

Who am I? The Sacrificed Self

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New King James Version of the Scriptures used unless otherwise stated.]*

Today, our subject is the Sacrificed Self. Let's start by thinking about what the word "sacrifice" means. It means an offering, something that is given. The Bible refers to sacrifices made to God and sometimes to idols. Most of these sacrifices were animals such as lambs, goats, bullocks, and birds. God made the first sacrifice when He killed animals in the Garden of Eden and used their skins to clothe Adam and Eve in Genesis 3:21.

Christ's sacrifice

In the New Testament, one supreme sacrifice is constantly referred to: the sacrifice of Christ. We read in John 3:16,

"For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life."

John also records the words of Jesus in John 10,

"I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd gives His life for the sheep" (v.11).

Paul writes in Galatians 2:20,

"I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me."

Later in Ephesians chapter 5, he also writes,

"Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her" (v.25).

The whole basis of our relationship with God is expressed in the tiny word "gave." God the Father explains the extent of His giving in the words, "His only begotten Son." In Genesis 22, God asked Abraham to do the most extraordinary thing: sacrifice His only son, Isaac, who was miraculously born to Sarah, his wife, in old age.

"Now it came to pass after these things that God tested Abraham, and said to him, 'Abraham!' And he said, 'Here I am.' Then He said, 'Take now your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I shall tell you'" (Genesis 22:1-2).

Abraham obeyed God without question and travelled to Moriah, where he built an altar and laid Isaac on it. Isaac did not struggle or try to escape. But as Abraham was about to slay his son, God stepped in and provided a substitute sacrifice, a ram caught by his horns in a thicket. In this event, God tested Abraham's faith in Him and illustrated the future day when God the Father would give the greatest sacrifice for our redemption, His only Son, Jesus Christ.

Paul later writes in Romans,

"What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare His own Son but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?" (Romans 8:31-32).

Paul uses the words "gave himself" to describe Jesus's sacrifice. In Galatians, he uses the expression twice, first in chapter 1:4, "Who gave Himself for our sins, that He might deliver us from this present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father." I have already quoted the following two verses in Galatians chapter 2:20, "The Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me," and in Ephesians 5:25, "Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her." In 1 Timothy 2:5-6, Paul writes,

"For there is one God and one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus, who gave Himself a ransom for all."

And, finally, in Titus 2:13-14, Paul also writes,

Paul also writes, "Looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Saviour Jesus Christ, who gave Himself for us."

Christ gave Himself. His life was a living sacrifice to God. As the Son of God and the Son of Man, Jesus was the only Person who fulfilled the words of Deuteronomy 6:5, "You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength", and His love flowed out to everyone. Ultimately, the expression "gave Himself" referred to His death at Calvary. In John chapter 10, Jesus says,

"Therefore My Father loves Me, because I lay down My life that I may take it again. No one takes it from Me, but I lay it down of Myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. This command I have received from My Father" (vv.17-18).

Luke records the final words of Jesus on the cross, "Father, 'into Your hands I commit My spirit'" (Luke 23:46). He gave His life. He gave Himself. The characteristics of the Lord's sacrificial life and sacrificial death have spiritual and practical implications for every Christian. I want to highlight these implications and challenge my own heart in their light. We learn about the true meaning of the sacrificed self by understanding Christ's sacrifice of Himself.

Paul's appeal for us to present ourselves as living sacrifices

Key to this understanding are the opening verses of Romans chapter 12. These follow Paul's unfolding of the love and grace of God in the preceding chapters. He writes,

"I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. And do not be conformed to this world, but be

transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God" (Romans 12:1- 2).

The whole basis of our faith is the sacrifice of love the Lord Jesus Christ made for us upon the cross. God now looks for a response in the hearts and lives of His people. That response is a "living sacrifice", the "sacrificed self." This means serving God in every part of our lives. It involves personal holiness and the fulfilment of God's will in our relationships, our homes, among the people of God, our work, and our communities. It also involves not conforming to the world's thinking or manner of life but being transformed to prove the will of God.

The words "conformed" and "transformed" in verse 2 are essential. "Conformed" here means an outward change that makes us like others. Let me give you an illustration. When I was young, I was given a Walt Disney modelling kit. It had some rubber moulds of cartoon characters and some plaster. You mixed the plaster, poured it into the moulds, and then waited for it to set. The plaster took the character's shape; you could paint it afterwards to look like the Disney character it represented. The models were identical because they had been poured into the same mould. Paul argues that is what the world is like. It wants everyone to conform to a pattern of life that agrees with current thinking. A mixture of philosophies, politics, art, marketing and the behaviour of society form this pattern or mould.

