

Gospel-Centered Sacrifice – Part 2

Various Texts

Series: Sacrifice Worth Making

Congregational Prayer:

Introduction: Take your Bibles and join me in Hebrews 11, Hebrews chapter 11.

I recently found myself in Wichita for a hospital visit and so I thought I would run up to the new "Christian" bookstore on the NE side of town. I needed a couple of books to give away to our new parents at our Baby Recognition this morning, and so I worked it out with Julie to get home a bit later than usual which meant fighting off hungry children as they swarmed around prepared food waiting for Dad to get home. Bookstores and I get along pretty well. I can spend more time than I should browsing titles. But this trip was different. I went to the "Parenting" section to look for two copies of any of a handful of good parenting books which I know would be good resources for our young parents. But as I browsed the shelves, my anticipation turned quickly to exasperation and eventually to frustration. I found 2 titles (in a section containing 100's of titles) that I would gladly pass on, but of course, they only had one copy of each. This sent me into plans B, C, D, and E looking for other options. I found myself in the Devotional section and the Christian Living section and the Men's section and the Women's section - all to no avail. I couldn't find two copies of a book that I could whole-heartedly give to our young families to help them raise children for God's glory. And that was not because there was a shortage of books! (on a side note - be very careful when you look for Christian books to read - a ton of discernment is needed)

Well, the trip wasn't a total loss. I found a book for a decent price which I had been wanting to read for over a year - so at least I found something! But I left disappointed in wasted time and in making my family wait on dinner. It was a "sacrifice" that wasn't worth making! This morning we come one last time to the subject of "Sacrifice Worth Making." We will limit ourselves to two texts as we seek to add two more components to our understanding of this sacrifice that is worth making in our lives. We have already seen from 1 Peter 2 that we were redeemed for this very thing. We have been bought with the precious blood of Christ so that we can be living stones added into God's Holy Temple on Earth – the Church. We are to be a holy priesthood in that we are to continually offer up to God sacrifices that are pleasing to Him through Jesus Christ. In other words – you were made for sacrifice to God – that is what you were redeemed to do. Then we saw last week from Romans 12 that this sacrifice must be the fruit which grows out of our life as we are rooted in the mercy of God. We must be Gospel rooted and Gospel shaped in our sacrifice. Because of the great mercy of God in the Gospel we are compelled to present our bodies as living sacrifices to God to be used as sacrificial worship. This sacrificial worship – according to Hebrews 13 is to be full of good works, and full of sharing what we have for the

sake of others. Ephesians 5 clarified that we are to walk in love as we seek to imitate Christ and offer our lives as a living sacrifice for God by giving ourselves up for the good of others.

Those are all pillars of truth in this temple of Christian sacrifice. Hebrews 11 gives us one more of those pillars. Sacrifice worth making must be by faith. Let's read starting in Hebrews 11:1.

