

Sacrifice Nothing

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This morning, I want to begin by posing a question for each of you to consider in your own head. The question is, "what is faith, more specifically what is saving faith? If you had to describe to somebody what a saving faith in Jesus Christ looks like, what you say? Think about it for a minute.

Here's another question. When you worship God, let's say in singing, are you giving, or are you getting? Is worship a service of sacrifice *to* God or a response to the overwhelming blessings *from* God?

I want to talk this morning about faith and sacrifice by suggesting that if you are coming to God to give to God rather than to receive from God, something is very, very wrong and your faith may not survive.

As I sat in my apartment on Friday night, trying to finalize my lesson, this is the phrase that came to me so brace yourselves. *The call to be a Christian is the call to never sacrifice.* I'll say it again. The call to be a Christian is the call to never sacrifice. Now that just sounds all wrong so I better qualify that before I'm asked to sit down. The call to be a Christian is the call to never sacrifice the unfathomable wealth of the kingdom of God for the two-bit, low yield, here today gone tomorrow pleasures of this world.

Let me ask you, is it a sacrifice to give up the lesser, to receive the greater? Is it a sacrifice to give up your blindness so you can receive sight. Is it a sacrifice, as C.S. Lewis puts it, to give up your mud hole in the slum so you can have a holiday at the sea? Is it a sacrifice to give up hell so you can gain heaven? It is *no* sacrifice to give up seventy or so years of indulging the flesh so as to receive an eternity of perfect and lasting fulfillment.

Everything we give up as a Christian should be for the joy, so that we count even our greatest acts of human sacrifices as insignificant in light of what we gain. And measured in eternity, the Christian life is *not* a sacrifice. If you treat it as such you dishonor God.

Let me illustrate. Tomorrow is Carrie's birthday, and I'm taking off work so I can be with her. Now let's say a friend calls me and says that he just won free tickets to a cast only screening of the new Star Wars movie. Can I come? Of course I am going to decline his invitation to be with my wife, but the motivation behind that decision will speak volumes about my love for her. Am I treating our day together as sacrifice or joy? Let's say Carrie asks me if I wouldn't rather be at the movie, to which I reply, "Of course I'd rather be at the movie, but I've sacrificed to be with you so that I can carry out my duty as a husband." Does that kind of thinking honor Carrie?

What would honor Carrie would be for her to say, "Are you sure you don't want to go to the movie?" to which I reply. "The movie?! Are you kidding? There is no place I'd rather be than with you." If I count time spent with my wife as sacrifice, I belittle her. If I count time spent with my wife as reward, I exalt her. Such is the case with God. If we count it mere sacrifice to fellowship with God, we are essentially saying, "I'd rather be fellowshiping somewhere else."

Well, I've gone long enough without interjecting any scripture so let me start with Hebrews 11:6. Whatever else you remember from this morning, remember this verse. Hebrews 11:6 states that without faith it is impossible to please God. So here we are back at faith. Now think back a few moments to the first question I asked and see how your answer matches up. The Bible marks two components of the faith which pleases God. 1) Believe that God is. That's good, but there are a lot of unsaved people who believe that God is. Even the demons believe that. What separates saving faith from dead faith is the second component and that is the requirement that we believe that God is a rewarder of those who seek Him. Stop and feel the weight of that text. If you don't come to God for reward then you can never please Him. Is that not amazing?

If we continue in Hebrews 11 we will eventually come to verse 24 which describes the life of Moses. It reads:

By faith Moses, when he became of age, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin...

Moses chose to suffer affliction with the people of Israel, a despised people, rather than be a prince and an heir to the most powerful kingdom of his day. He gave up a life of royalty for a life of toil. Why did he do that? That *seems* like

a tremendous sacrifice. What could motivate such a faith? Let's read on:

By faith Moses, when he became of age, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin, esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt; *for* he looked to the reward.

Moses looked to the reward!! He weighed the passing pleasures of sin against the never ending, never diminishing, ever increasing pleasures of heaven, and he chose the greater. Does that make him a mercenary, serving God for his own gain? No, because what *is* the gain but God himself!! I was at Biola this week to hear Dr. Piper and he said it this way, "Eternal life is not eternal golf, or eternal ultimate frisbee, or eternal fill in the blank, it is eternal God! You gain God! And though you lose everything else, you sacrifice nothing, for you have gained the one and only thing which can satisfy your soul for all of eternity, namely the unbroken, unhindered glory of God. That's what we were made for! John 17:3:

And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent.