Paul argues that Christians should be transformed and not pour themselves into the world's mould. The word "transformed" means metamorphosed. This happens when a caterpillar forms into a chrysalis, and a butterfly emerges after two weeks or so. The struggle the butterfly has in releasing itself from the chrysalis is part of its preparation for a new life. A scientist once used a penknife to help a butterfly out of its chrysalis. As a result, the butterfly could not fly. It needed to struggle to make its wings strong enough for flight.

What are the characteristics of transformation into a living sacrifice?

We may have read Romans 12:1 many times, but do we ever ask ourselves the question, "What does a "sacrificed self" look like?" From verse 9 onwards of Romans 12, Paul answers this question by describing the spiritual features of those who would respond to his heartfelt appeal. Let's look at those features, it is a long list:

1. **Genuine love** - Let love be without hypocrisy (v. 9).
2. **Compassion and consideration** - Be kindly affectionate to one another with brotherly love, in honour giving preference to one another (v. 10).
3. **Diligence** - Not lagging in diligence, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord (v. 11).
4. **Joy, patience, prayerfulness** - Rejoicing in hope, patient in tribulation, continuing steadfastly in prayer (v. 12).
5. **Cheerful giving** - Distributing to the needs of the saints, given to hospitality (v. 13).
6. **Blessing** - Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse (v. 14).
7. **Sympathy** - Rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep (v. 15).
8. **Harmony** - Be of the same mind toward one another (v.16).
9. **Humility** - Do not set your mind on high things, but associate with the humble. Do not be wise in your own opinion (v. 16).
10. **Integrity** - Have regard for good things in the sight of all men (v. 17).
11. **Gentleness** - Live peaceably with all men (v. 18).
12. **Overcoming** - Overcome evil with good (vv. 19-21).

Outside the Tabernacle, in the Old Testament, was an enormous container full of water called the Laver. The priests took water from the Laver to wash. It was made from bronze mirrors donated by the women of Israel (Exodus 38:8). In its still water, the priests would have seen their reflections as they took the water to cleanse themselves. Most mornings, we look in a mirror to check our

appearance. But there is another mirror - the word of God, which looks deep into our hearts and minds. It keeps us from being conformed to this world and transforms us by renewing our minds into the likeness of the Lord Jesus. It tells us what a living sacrifice looks like and teaches us to be self-sacrificing. Through it, God wants to transform His people, renewing their minds and empowering them to become what God wants us to be. This spiritual change is brought about by the action of the Spirit of God and the word of God in our lives. It is a struggle that requires our obedience and our willing response. This transformation should be seen in the lives of individual Christians and among the people of God as a whole. It should be demonstrated using our spiritual gifts to benefit the body of Christ (vv.12:4-11).

This transformation demonstrates a new life characterised by hope, patience, prayer and giving. We are to care for each other. We are to use our homes for hospitality. We are to bless when badly treated rather than responding in kind. We are to rejoice with those who rejoice and weep with those who mourn. A spirit of humility and peace rather than pride, revenge and conceit should also mark us. These are not typical characteristics even amongst Christians. This makes Romans 12 even more challenging in today's world. But Paul encourages us through the love and sacrifice of Christ,

"Therefore be imitators of God as dear children. And walk in love, as Christ also has loved us and given Himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling aroma" (Ephesians 5:1-2).

This sacrifice is a daily presentation of a lifelong commitment. Numbers 28:3-4 describe the burnt offerings made each day to God.

"This is the offering made by fire which you shall offer to the LORD: two male lambs in their first year without blemish, day by day, as a regular burnt offering. The one lamb you shall offer in the morning, the other lamb you shall offer in the evening" (vv.3-4).

It is helpful not to be overwhelmed by the concept of sacrifice but to begin each day committing what lies before us into the hands of God and to follow the Saviour in simple discipleship.

Self-sacrifice also involves material sacrifices and the giving of our resources. Paul praised the Philippians,

"Indeed I have all and abound. I am full, having received from Epaphroditus the things sent from you, a sweet-smelling aroma, an acceptable sacrifice, well pleasing to God" (Philippians 4:18).

Hebrew 13:16 reinforces this characteristic of sacrifice,

"But do not forget to do good and to share, for with such sacrifices God is well pleased."

Equally, it involves the sacrifice of praise,

"Therefore by Him let us continually offer the sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of our lips, giving thanks to His name" (Hebrews 13:15).

