

A Living Sacrifice

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[0 : 0 0] Today the scripture reading comes from Romans chapter 11 and 12. Please follow along on the screen, the bulletin, or your own Bible.

Starting in chapter 11, verse 33, we read, O the death of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments, and how incruitable in his ways!

For who has known the might of the Lord, or who has been his counselor, or who has given a gift to him that he might be repaid? For from him, and through him, and to him are all things.

To him be glory forever. Amen. I appeal to you, therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.

This is the word of God. Great. Thank you. Thank you, Sherman. We've got a short passage today compared to Daniel, so well done for reading that.

[1 : 1 7] Let me just pray for us as we get into God's word this morning. Father, I just thank you that actually as we come before you and we get in your word this morning, this is such an incredible passage, and I know it's a passage where many of us who've been in church have heard this before, but, Lord, we want our hearts not just to check out because we've heard something before, but we want you to warm our hearts.

We want you to melt our hearts. We want you to change our hearts so that actually as we go out this week into the rest of our lives, Lord, that we live our lives as an offering of worship to you.

Lord, I pray even as I speak, Lord, would my lips be worshiped to you? Nothing about me, Lord, but about you. Would as we listen, Lord, would it be worshiped to you? Would you open our ears so that we want to honor you in the way that we hear and respond?

And I pray, Lord, that you would just be with us right now. By your Holy Spirit, we pray. In Jesus' name.

Amen. Great. Welcome, everyone. My name's Chris. If you don't know me, I'm one of the leaders at Watermark. Today, Kevin's actually preaching at another church, Faith Community Church, so you can check out with him.

[2 : 4 4] Actually, that's one of the things we really believe God has us here as a church, is not just to be here for ourselves, but also to be a blessing in the city. And so that's why Kevin's going and speaking at another place this morning.

We're starting a new series in the book of Romans. Let me start off by saying I was talking actually just last week to a cafe owner, and she said to me, you know, all religions are basically the same, aren't they?

You know, it's just about, it doesn't kind of matter what you believe, it's really all about just being good, isn't it? So as long as you're a nice person and kind of help grannies across the road, it's great.

It doesn't matter what you believe. And it sounded plausible, except for the fact that she had missed the crucial fact that, though what you do is really important, the why behind the what is also crucial, in fact, even more important.

Because I can be nice to you just to manipulate you. I can be nice to you to feel better about myself. But the passage in Romans 12 that we're going to be looking at, and we're going to spend a few weeks just going through this extraordinary passage in Scripture, it's amazing.

[4 : 08] I encourage you all to be reading it in between. It's a passage which calls us not just to be nice people, it calls us to be people of radical love and sacrifice.

It calls us to be a community, which is so beautiful because it's shaped entirely by Jesus and his love for us. And we're going to focus, really zoom down into the first verse of this passage today, which is really the foundation for everything else that Paul is going to say in Romans 12.

Because if you don't get this part of the verse, everything else that he's going to call us to is going to be useless, because it's going to be a what without a why.

It's going to be morality without the motivating power to sustain it. You know, I remember when I was a teenager, I mean, my friend, we went to climb the tallest mountain in the UK called Ben Nevis.

And we wanted to do it because it was the tallest mountain. And so we got halfway up, but we realized that actually it's eight hours of just monotony.

[5 : 24] It's the most boring mountain ever in the world. And halfway up, my friend and I, we were just exhausted. We were kind of like, I can't bother to do this any longer.

We just sat down, we stopped, we looked at each other and go, I can't be bothered. And then, this really hot girl walked past us racing up the mountain.

And do you know what happened? You have never seen two 16-year-olds climb Ben Nevis as quickly as we did. Because we found our why.

Before, we thought we had a why, but it was just in our heads. But then we had a why which captured our hearts at that moment. And though that's a stupid story, if we're going to live radical lives, loving Jesus as he calls us to, it's tough work.

It's like climbing a mountain. And we're going to need a greater why than all the other whys that the society around us preaches to us. We're going to need heart-motivating rocket fuel.

