

Sacrifice: Duty or Joy

Welcome - straight into (1 min)

Response - with gusto please!: (*does this go at the end?*)

(SLIDE)

The Lord is here
His Spirit is with us

Lift up your hearts
We lift them to the lord

Let us give thanks to the Lord our God
It is right to give him thanks and praise

(SLIDE)

It is indeed right it is our duty and our joy
at all times and in all places
to give you thanks and praise
Holy Father, Heavenly King,
almighty and eternal God.

Worship

Nath: 2 songs of opening praise - focus on God's greatness and holiness.

The Prologue

Notices?

(SLIDE)

This talk is about sacrifice...it was going to be about something else but when I sat and chatted to God about it he said to talk about Sacrifice. It might be quite a long talk as the Bible has a lot to say about the topic. I don't want apologise for this - there's just a lot to cover. But I've done two things to help.

First, I've broken the talk up into several sections and we'll have time in between to think and pray and worship.

Second, I wanted you to all have access to a copy of the same translation of the Bible but I couldn't get that so I printed out copies of the texts I'll be using and there are pens available too and I encourage you to do you best to follow and, if it helps, take notes or do doodles or whatever you do when you're listening to sermons.

OK, seatbelts fastened - let's get going.

Introduction (10 mins)

I like words...so let's start with the word.

Sacrifice definition (5 mins)

Probably more used to the definition of giving something up. But the original word had a different meaning.

(SLIDE)

Related to "sacred"

- From Latin "Sacrificium"
 - Sacra - sacred
 - Facere - to do/to perform
- Meaning: "performing priestly functions or deeds"
- Originally "a priestly duty"
- Chamber's dictionary of Etymology: "The transferred sense of giving up one thing for another is first found in Shakespeare's Romeo and Juliet" (though I don't understand Shakespeare well enough to know where this happens.
- e.g. I might sacrifice a long bike ride to spend time with Sally. Give up one thing for another.
- Also used in chess: to deliberately giving away a chess piece to protect another.
- "Collateral damage"

Two meanings:

- a priestly duty - something we have to do
- an act of the will giving something up to get something else - something we choose to do

And a tension. Does God DEMAND that we make we sacrifices? Or does he wait for us to take the initiative and make sacrifices? Is sacrifice a DUTY or a JOY? Or both? Or somewhere in between?

(SLIDE)

DUTY/JOY game (5 mins)

Eating Chocolate - Eating Salad
Getting up on Monday Morning - Having a lie in on Saturday morning
Cooking dinner
Gardening
Exercise (running, gym, PE at school)

2nd half - sit down - for more challenging ones.

Prayer
Going to church
Giving money to charity
Singing songs of worship
Being on a church rota

Further introduction (1 min)

We're going to

- explore this tension between DUTY and JOY.
- look at an example of old testament sacrifice
- look at the example of Jesus' sacrifice
- look at what sacrifices WE are to offer to God and whether they are DUTYS or JOYS

First let's come before our great God again and ask what he wants of us, what we can do in response to his greatness.

SONG: "WHAT CAN I OFFER?" or "YOU'RE WORTHY" type song.

Part 1: Old Testament Sacrifice (10 mins)

Throw question out - can anyone think of examples of sacrifice in the Old Testament?

16:18

A bit of history...Egypt, Exodus, Wandering in the desert (3 months), Mt Sinai, Ten Commandments (more wandering in the desert?)

God gave Moses instructions on how to live and how to worship. And worship, for them, included making sacrifices, or giving offerings to God.

Many of these old testament sacrifices that the Jews had to make were "priestly duties". Remember the definition of sacrifice? They were things that God required them to do in the laws that God gave them.

Examples:

(SLIDE)

*The Lord said to Moses "Make an altar * of earth for me and sacrifice on it your burnt offerings * and fellowship offerings, * your sheep and goats and your cattle." - Exodus 20:24*

(SLIDE)

During the 7-day ordination of Aaron the priest:

Sacrifice a bull each day as a sin offering to make atonement . Purify the altar by making atonement for it, and anoint it to consecrate it. - Exodus 29:36

(SLIDE)

The Lord said to Moses "Say to the Israelites: 'Anyone who brings a fellowship offering to the LORD is to bring part of it as his sacrifice to the LORD. " Lev 7:29

And people feared God. They had seen his wonders, they knew his power - the power that caused ten plagues on Egypt and parted the red sea. They didn't want to NOT do the things he'd told them to. He was SCARY.

BUT...sometimes there's a different side to the sacrifices of the Israelites too...

(SLIDE)

Exodus 35:4-9

God wants to be among his people as they travel, so as well as commands for living and worship, he instructs them, through Moses to construct a sanctuary, called the "Tabernacle" - a movable sanctuary - a temple in a tent.

He gives Moses instructions for what to build it from and how to make it.