I. Sacrifice Worth Making must be by Faith – Hebrews 11:4, 6

- a. Let me state the pillar of truth very simply from this text. If we are going to make sacrifice that is worth making then we must make that sacrifice by faith. This is based on verses 4 and 6 primarily. We see in verse 4 that Abel pleased God with his sacrifice because it was offered by faith. In verse 6 the writer of Hebrews makes this truth all the more plain by stating the unalterable fact of the matter – it is impossible to please God without faith. So, if the sacrifice which you were made for is not done by faith, then it will not be pleasing to God, and therefore it is not worth making. There are two men listed in verse 4 – Abel and Cain. One of the presented a sacrifice which was acceptable to God, and one who didn't. What was the difference? Faith! Abel presented his offering by faith, and this was pleasing to God. Cain presented a sacrifice too, but he presented it without faith – and therefore it did not please God.
- b. Before we look at the faith component of this passage let's give some attention to the idea of sacrifice in this text. Obviously Abel was offering a sacrifice to God back in Genesis 4 which has much different content than the sacrifices we must offer to God. He was offering the firstborn of his flock out of obedience to the Lord's command, but we are to offer our very lives as living sacrifices. But that doesn't mean that there isn't come carry-over here. The original recipients of this letter were former Jews who had believed the Gospel of Jesus the Christ – but now they were being tempted to turn back to their old religious ways because the following after Jesus was a hard road. When you look back at the end of chapter 10 you realize that these Christians were very familiar with sacrifice. They had known suffering and persecution from the very beginning. Look at verse 32 of chapter 10. *Read 10:32-39.*
- c. They had already known and expressed the kind of faith which they are being called to in chapter 11. But they were in danger of shrinking back. The adversity was too severe. The sacrifice they were being asked to make was intimidatingly large. They were tempted to turn back and walk away from Christ by refusing to keep sacrificing themselves for the sake of following Jesus. The words of chapter 11 flow out of this context of sacrifice in chapter 10. These believers were being exhorted to keep enduring in their faith. This faith is then defined and illustrated in chapter 11. Without this kind of faith, our sacrifice to our Lord will be unacceptable and therefore worthless. So, what is the definition of this faith?
- d. Well, verse 1 says that it is the assurance of things hoped for, and the evidence of things not seen. Verse 2 says that by this kind of faith, the people of old received their commendation from the Lord. In other words, you should have this kind of faith because this kind of faith has always been that which has been pleasing in

God's sight. This is what we saw in Habakkuk 2 – the just shall live by faith. God is pleased with those who have this kind of faith. This kind of faith is defined not simply by belief in a set of facts about God, but a heart commitment and a shaping of the will to those truths. So, verse 6 is the parallel to verse 1 and it says that we please God when we draw near to God out of a belief that he exists and that he rewards those who diligently seek him. In other words, faith is a settled heart trust in God's testimony about himself and about how we ought to live in light of that testimony. Faith takes God at His Word and then lives in accordance with what He has said, confident that faith-filled obedience will be rewarded with the joy of being in His presence someday. This is not works-based salvation, but rather this is the natural working out of true faith. True faith in God takes God at His Word because it believes that God exists and that He is going to keep every word He has ever spoken.

- e. That is what we see fleshed out in the life of Abel. He hadn't seen God, but he believed God's words about God. He believed God's words which called him to a particular kind of sacrifice, and he lived out that faith in humble worship-filled obedience, and this was pleasing to God. We don't have time to get into the difference between Cain and Abel's sacrifice this morning, so I will just give you my conclusion. I think Cain was filled with unbelief in the sense that he thought he could come to God on his own terms with an offering of his own choice. He could worship God his own way, rather than God's prescribed way. But Abel had true faith in God as God and he believed that God meant what he said when he called them to sacrifice in a particular way. I am taking this from combining the testimony of Genesis 4, Romans 10:17, and Hebrews 11. So, Genesis 4 tells us of the difference between the sacrifices, but it doesn't ever tell us if God had prescribed a particular content of their sacrifice. But then Hebrews 11 says that Abel offered his sacrifice by faith and was pleasing to God, and Cain obviously didn't and therefore was not commended by God. Romans 10:17 says – faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God. So, Abel obviously had heard from God about how he was to sacrifice to God, and he believed these words and his life and sacrifice were ordered accordingly – and therefore he pleased God by walking by faith.
- f. Faith is not a work, but true faith produces works. True faith comes out of the heart and expresses itself in worship-filled obedience which looks to the great fulfillment of the promises of God. As John MacArthur says, "Faith is an *internal* reality with *external* consequences."¹ Faith and its counterpart, unbelief, are heart conditions which will make themselves known through behavior. The proof will be in the pudding, so to speak. That is what all of these saints in Hebrews 11 illustrate for us – they had the heart condition of faith which showed itself in radical acts of trust and obedience even when circumstances were shouting in their face to capitulate and give up on God. But they all believed that God exists and that he rewards those who diligently seek Him, and so they looked to Him

¹ John MacArthur, *Faith Works*, pg. 50.

and not to their circumstances. Without this kind of faith, it is impossible to please God.