[6 : 40] There we go, the spirit is working. Excuse me. We're going to need heart-motivating rocket fuel to really enable us to live this kind of life.

Excuse me, I'm going to put this down here. So we're going to look through this passage, this verse, and I've just got two things that I'm going to say.

One is about give me your why. And the second is give me your all. Okay? So just have the bulletin open in front of you.

And we're going to look through this. Because here is the verse. It says, I appeal to you, therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God.

He says, therefore, which is actually, he means in the light of everything that I've said in chapters 1 through to 11. And then he summarizes the why behind the what that he's going to go into.

[7 : 52] And he says, well, the NIV translation says, in view, and actually our title says, in view of God's mercy. But that's actually only half right.

Because in view of means kind of think about it and then go ahead and do it. Maybe out of obligation, maybe out of guilt, but just do it.

That's not what he's saying here. The actual Greek says, by the mercies of God. Because what by means is, it means having thought about it, having allowed it to marinate and soak in your heart, and allowing it to empower and energize you.

These mercies of God then live radical lives after that. And do you notice, it's actually not the mercy of God, it's the mercies of God in Greek, which means you try counting how many mercies there are.

They're innumerable. And so what I'm going to do is, I'm going to just go through a few from the book of Romans, from chapters 1 to 11, of some of the mercies of God.

[8 : 58] You see, chapter 1, Paul says, I'm not ashamed of the gospel, because it's the power of God for salvation, for everyone who believes.

And in it, the righteousness of God is revealed. The restoring, the saving, the healing, the renewing power of God is revealed. The gospel, the mercies of God, are not about what we do for God, it's about what God has done for us.

It's about God's solution to our problem. And so as the Romans carries on, he says, our problem is that though we knew God, we didn't glorify Him, or honor Him in our lives.

We walked out on Him. We took the glorious symphony of God's creation, in all its complexity, all its beauty and wonder, and we scrubbed out the name of the composer, which was God, and we tried to put our own names in there.

And then maybe we ended up worshipping the music stand, or something we'd created, an idol, instead of the one who deserved all the honor. And it says we became jealous, selfish, unkind, judgmental, and we justified it all.

[10 : 10] Anybody like that? One or two. And he says, religion couldn't help us, morality couldn't help us, because we failed even our own standards.

And he says, all of us have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. And he says, because of that, the wages of sin is death. We were under God's judgment, under His wrath, condemned.

No defense at all. And then he says, but. But God showed His great love for us, in that while we were still sinners, while we were powerless, while we had nothing in our hands, Christ died and rose for us.

He took our punishment on the cross. He freed us from the penalty of sin. Instead of being His enemies through Jesus, we're reconciled. We've got peace with the Creator of the universe.

He said, there's now no condemnation for any of us in Christ. He says, He doesn't just forgive us, doesn't just wipe the slate clean. He credits us with the gift of righteousness.

[11 : 16] We have right standing before God. And we can reign in the new life that He gives to us today. And He says, we have access into the very presence of this holy, awesome God.

And He calls us His adopted, beloved children. And by Him we can cry, Abba, Father. Have you thought how amazing that is? There's no other religion which says, the God who created everything, the galaxies, the Milky Way, you can call Him Dad.

And He loves to hear your voice. And He says, there is nothing in all creation that will ever separate you, if you're in Christ, from the ever doting, ever watching, ever caring, ever passionate love of God for you.

Nothing. Because we're united to Him. The mercies of God. But then He says, there's more. He says, God works through every circumstance, you go through for your good.

He's going to conform us to be more like Jesus, to be glorious image bearers, the beautiful people we were made to be. He is restoring us. And He says, even though we groan in this world, He will, He's not just setting us free from the penalty of sin, but also the power of sin.

[12 : 43] He fills us with the Holy Spirit's presence within us. He doesn't leave us slaves to fear and anxiety. But the Spirit reminds you, you are a child of God.