(SLIDE)

Note v 10 also - not only STUFF required, but people to work too.

(SLIDE)

This all starts with the phrase "This is what the LORD commanded...". **(SLIDE)** This sort of offering or sacrifice was a DUTY of the people.

Now, you might expect the Israelites to object to this. Maybe to think that they've earned their Gold and Silver, their gem stones, fine cloth and their sea-cow hides. (For those wondering, according to my notes the sea cow is a thing called a "Dugong" and looks like this **(SLIDE)**). They've been working hard in Egypt under the slave drivers and they'd be right to want to enjoy the fruits of their labour a little.

But let's see what happens:

Exodus 35:20-22

The people "who are willing" all come and bring the things needed. The list goes on and includes not only the THINGS God asked for but the women spin yarn especially! They go out of their way to make new things for the tabernacle too.

We see the phrase "those who were willing" quite a lot. The people actually brought things because they wanted to.

The lists go on but let's skip to:

Exodus 36:2-7

God told them to bring what was needed to make the things for the tabernacle, but the people brought too much! They had to be restrained from bringing more.

Was this a response to God's goodness and leading? Was it a response to God being big and scary? We don't know. But it was a very visible and practical response. God said, and they did, willingly!

From Moses' point of view, this is amazing. Imagine if we had a need in the church and, rather than being met, the need was far exceeded. I bet Trevor, our treasurer, has never had to turn away people giving him money. Or that Dave has had to turn way volunteers. Or that Nathan has too many people to go on the music rota.

I don't know for sure, but I suspect that this was a really exciting time. The community all pulling together to achieve something great for God. Imagine the conversations: "Have you heard that they've nearly got enough Gold for the tabernacle?" "Have you heard that they've got too many sea cow skins?" I suspect that there was a real buzz about this project.

(SLIDE) "the people continued to bring freewill offerings morning after morning".

(SLIDE) What started as a duty, appears to have turned to great joy.

Song: Lord you are more precious (or similar)

Part 2: The Sacrifice of Jesus

Similar question - who knows any new testament sacrifices?

Examples:

- Woman with perfume

For some reason it's a bit harder!

We turn to look at the sacrifice of Jesus.

As Christians, we believe that God sent Jesus to die in our place. Jesus received the death sentence that should have been applied to us for our own wrongdoing or our "sin". Jesus died in order that we might have eternal life. And God, the Father, allowed Jesus to die for the same reason.

We talk easily of Jesus' sacrifice, but I wonder how much we really think about it.

I don't want to be morbid and dwell on the painful death that Jesus experienced. I want to look at why he did it. Was it, for him, a duty or a joy? Was it something God told him he had to do? Or did Jesus go to the cross willingly?

The Bible accounts make it clear that Jesus knew what would happen. And and as a person he was incredibly scared. We even read of Jesus praying that there might be another way; that he wouldn't have to die.

(SLIDE) He prays "Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet not my will, but yours be done."

This is God's will, not Jesus'. Jesus didn't want to die, and God doesn't give him a way out. So it certainly appears that dying on the cross was Jesus' priestly duty.

I've tried and tried to find a hint of Jesus having joy about his death before it happened. But I can find none.

Jesus gives hints that he knows that his death is for the greater good. He's quoted as praying **(SLIDE)** "Father, I want those you have given me to be with me where I am and to see my glory". Jesus WANTS the results of his death, but he certainly didn't want to have to die to achieve it.

Jesus is sentenced, strung up, dies, is put in the tomb and the mourning of his death by his confused followers begins. There is no joy.

Even from God the father's point of view, having to withhold his power while his only son dies, there is no joy.

Of course, we know that Jesus rises from the dead to live with us, in spirit, forever, and that's where the joy lies. If we follow the risen Jesus then God forgives for our wrongdoing because Jesus died in our place. We have forgiveness and freedom to live, and God rejoices in that with us.

The bible says that **(SLIDE)** "there is rejoicing in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents" - there's celebration in heaven when someone chooses to own up to their wrongdoing and follow Jesus.

Jesus' death was giving up something to get something better. We see that Jesus wanted the effects of his sacrifice. He wanted us to be saved. And the Bible says that **(SLIDE)** "we have been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once for all". (Heb 10:10)

Jesus even says to his disciples, before his death, that **(SLIDE)** "You will grieve, but your grief will turn to joy."

Jesus values you so much that he wants his father, our LORD to forgive you. He's willing to give up his life, because he wants to see you live, and to be holy. You're THAT important to him. It was Jesus' JOY to have you forgiven. It was the father's JOY to resurrect Jesus, and it was the JOY of the disciples and of us to have the risen Jesus live with us day by day.

(SLIDE) Jesus' sacrifice - the ultimate sacrifice of his life - was **(SLIDE)** his priestly duty. But Jesus' death also represents giving up something for the greater good and turns out to be a source of much joy.**(SLIDE)**

Song: You chose the cross.