- g. So, how does this relate to the sacrifice in your life? Well, very simply – if you believe that God exists, and you believe that He rewards those who diligently seek Him, then you will sacrifice. Faith in your heart will produce sacrifice in your life. It will be rooted in the mercy of God and it will be shaped by the Gospel of God and it will be fleshed out in accordance with the Word of God. If we walk by faith like Abel and Noah and Abraham and Sarah and Moses, and on down the list – all did, then we will obey God’s Word and we will walk in God’s ways in great sacrifice to ourselves and this will all be very pleasing to God. If you want to know what that looks like – just look at the lives of these faith-filled saints who have gone before us.
 - i. Abel brought the right sacrifice the right way even though it cost him his life.
 - ii. Abraham left everything he knew so that he could follow God’s clear command all because he believed God’s Word about a coming inheritance. Abraham and Sarah lived with their eyes on a coming city, whose founder and builder was God, rather than on the earthly cities which would soon pass away. Abraham trusted God’s word and obeyed to the point of putting the son of promise on the altar as a sacrifice to the Lord because he had such settled faith that God was God and God was going to keep His Word.
 - iii. Moses’ parents refused to sacrifice their child to the maniacal whims of a human ruler, but rather hid their baby and feared God rather than men. Moses himself refused the temporal pleasures of sin which are fleeting so that he could be identified with people of God and be mistreated, abused, and enslaved with them. He looked to the future reward of Christ and therefore was able to reject the offerings of the earthly kingdom of Egypt in all of her glory. Moses believed God’s Word about the Passover and obeyed God’s instructions and spared the firstborn. The people of Israel stepped out onto the floor of the Red Sea with walls of water on either side because God instructed them to trust in His mighty power. By faith, they marched around the walls of Jericho – just like God had said, and they watched the walls crumble before their very eyes.
- h. This is what it means to be a living sacrifice. It looks like walking by faith in God no matter what the cost might be and no matter what the circumstances around you are screaming in your face. So, most likely that is going to be more ordinary and normal than having to leave all that you know to go to a country you do not know anything about so that you can receive that land as the Promised Land for a great nation who will come out of you. You are not Abraham. But the definition of that faith, the content of that faith is the same as yours.
- i. It may not be the life and death choice of bowing the knee to Nebuchadnezzar’s statue, but it will be the sacrificial choice of the death of self daily for the sake of radical obedience to the God of your salvation. It may not be sacrificing the son of

promise on the altar and raising the knife to thrust in his chest, but it will mean the sacrifice of my plans, my hopes, and my dreams so that I can live in full submission to the God of Heaven. It may not mean the sacrifice of enjoying the pleasure of Egypt as a prince, but it will mean the sacrifice of experiencing the fleeting pleasures of sin so that you can be faithful to your Lord.

- j. So, how do you evaluate to see whether or not you are making your sacrifice by faith or not? So, get in your mind an area of sacrifice in your life and let's evaluate it for a moment. So, this may be an area of obedience, or an area of refusing temptation, or an area of giving of yourself in love for the benefit of others – all of those are biblical sacrifice. Then as you look at that area of sacrifice – ask and answer these questions:
 - i. *Is it rooted in my belief about God?*
 1. So, when I look at that area of obedience or resisting temptation or giving of myself in love for the good of others, is this rooted in my belief that God exists? Is this the fruit of my faith-filled constant God-consciousness which desires to always live in ways which are in accordance with Him and His Word?
 2. For example – lots of men, both Christian and non-Christian can love their wives and sacrifice for them. The sacrifice of the non-Christian is not pleasing to the Lord because it is absent of faith. But the sacrifice of the Christian can be unpleasing to the Lord also, if it is absent of faith. So as the Christian husband examines his love for his wife to see if it is a sacrifice which pleases the Lord he will look to see if it is just something he is doing to make life easier, or is it something that is flowing out of a deep-seated belief in the existence of God?
 - ii. *Is it compelled by my trust in God's Word?*
 1. Next, we can ask – is it compelled by my trust in God's Word? This is similar to the previous question, but it takes it further. Knowing that God exists and living in light of that truth, I now must be compelled by a deep trust in what God has said – both about himself and about how I should live as one redeemed by the blood of His Son.
 2. For example, let's say a young girl is tempted by the world, the flesh, and the devil to pursue pleasure and happiness in the promiscuity which is pedaled at every opportunity in our culture. As she is provided with the opportunity to follow this temptation and fulfill the lusts of her flesh, she has the opportunity to sacrifice in a way which is pleasing to God by looking to God's Word and entrusting herself to it. Like Moses of old who refused the fleeting pleasures of sin because God's Word promised him a better reality if he would deny the temporal pleasures of today and remain obedient to God until the lasting pleasures of that eternal day.