Remember that. He lifts up when we just don't, we feel so weak, and we don't even know how to pray. He says, He helps us in our weakness, and He intercedes for us, and He lifts our prayers to the throne of heaven.

And because of Him, you have resurrection power inside of you to say no to your selfish desires, and to choose to live lovingly, obediently, and courageously with His power.

And in the groaning of the world, He will not just move the penalty of sin, not just the power of sin, but also He removed the presence of sin.

Because He's giving you an unshakable future, a hope that's never going to disappoint you. You become heirs of the estate of heaven and earth.

[13 : 49] You're co-heirs with Jesus, will reign with Him. You're more than a conqueror through Him who's loved you. And your body, which right now may get allergies, and asthma, and high blood pressure, will be healed and transformed to a place where we'll go, well, what do we call that back then?

Was it cancer? Because He will have brought this abundant new creation in life, and you and I will be there if you've trusted in Christ.

And we did nothing to deserve it. Nothing in our hands. It's purely the gracious generosity of a God that we go, why on earth would you do that? And He says, because I love you.

And we receive it all as an open gift with empty hands, the empty hands of faith. And I've only just begun to start talking about the mercies of God.

Because I could talk about the fact that His mercies are new every single day. And that even though I so often forget about His mercies, He still continues to be merciful to me.

[14 : 58] Even today. How often do we rehearse the mercies of God? And you know, the amazing thing of this is that Paul, he's a brain.

He knows all this doctrine. And you know, people who have real intelligence, often they're great at academics, but they're cold a little bit in the way that they're just clinical.

But actually, he doesn't get tired of this because in chapter 11, he ends the whole of chapters 1 to 11 with this splurge of uncontrolled praise.

He goes, oh, the depths of the riches of the wisdom and the knowledge of God. How unsearchable and how inscrutable are His ways and His judgments. He's going, wow, I can't get my head around this.

I don't even have the words to say. Why is Paul so excited about this? This isn't theory for Paul.

[15 : 58] For some of us, that can be nice. That's nice theory. This is not theory because his life is the testimony to these mercies. You know, 1 Timothy 1, he says, formerly I was a blasphemer, a persecutor, an insolent opponent.

But I received mercy and the grace of our Lord overflowed to me, he says. You know, this is personal. And you know, actually, this will only make you sing when you realize how much you need it.

Until God runs a 10-ton truck over your life to the place where you go, wow, I need mercy, you will not realize that the power and the joy that there is in the mercies of God.

You know, I knew a guy, I knew of a guy who, his dad was always working for the family. And as a son, he was grateful that he paid his college fees and he was dutiful, he was there on birthdays and Father's Day doing the kind of right thing.

But emotionally, he was not really invested. He was, he was just, you know, he invested in a whole load of other stuff. He took his dad quite for granted. And you know, they had a, just a dutiful relationship.

[17 : 17] But then one day, his mom came to him and said to him, do you realize why your dad took so many multiple jobs and was busy all the time?

It's because he had to pay off the debts for the treatment that saved your life when you were a kid. And actually, you meant the time that he's actually spent with you, do you realize he was actually sacrificing the sleep that he should have gotten.

Actually, it's affected his health massively. And he didn't want you to know about this because he didn't want you to feel guilty. And when the son, the son heard this, do you know what it did?

It melted his heart. He broke down. He wept at how cold he could have been towards his father. And it changed him to determine to invest his life in rebuilding his relationship with his dad.

You know, Jesus isn't just a busy, absent father. He's an ever-present father. But if you think that Jesus is just, you know, the greatest mercy that you have from him is he gave you a good job.

[18 : 29] Or he, you know, helped you to get, I answer a prayer that you had. If that's the extent that you think his mercies go to, then you'll be grateful.

You'll go, well, thanks, Jesus. That's nice. I'm forgiven. Maybe here's \$10 in the offering for you. Thank you for dying for me.

Now, what price were the Tesla stocks at the moment? Because you might give your duty, but you won't give your heart until you realize the depth of the sacrifice for you that he went to.