I thought to myself after reading Hebrews 11:24. Is there anyone else in the Bible who gave up more earthly wealth than Moses? I couldn't think of anyone, largely owing to the fact that there just aren't people who could ever lay claim to such wealth in the first place, but there is at least one other, King Solomon. As great and powerful as the Pharaoh's were, no kingdom can compare with Solomon's. The Bible tells us that King Solomon was the wisest mortal to ever live, with a wealth that far surpassed any other kingdom of the world. Nevertheless, Solomon finds no mention with the heroes of the faith in Hebrews 11. His father David is there, but he is not. For all his wisdom, his faith wavers.

It would be easy to place Solomon and Moses side by side and say that Moses left riches and become a great man of faith...Solomon received riches and become a very inconsistent man of faith. Therefore, it must be earthly wealth which is the problem. That would be a very neat and clean comparison, but the conclusion doesn't work.

Solomon's problem was not his wealth. His fortune was God-given. In fact God blessed him with such abundance for the very reason that Solomon did not seek it out for himself. Solomon asked for wisdom not wealth. His problem was something much more serious, but in order to be fair to Solomon and to scripture, I want to take the next five minutes or so to give you a quick survey of Solomon's life as it lays out in I Kings. I'll be quickly skipping through chapters 1 through 11 so you can just listen along and try to stay with me.

So Nathan spoke to Bathsheba the mother of Solomon, saying, "Have you not heard that Adonijah the son of Haggith has become king, and David our lord does not know it? Come, please, let me now give you advise, that you may save your own life and the life of your son Solomon.

So Bathsheba went into the chamber to the king. And Bathsheba bowed and did homage to the king. Then she said to him, "My lord, you swore by the Lord your God saying, 'Assuredly Solomon your son shall reign after me, and he shall sit on my throne'. So now, look! Adonijah has become king; and now, my lord the king, you do not know about it.

And the king took an oath and said, 'As the Lord lives, who has redeemed my life from every distress, just as I swore to you by the Lord God of Israel, so I certainly will do this day.

So Zadok the priest, and Nathan the prophet went down and had Solomon ride on King David's mule, and took him to Gihon. Then Zadok the priest took a horn of oil from the tabernacle and anointed Solomon. And they blew the horn, and all the people said, "Long live King Solomon!"

Now the days of David drew near that he should die, and he charged Solomon his son, saying: "I go the way of all the earth; be strong, therefore, and prove yourself a man. And keep the charge of the Lord your God: to walk in His ways, to keep His statutes, His commandments, His judgements, and His testimonies, as it is written in the Law of Moses, that you may prosper in all that you do.

So David rested with his fathers, and was buried in the City of David. Then Solomon sat on the throne of his father David; and his kingdom was firmly established.

Now Solomon made a treaty with Pharaoh king of Egypt, and married Pharaoh's daughter; then he brought her to the City of David until he had finished building his own house, and the house of the Lord. And Solomon loved the Lord, walking in the statutes of his father David, except that he sacrificed and burned incense at the high places.

Now the king went to Gibeon to sacrifice there. At Gibeon the Lord appeared to Solomon in a dream by night; and God said, "Ask! What shall I give you?" And Solomon said: "You have shown great mercy to Your servant David my father, because he walked before You in truth, You have continued this great kindness for him, and You have given him a son to sit on his throne, as it is this day. Now, O Lord my God, you have made Your servant king instead of my father David, but I am a little child; I do not know how to go out or come in. Therefore give to Your servant an understanding heart to judge Your people, that I may discern between good and evil.

The speech pleased the Lord. Then God said to him, "Because you have asked this thing, and have not asked long life for yourself, nor have asked riches for yourself, nor have asked the life of your enemies, but have asked for yourself understanding to discern justice, behold, I have done according to your words, see, I have given you a wise and understanding heart, so that there has not been anyone like you before you, nor shall any like you arise after you. And I have also given you what you have not asked: both riches and honor, so that there shall not be anyone like you among the kings all your days.

So Solomon reigned over all kingdoms from the River to the land of the Philistines, as far as the border of Egypt. They brought tribute and served Solomon all the days of his life.

And it came to pass in the fourth year of Solomon's reign, that he began to build the house of the Lord.

And in the eleventh year, the house was finished in all its details and according to all its plans. So he was seven years in building it.

But Solomon took thirteen years to build his own house.

And it came to pass, when Solomon had finished building the house of the Lord and the king's house, and all Solomon's desire which he wanted to do, that the Lord appeared to Solomon a second time. And the Lord said to him: "I have consecrated this house which you have built to put My name there forever, and My eyes and My heart will be there perpetually. Now if you walk before Me, in integrity of heart and uprightness, to do according to all that I have commanded you, then I will establish the throne of your kingdom over Israel forever. But if you or your sons at all turn from following Me, but go and serve other gods and worship them, then I will cut off Israel from the land which I have given them.