Faith is God fueled by unyielding trust in His Word empties temptation of its power. And when this happens in your life – it pleases God.

iii. *Is it sustained by my confidence in God's trustworthiness?*

1. The next question of evaluation is - is it sustained by my confidence in God's trustworthiness? In other words, do I continue to sacrifice in this way because I believe that God is true and His ways are right? Am I continuing to obey because I know that God's way is best and His promises will come true? Or am I being sustained by something else – like a reputation I must maintain, or the persona of a spiritual status that I can't bear to lose?
2. The alternative, which is the only thing which will sustain God-pleasing sacrifice, is a confidence in God's trustworthiness. Taking God at His Word and entrusting yourself to His promises. Believing that there is more to life than this life. That there is a coming day when all this sacrifice will make sense in the glow of the glory of God. So, children this will look like obedience and honor to your parents sustained by your confidence that God can be trusted. If your mind and heart are settled on God being God and God always being right, then this will sustain your ongoing sacrifice.

iv. *Is it opposed to the anti-God voices?*

1. And the last question of evaluation is – is it opposed to the anti-God voices? Does your sacrifice go directly against the screams of our culture and the screams of your own flesh and the screams of the enemy of your soul – Satan himself? If your sacrifice fits in with the voices of your flesh, the world, and the devil, then it is no sacrifice which is pleasing to God at all.
2. But sacrifice which pleases God will always be opposed to what your flesh, your world, and your enemy would want you to do. Faith-filled sacrifice will please God because it will fight against those voices and it will follow God's truth regardless of who opposes you. So, if your sacrifice is not in opposition to the pulls of your flesh, your culture, or your enemy, it probably isn't a faith-filled sacrifice.

k. Sacrifice worth making is sacrifice which is presented to God by faith.

II. **Sacrifice Worth Making Produces Joy – Philippians 2:17-18**

- a. Let me quickly give you the last pillar of truth about sacrifice worth making – and that is simply that sacrifice worth making produces joy – sacrifice worth making produces joy. Turn with me to Philippians 2 to see this truth fleshed out. What we find in Philippians 2 is the great culmination in our own hearts of the kind of

sacrifice we have been talking about for the last few weeks – and this is overwhelming and abounding joy.