In fact, to just give him your duty is actually quite offensive, right? After all he's done. But if you know that he sacrificed everything for you, the very breath that you have right now is a gift from him.

That if it wasn't for his mercy, you would be in a way worse place than you are right now. And I know that for myself. Then that changes everything. You found your why.

[19 : 40] You found the way that you can be propelled to really love and to live for him. Do you know your need for his mercies? Do you know just how incredible much he loves you?

Because if you do, Paul then appeals to you and to us with this why to respond.

And he says, respond with spiritual worship. And that word spiritual means the only logical, reasonable, not external duty, but internally motivated and fueled from the inside response is worship which says, I give you my all, Jesus.

He's given you his why and now he tells you, give me your all. That's the second point. And this music stand is getting lower and lower.

Or I'm getting shorter and shorter, I'm not sure. Paul says, by the mercies of God, what should you do?

[20 : 54] Present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is, this is, your spiritual worship.

worship. You see, this is the language of the Old Testament, of Old Testament worship, where you take a bull or a lamb or some animal and you'd offer it on the altar and you'd slit its throat and it would die as a substitute for the worshipers.

And it was a costly sacrifice. It was brought before God to bring that offering but actually you would only bring the best. Your animals were your possessions, your wealth.

You know, you didn't bring a sheep with acne. You had to be spotless. And there were three types of animal sacrifice. There were sin offering, sin and guilt offerings, there were burnt offerings and there were fellowship offerings.

But the guilt and the sin offerings and the fellowship offerings, the priest could eat some of it. But the burnt offering, you brought it all and you burnt it all in front of you.

[22 : 11] There was nothing left. You didn't say, oh, I'll just take a thigh from that afterwards once it's cooked. You didn't do that. It was totally consumed in front of you. Why?

Because what you are saying is, this is my total, utter, no holds barred, consecration and devotion to you, God. This is my worship for you. And what Paul is saying here, he says, Jesus has done away with the animal sacrifice, but do you know where is the sacrifice now?

You're the sacrifice. But you're not a dead one. You're a living one. You're not a sacrifice for the sin offering.

This is the burnt offering of saying, where my day-to-day life is, thank you, we need a repair man. My day-to-day, moment-by-moment life is an offering of responsive worship to the God who's given everything for me.

It's a heart that's captivated by his mercies. Because you know what worship is? His worship is giving the highest value, the highest worth, the highest priority to what you think is most valuable, is worth the most.

[23 : 35] And so he's saying, is Jesus the most precious thing to you? Is he? Can you say, Jesus, I want to surrender my all to you?

And notice he doesn't say actually just, bring your spiritual life, bring your church life, bring your Bible studies to me. He doesn't say that. He says, present your bodies, your lips, your arms, your mouth, your tongue, your every part of you, your sexuality to God.

Verse 2 is going to talk about the mind. And we'll look at that next week. But here he's saying, true worship is not just singing some songs on a Sunday. It's not even just confessing some sins from your heart, although those are worship.

It's every single aspect of your life. Everything. One guy, commentator, William Barclay, said this, we might say, I'm going to church to worship God.

But we should also be able to say, I'm going to the factory, the shop, the office, the school, the garage, the mine, not many mines in Hong Kong, the shipyard, the field, the cow ship, definitely not many of those, the garden, to worship God.

[24 : 51] You're going, I'm going to change nappies and send emails and have conversations and plan vacations and have sex with my spouse, all for the glory and honour of God.

Every part. Because he says, if you've got your why, and if your why is not just here, it's come down here, then this offering of what you present to God, it's holy and acceptable.

You know, in the Old Testament, God doesn't accept any old sacrifice. It had to be perfect. He won't accept an imperfect sacrifice.

You know, he won't accept a sacrifice from somebody who isn't a believer in him. But the gospel says that imperfect people like you and me are made acceptable and holy sacrifices.

Because in Jesus, God doesn't look at you like we look at us or like other people look at us. We go, but can't you see all the kind of things I do wrong?

[25 : 58] And God says, yeah, I know. But in Christ, I have cleansed you. I see you with my righteousness, holy, spotless, acceptable, pleasing.