Now when the queen of Sheba heard of the fame of Solomon concerning the name of the Lord, she came to test him with hard questions. So Solomon answered all her questions; there was nothing so difficult for the king that he could not explain it to her. And when the queen of Sheba had seen all the wisdom of Solomon, she said to the king: "It was a true report which I heard in my own land about your words and your wisdom. However I did not believe the words until I came and saw with my own eyes; and indeed the half was not told me. Your wisdom and prosperity exceed the fame of which I heard.

But King Solomon loved many foreign women, as well as the daughter of Pharaoh: women from the nations of whom the Lord had said to the children of Israel, "You shall not intermarry with them, nor they with you. Surely they will turn away your hearts after their gods." Solomon clung to these in love. And he had seven hundred wives, princesses, and three hundred concubines' and his wives turned his heart after other gods; and his heart was not loyal to the Lord his God.

So the Lord became angry with Solomon, because his heart had turned from the Lord God of Israel. Therefore the Lord said to Solomon, "Because you have done this, and have not kept My covenant and My statutes, I will surely tear the kingdom away from you and give it to your servant. Nevertheless I will not do it in your days, for the sake of you father David; I will tear it out of the hand of your son.

And the period that Solomon reigned in Jerusalem over all Israel was forty years. Then Solomon rested with his fathers, and was buried in the City of David his father. And Rehoboam his son reigned in his place.

And I Kings tells us that Rehoboam did not reign long before the kingdom was taken from him and given to Solomon's servant, Jeroboam.

Solomon's downfall was not his earthly wealth. Solomon's downfall, his great evil, was simply this. He forsook the fountain of living waters, God, to hew out for himself cisterns, broken cisterns that can hold no water.

That's how Jeremiah describes evil in Jeremiah 2:13. It fits Solomon and it fits us. We seek our reward in the wrong place, turning from the cup of abundant blessing to drink from the filth of a broken cistern. How do we know this is Solomon's problem? He tells us himself in Ecclesiastes 2:10, 11.

Whatever my eyes desired I did not keep from them. I did not withhold my heart from any pleasure...Then I looked on all the works that my hands had done and on the labor in which I had toiled; And indeed all was vanity and grasping for the wind. There was no profit under the sun.

He pursued his pleasure everywhere, except in the one place where it could be found. But someone will ask, "didn't Solomon go to heaven? Wasn't his faith shored up in the end. And if he is rewarded with eternity after a life of so much compromise, isn't he getting the best of both worlds?...a lifetime of sinful pleasures and an eternity of paradise?"

If you read Ecclesiastes, you will hear the heartcry of a man who poured his life out in vain pursuits, pursuits which ultimately yielded misery, not joy. Consider Solomon's declaration in Ecclesiastes 4:1-3:

Therefore I praised the dead who were already dead, More than the living who are still alive. Yet, better than both is he who has never existed, Who has not seen the evil work that is done under the sun.

Solomon's love affair with foreign women and false gods cost him a lot of joy. He sacrificed a lot of satisfaction for the despair of sin. He lost the kingdom for his descendants. He established a legacy of sinfulness for his sons, and he went to his grave amidst strife and adversity. Solomon sacrificed a lot for his sins.

So here's where it hits home for us. Is heaven at stake when we are tempted to find our pleasure outside of God? Well, not if we're justified. But how do we know that our faith is sufficient to justify if we don't walk in obedience, and how can we walk in obedience if we count the Christian life a life of sacrifice rather than reward. You can grit your teeth and fight off sin for a few days, or weeks or years, but the day will come when only the promise of reward will be sufficient to sustain you in obedience. How else can you be like the believers in Hebrews 11:27, believers who were sawn in two, Hebrews says, "that they might obtain a better resurrection". It wasn't the nobility of sacrifice that kept them, it was the promise of reward! If you were to stand before your executioners who are ready to run you through if you don't recant your faith in Christ, what is going to hold your tongue? At that moment, if you don't look to the reward and say in your heart with the apostle Paul, "to die is gain!", then all will be lost.

If you view the Christian life as a life of sacrifice rather than a life of reward you will never triumph over sin in any meaningful way. The Christian never has to make a sacrifice *because* the only thing worth attaining is the very thing we will never, never, never, never, never be called to give up. Give up everything but Christ. If you want to live a life of true sacrifice, be a heathen. What do they sacrifice? Everything. The heathen sacrifices an eternity of unbroken and ever increasing satisfaction for a mere breath of worthless gain.

In closing I want to consider Christ, our Savior, our Lord, our Treasure, and our example. Didn't He prove that sacrifice is a noble and beautiful thing? Aren't I belittling the fact that our very salvation hangs on one great sacrifice? Hopefully I am not for Christ too gave up the lesser glory to attain the greater glory, and we read of his motivation in Hebrews 12:2:

Jesus endured the cross, not for the sacrifice, but for the gain.

Let's pray.