This includes our personal expression of praise and thankfulness to God and doing this in fellowship together,

"You also, as living stones, are being built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ" (1 Peter 2:5).

Our sacrifices are valued

In the Gospel of Mark, Jesus demonstrates the value He places on what is sacrificed to God.

"Now Jesus sat opposite the treasury and saw how the people put money into the treasury. And many who were rich put in much. Then, one poor widow came and threw in two mites, which made a quadrans. So He called His disciples to Himself and said to them, "Assuredly, I say to you that this poor widow has put in more than all those who have given to the treasury; for they all put in out of their abundance, but she out of her poverty put in all that she had, her whole livelihood"" (Mark 12:41-44).

A mite was the smallest Jewish coin. Two made a quadrans and were worth a third of a farthing. The poor widow did not throw one in and keep the other. She "put in all that she had." Her poverty did not restrict her from giving. It defined it. In casting everything into the treasury, she threw herself entirely upon God. Jesus saw what she did, and he described its value. Our self-sacrifice defines us as followers of Jesus who gave Himself.

In Matthew 25, Jesus also values what we think has little value.

"Then the King will say to those on His right hand, 'Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: for I was hungry and you gave Me food; I was thirsty and you gave Me drink; I was a stranger and you took Me in; I was naked and you clothed Me; I was sick and you visited Me; I was in prison and you came to Me.' Then the righteous will answer Him, saying, 'Lord, when did we see You hungry and feed You, or thirsty and give You drink? When did we see You a stranger and take You in, or naked and clothe You? Or when did we see You sick, or in prison, and come to You?' And the King will answer and say to them, 'Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me'" (vv.34-40).

We should not underestimate the value of small sacrifices. Sometimes, the tiniest actions can have a profound effect. The Lord took a child's meal and gave thanks for it before using it to feed 5000 people. The Lord looks beyond the smallness of sacrifices to the hearts of those who freely give of what they have, and He appreciates the cost of what is given.

King David gives us an insight into the cost of sacrifice when Ornan wanted to gift land to David. He said,

"No, but I will surely buy it for the full price, for I will not take what is yours for the LORD, nor offer burnt offerings with that which costs me nothing" (1 Chronicles 21:24).

We should give to the Lord what is precious to us. In Malachi, the people of God sacrificed injured animals to Him,

""And when you offer the blind as a sacrifice, Is it not evil? And when you offer the lame and sick, Is it not evil? Offer it then to your governor! Would he be pleased with you? Would he accept you favourably?" Says the LORD of hosts" (Malachi 1:8).

Nor should we be frugal but cheerful givers.

“But this I say: He who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. So let each one give as he purposes in his heart, not grudgingly or of necessity; for God loves a cheerful giver” (2 Corinthians 9:6-7).

I want to leave you with some of the features of an outstanding example of a person whose life portrayed the "sacrificed self." His name is Barnabas.

1. **Barnabas' life of faith in Christ began with sacrifice**

“And Joses, who was also named Barnabas by the apostles (which is translated Son of Encouragement), a Levite of the country of Cyprus, having land, sold it, and brought the money and laid it at the apostles' feet” (Acts 4:36-37).

The Spirit of God uses Barnabas to give us an example of the sacrificed life. We are introduced to him at a critical moment in the history of the early Church - just before the sin of covetousness marred the remarkable testimony of the people of God in Acts 5. We can look further back and see the damage this sin did in the days of Joshua (Joshua 7), and Paul writes in Colossians 3:5, "covetousness, which is idolatry." In contrast, Barnabas sold his land and brought the money to the apostles for use in the service of God. It wasn't merely a gift but an expression of his desire to sacrifice his life entirely to the service of God. God loves a cheerful giver, and the apostles named him "Son of Encouragement."

When Saul of Tarsus, following his conversion, attempted to join the disciples at Jerusalem, he was still seen as an enemy (Acts 9:26-27). Barnabas befriended him, brought him to the apostles and spoke on his behalf. This gives us an insight into Barnabas' character as a true spiritual shepherd. He cared for God's people, saw value in them when others did not and defended and encouraged them in their faith and service.

A great persecution of the Christians at Jerusalem followed the death of Stephen. God's grace led to the Gospel spreading to Samaria in Acts 8 and Antioch in Acts 11. Astonishingly, the Lord used the death of Stephen to spread the Gospel through the lives of ordinary disciples and gifted servants of God. God lit a fire in their hearts, and despite their suffering, they communicated the love of God everywhere they went. When the apostles heard of the blessing at Antioch, they sent Barnabas to encourage them. The apostles held Barnabas in high regard and knew he would benefit those he was sent to serve.