Your sacrifice delights his heart. Isn't that amazing? Some of you are not amazed, but I think it's amazing. So what does it mean for all of your life to be worshipped?

Well, there's a parallel passage in Romans 6 which says this. It says, don't present your members, that means your body parts, your arms, your legs, all those things, to sin as instruments for unrighteousness.

But present yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life. You're alive, you're living. That's what he's saying, a living sacrifice. And you're members to God as instruments for righteousness.

What is he saying? He's actually saying you are always presenting your body to something. You are always worshipping something every day.

[27 : 18] It's not a matter, a choice of whether you worship or not, but who or what you will worship. And so, what you will do with your lips and where you are focused with your eyes and your ears is where you will lay those down on the altar of worship to that thing.

You know, the reason we present our bodies to pornography, the reason we present our bodies to anger and shouting and all the other things is because we are worshipping something other than God and we've lost sight of the mercies of God towards us.

You know, every morning the first thing some of us do is present our bodies to our phones, to Facebook, to the news, to WhatsApp because we worship being up to date.

We fear missing out. But you know, one of the things I've started trying to do as a habit in my heart and my life is to start my day praying a prayer that author Elizabeth Elliot prays to actually offer every single day and here's what she says her prayers loving Lord and heavenly Father I offer today all that I am that means I'm a father I'm a son I'm a colleague I'm a friend whatever you are all that I have my phone my laptop all the things that you have given me my flat that all that I do that project that I've got right now this sermon that I'm writing whatever email you're sending and all that I suffer my struggles the pains that I'm going to go through today to be yours today and yours forever isn't that an amazing prayer?

I want to be a living sacrifice to you but you see there's a choice because you'll not find your why to change and do these kind of things by me just telling you okay just pray before you first thing you do in the morning before you're looking at the phone okay if I say that I can guarantee tomorrow morning none of you will be praying that prayer but what do we need to do we need to rehearse the mercies of God towards us personally so that actually it begins to melt your heart so you make decisions and go God I want to put that in my diary I want to put that in my calendar I want to change my life and you're saying God change my heart so that actually these mercies are not just here but are down here because sometimes we forget right and so here's what's at stake you know it's possible to have been a Christian at one point in your life and at one point said I'm going

[30 : 19] I'm putting my life down on the altar but it's possible over time to be a Christian and not enjoy Jesus you know that because you remember that sin and guilt offering was about atonement Jesus has paid the price there is no more sin and guilt offering you know but there was also that fellowship offering which was about enjoyment of God and communion with him but you know the way that you get from the atoning sacrifice to the enjoyment comes through the burnt offering it comes through that place of sacrifice of getting on the altar and willing to stay on the altar and saying God take me I don't know where this is going but take me and it's only there that actually you'll really see that the joy and the mercies of God will become not just a theory but actually they'll become even richer in your life and you'll experience them more deeply which will then motivate you more to want to offer more of your life to him let me make this practical by giving you four characters

I could do many many more but these are characters that over my time in church I've just seen different people in these categories and for what it has meant for them to get on the altar so I'm going to give you four different people I'm going to give you feelings Felicia feelings Felicia her whole life is presented as an act of worship to her feelings if she feels a little tired she cancels on CG sundial service or any of her commitments if something else comes up that makes her feel better she serves when she feels in the mood but not when she doesn't she lives for the instant gratification of her feelings whether that's food or YouTube or other things and the mercies of God come to feelings Felicia and say Jesus didn't lay down his life because he felt like it he laid down his life because he loved you and so he calls you as an act of worship to lay your feelings on the altar to surrender them and to find that as you keep your commitments as you persevere in things you find difficult to do you'll discover that his mercies lead to way more joy than binging on YouTube ever does because his mercies are for your good even when in the short term it doesn't feel like it feelings