- b. You will remember that the Philippian church faced opposition and persecution from the very beginning. The social, economic, and religious pressure placed on these believers called them constantly to abandon Christ and return to their former way of life. But they were faithful and they were sacrificial. Out of their own great need they had sent a financial gift through Epaphroditus to Paul who was sitting in a Roman prison cell. Now Paul had sent Epaphroditus back to them with this letter in hand. In the first 11 verses of chapter 2 Paul has called them to the humility of heart which they see modeled preeminently in Jesus. And this leads Paul to three commands in verses 12-18 of how this humility should come out real life – they should work out their salvation with fear and trembling, they should do all things without murmurings and disputings, and they should be glad and rejoice with Paul. Let's read verses 17-18 in particular.
- c. Notice how Paul describes them and how he describes himself. He says they are a sacrificial offering of faith. This is what we have just talked about from Romans 12 and Hebrews 13 and Ephesians 5 and Hebrews 11. Their faith is not simply a mental assent to a set of facts about Christ, but rather, their saving faith in Christ has redeemed them and therefore completely re-oriented their lives so that they are now defined as a sacrificial offering, or a living sacrifice. So, again we see the life-altering reality of the Gospel to take us from darkness to light and from living for ourselves to now laying down our lives out of worship to the God who has redeemed us.
- d. Paul then describes himself as the drink offering being poured on top of their sacrifice. So, they are the main meat sacrifice laid on the altar as an act of worship to the God who has redeemed them, and Paul's life and service is the cup of expensive drink which is poured out on top of the sacrifice as a further act of worship. This drink offering produces a sweet smelling aroma as all of it is poured out. This is how Paul viewed himself in the sacrificial service to others. It was for God and it was a complete giving of himself as his life was poured out for their benefit. He says similar things in other texts. So in 1 Thessalonians 2:8 Paul says that he came to the Thessalonians and he didn't just share the Gospel with them, but he shared his very life with them. In 2 Corinthians 12 Paul says that he does not seek the Corinthians stuff, but the Corinthians very lives. He wasn't seeking after what they could give him, but rather he was seeking after their very souls. Therefore, he says in verse 15 – I will most gladly spend and be spent for your souls. In Colossians 1:24 Paul rejoiced in his sufferings because they were of benefit for the souls of the Colossian Christians.
- e. This is an other-worldly view of sacrifice. This sounds so strange to our posh American minds. We avoid sacrifice. We limit it to small doses so that we can drink it quickly like bad tasting medicine. We carefully manage sacrifice to fit nicely into our well-ordered schedules. We think of our sacrifice as more of a little drip spilled out rather than like Paul does here – the whole cup turned completely over and all of its contents poured out in sacrifice. We tend to think

that this kind of sacrifice would be dreadful full of pain. We think self-sacrifice, and we tend to think – complete lack of joy.

- f. But the truth of the matter is the complete opposite. The end of verse 17 and verse 18 point us to a different conclusion. Sacrificial worship for the sake of others faith culminates in great joy! So, Paul uses 2 different Greek words to say that he is made glad by his life being able to be poured out as a drink offering on top of the sacrifice of their faith, and he is rejoicing with them all. So, he personally rejoices in this sacrifice, and then he rejoices with them because of the good benefit that this sacrifice has brought for them. Then in verse 18 he exhorts them to have the same response. His sacrificial service to them should produce the same result in their hearts. They also should be made glad by this and they should rejoice with him that he is made glad by this. Do you see the complete circle here of joy in sacrifice. The one giving the sacrifice for the benefit of another is made glad because they were able to give of themselves for another's sake. They are also rejoicing with the recipient of their sacrificial service because it has benefited them. Then the one receiving the benefit of the sacrificial service rejoices because they have been helped by another, and then they rejoice with the one who gave of themselves because they have joy in their giving. And then the circle is completed by God being pleased with the whole thing. Sacrifice is a joy-producing venture when it is Gospel-rooted, Gospel-shaped, and carried out by faith.
- g. In other words – if you are not made glad by your sacrificial service to God – then you are probably not offering sacrifice that is worth making. If it is rooted in the mercy of God and if it is shaped by the Gospel actions of Jesus, and if it is carried out by faith, then it will produce abounding joy in you and in those receiving the benefits of your sacrificial service. So, do you have abounding joy in the opportunities that you have for your life to be poured out on top of the sacrificial offering of other people's faith?

Conclusion: As we bring this sermon and this series to a close let me ask you – does the Gospel redemption you claim in Christ produce continuous sacrifice as a holy priest to God. Does your faith in God – your belief that He exists and that He rewards those who diligently seek Him – does that faith sustain continuous acts of sacrificial worship to our God? Does the example of Christ, who gave himself up for you, does that example call you daily to give yourself up for the sake of God, His Gospel, and the joy of others? Does all of this culminate in you being glad and in others being blessed? May God help us to grow in sacrifice worth making! May our lives be a continuous shout of praise to our praiseworthy God!