Part 3: Our Sacrifice

(2 x SLIDES) What about us, are WE expected to make sacrifices to God? What does he command of us? What is our priestly duty? And what might we give up in order to get something better. Is our giving a duty or a joy?

We hear of tithing, the offering plate is handed round, we're encouraged to give up our time and money and food and skills and talents for God's work, and to attend church every week. Some may give something up for lent, or take part in fasting. These can all feel like duties, chores, things that we have to do.

(SLIDE) So what does God require of us?

Well, there are two answers:

(SLIDE) 1) God demands nothing.

Paul writes in one of his letters to the early churches: **(SLIDE)** "it is by grace * you have been saved, * through faith * —and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God— [9] not by works, * so that no one can boast. **"

Jesus has already died for us. This is a gift from God. We can't earn our salvation or eternal life. The ultimate sacrifice has already been made - Jesus gave his life in place of ours.

(SLIDE) 2) We should give Jesus everything.

If you truly follow Jesus, then you've already committed your life to following him. Jesus was once talking to his disciples about his fate on the cross and he said **(SLIDE)** "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will find it. What good will it be for a man if he gains the whole world, yet forfeits his soul? Or what can a man give in exchange for his soul?" (Matt 16:21-26)

If we want to follow Jesus, we must deny ourselves and take up our cross. We find our life by losing it.

We can claim to follow Jesus but go on as normal. This is not following Jesus.

Or we can claim to follow Jesus, and follow him. To the cross. With our lives.

Jesus tells some parables - some stories - about this where the characters in the stories say "Well, I'll follow you, but let me just sort some things out first". Jesus makes it clear that this is not acceptable. We either follow him, or we don't. (Luke 14:16-24)

(SLIDE) So, as Christians we have a DUTY to sacrifice our own lives. If we do not, we are not following Jesus.

I bet you're really hoping now that I'm about to tell you that **(SLIDE)** doing this is a JOY right?

And here...prick your ears up...here comes the single most important thing that I want you to take away from this talk.

The Christian life is supposed to be joyful. Indeed, sacrificing things for God is supposed to be joyful. Yes, it can be hard at the point of the sacrifice, and sometimes for a while afterwards, but doing God's will is the most amazing and exciting thing in the world.

Paul sums this up in his letter to the Roman church: **(SLIDE)** "Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship. Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is — his good, pleasing and perfect will."

(SLIDE) Paul says "In view of God's mercy...." - this is a response to the grace of God. He's given us something for free, and so we are to respond willingly.

(SLIDE) Paul tells us that we should "offer our bodies as living sacrifices". Not dead animals or food or oil like in the Old Testament, we should offer our living, breathing selves. We should use our feet to go where he wants us to go. We should use our hands to do his work.

But best of all, Paul says that offering ourselves is an act of Worship. The word used by Paul here contains an element of service, but the tone of the words is joyful. He says, "be holy", "be pleasing to God", "be transformed". He tells us to do God's will because it is good, it is pleasing, it's perfect!

We've seen how the old testament Jews gave extravagantly to God and it was Joyful! We've seen how Jesus' sacrifice, though incredibly painful, results in so much joy as the angels celebrate in heaven and we are given new life.

And sometimes giving of ourselves to God is painful, or difficult. But if it really, genuinely is for God then it's a thing of great joy.

(SLIDE)

So what's your sacrifice?

- Dutifully sacrificing your own time and space to accommodate someone else, and joyfully making a new friend.
- Dutifully sacrificing your own money to help out a friend in need and joyfully seeing their appreciation.
- For the men...dutifully sacrificing a football match (or, in my case, a bike ride) to spend time with your wife or girlfriend and joyfully finding that time with her is much better spent.
- Dutifully sacrificing a few minutes walking instead of using the car, and joyfully finding that you get fitter and might help save God's planet at the same time.
- Dutifully sacrificing 10 minutes on the internet and praying instead for a sick friend, and joyfully seeing them pull through.
- Dutifully sacrificing your inhibitions and abandoning yourself in worship, not worrying about what the person next to you thinks, and joyfully finding the presence of God.

I believe from my reading of the Bible that the things God really wants:

- Love
- Justice
- Mercy
- Service

These things should be our sacrifice.

Remember the definitions?

Sacrifice is doing something sacred. A priestly duty.
Sacrifice is giving something up, to get something better.
Sacrifice is both a duty and a joy.
The Israelites gave so much of their gold, silver and fine things that they were told to stop.
Jesus gave his whole life that you might live.
What's your sacrifice?

SONG: I will offer up my life.

SONG: All I have (from resound)

Offering: Send bags round, get people to pause and think about their offering.

CLOSE

Before we go - that response from the start. Responses can seem dutiful, dull. But this one speaks of giving thanks to God as our duty and our joy.

Let's do it again.