Felicia then there's Burden Barry okay Burden Barry used to be on fire for God back in uni but he's grown jaded disillusioned distracted and he's taken his life off the altar you're here in body but your mind is on your deadlines is on your kids education is on a whole lot of other things even on the grievances and the pains that you have in your life grievances with God grievances with your spouse grievances with everybody else and God's going to call you today if you are like Burden Barry to stop worshipping your distractions to stop even worshipping your pains and to come into the loving arms of a God who loves you way more than you realize and to lay your distractions to lay your burdens to lay your regrets and your hurts on the altar and find that his arms of love are big enough for you and let him free you to come back to your first love some of you need to pray and ask for God to change you in that feelings felicia and and then this insecure

Ian you worship your insecurities you know that actually God is calling you maybe he's calling you to quit your job and actually go into full-time ministry or maybe into missions or maybe he's actually calling you to join in with the core team of this second service that we're starting or he's calling you to give away or to serve in a whole load of areas which you just don't really want to because you're feeling inadequate in things and you want to put a little toe on the altar or maybe an arm but you don't want to put your whole thing because it feels scary and you don't know what's going to happen and God says I want it all or I don't want it at all present your fears to me rehearse how much I've been faithful to you so you know that I'm going to carry you all the way through don't live and worship your insecurities let me be your security step out and trust me with what I'm calling you to do feelings

Felicia burden Barry insecure Ian final one committed Carol you see for committed Carol everyone looks at you because you look like a living sacrifice you invest all your time in serving other people in missional justice and in a whole load of activities and a lot of people think you're the perfect Christian but deep down you know you've lost your why it's become dutiful you maybe find it hard to say no because a lot of your serving is driven maybe from childhood things but it's driven by the sense that you're never doing enough you need to perform to be accepted and to be valued and to be loved and if you stopped you just wonder whether you'd have any significance and actually that's a really heavy yoke for some of you and the mercies of

[36 : 25] God come to you today and say surrender your desire for acceptance and value on the altar and allow my acceptance of you to be enough for you because my mercies are way more way more way more satisfying securing and delighting in your heart than trying to gain it from anybody else or even from yourself I don't know where you're up to I don't know whether you fit into any of those or actually God is speaking to you in another way but you realize you can have the most amazing attractive spouse in the world and over time you can grow familiar and just take them for granted and sometimes you need somebody else to remind you wow your spouse is amazing in the church we need each other to remind us of just how amazing the gospel message is that's why we talk about

Jesus every Sunday but we need that to go from just I know this to going I know this and my appeal to you this morning as Paul appeals is don't go away from here just going that was nice God is calling you he is saying I want it all but I am not calling you to just a burdensome duty I am calling you to delight in me because you see how much I have done for you and if you are not in that place he says run to me and ask for me to change your heart because I love answering that kind of prayer here is a why big enough for when you're tired when you're bored when you're struggling in whatever area you're up to to propel us to see our bank balances our sex life our careers our schedule as an offering of worship not for ourselves but for his glory and his praise

I'm going to stop there there's three kinds of responses that we started talking about last week and I'd like you to actually think how should you respond now if you're a Christian you're a prince and a princess in the kingdom of God some of you may just actually need to respond in praising or thanking him because you don't take time to thank him you know this week I spent I took about 30 minutes to just go over the mercies of God that I've actually seen in my life it's an amazing thing to do some of you right now you actually just need to take a minute or two and just go God how have you been merciful to me in fact don't just do it now I encourage you to do it every day this week some of you actually just need to confess that you have treated Jesus so lightly you put a toe on the altar maybe not even a toe and he wants it all and you need to run to him and just be honest with him and some of us as we think about what he's calling you to do you've got to make a decision to choose to follow what he's calling you to do and tell someone about it so

I'm going to give you a minute or two just to actually respond right now with any of those three things we're going to come up in a minute to take communion but I want you to let's not take communion lightly let's not take communion until we've really rethought and rehearsed the mercies of God so this is no longer an external ritual but it's spiritual worship from the inside so let's as I want to invite the band to come up maybe the communion stewards want to come up as well but I want you to take a minute where are you with Christ how precious is he to you