I think Barnabas' arrival in Antioch gives us an excellent lesson in shepherding the people of God. Barnabas didn't rush to organise or direct, or even teach. As a true shepherd, he looked over the flock of God; he saw the grace of God, and he was glad. In serving God's people, we should never be superficial or hasty. We should take time to see how God's grace has moved in the hearts of His people, and we should rejoice in it. [Whatever the problems Paul had to deal with amongst the churches he sought to serve, he always began with what the grace of God had done in their lives. I wonder if he learnt that from Barnabas, who built on what God had already done.](#) In the King James Version, we read that he "exhorted them all, that with purpose of heart they would cleave unto the Lord" (Acts 11:23). I love the word "cleave"; here it means "to adhere firmly and closely or

loyally and unwaveringly to something." Barnabas crystallises the blessing and power of the Christian life with these simple words: stay close to the Lord. This is fundamental to the expression of the sacrificed self.

2. Barnabas' sacrificed self was characterised by goodness, led by the Holy Spirit, and fulfilled in faith.

"For he was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and of faith. And a great many people were added to the Lord. Then Barnabas departed for Tarsus to seek Saul. And when he had found him, he brought him to Antioch. So it was that for a whole year they assembled with the church and taught a great many people. And the disciples were first called Christians in Antioch" (Acts 11:24-26).

In a few words, the Holy Spirit tells us so much about Barnabas. He was a good man. Goodness is at the heart of the "sacrificed self." Barnabas did not have mixed motives or self-interest; he genuinely sought the blessing of others. His goodness was a result of the work of God in his life.

The early church prospered because those within it were transformed by the love of Christ into His likeness. Christ transformed Zaccheus, the tax collector, into the most generous of men. Paul told the Philippian jailer, "Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved" (Acts 16:31), and the heartless jailer was transformed into the gentlest of men. Like them, Barnabas was who he was because of Christ's work in him.

He was full of the Holy Spirit. Paul writes in Ephesians 5:18:

"And do not be drunk with wine, in which is dissipation; but be filled with the Spirit."

He compares the loss of control and damage caused by drunkenness with the fruitfulness and blessing of a life filled with the Holy Spirit of God. Being filled with the Holy Spirit is being like Jesus. It is the Holy Spirit who empowers the sacrificed self. Through Him, we are characterised by love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, and the other features of the fruit of the Spirit. The Holy Spirit's ministry is to glorify Christ in us and through us. Barnabas was filled with and empowered by the Spirit of God to minister Christ in the Gospel and to care for His people.

He was also full of faith. He had faith to sell his land; he had faith to befriend and encourage Saul, and he had faith to share the Gospel, and nurture the people of God in Jerusalem and Antioch. His faith in God was expressed in the reality of daily life. He walked with God and had complete confidence in what God could do. He encouraged the Lord's people to "cleave to the Lord with purpose of heart" because that's how he lived. Like Peter, he became a shepherd of the flock of God because he knew the Good Shepherd and understood how important it was to be an example to the flock of God (1 Peter 5:3). His ministry was also evangelistic. By his sacrificial service in the Gospel, Barnabas led many people to Christ and supported their spiritual growth and sanctification.

Barnabas also had a rare quality. He saw so clearly the grace of God in the lives of his fellow believers. Barnabas was a guileless man who discerned, encouraged and valued gifts and abilities in others. He left Antioch to seek, find, and bring Saul to help in the work of God in that city. This is another aspect of the sacrificed self. He found a valuable servant of God and brought him to a place where he was needed. Barnabas not only ministered to the needs of God's people but valued and stimulated them to use their spiritual gifts. He and Paul worked together in a harmonious Christ-centred ministry which led to the disciples being called Christians for the first time.

3. Barnabas was a sacrificial example to others and a sacrificial friend

“Now in the church that was at Antioch there were certain prophets and teachers: Barnabas, Simeon who was called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch, and Saul. As they ministered to the Lord and fasted, the Holy Spirit said, “Now separate to Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them””(Acts 13:1-2).

Barnabas was a prominent role model to the people of God in Jerusalem, Antioch, and commissioned by the Holy Spirit to undertake the first missionary journey with Paul. This spiritual friendship with Paul was an enormous blessing to the Church of Christ.

Acts 13 and 14 testify to their harmony in the service of God. These two spiritual and gifted men, blended together effectively to fulfil a shared ministry. It can be challenging to share a ministry, and I think it helped that they were friends. We should never underestimate the value of true Christian friendship and choose our friends wisely. As the unique ministry of Paul as a "chosen vessel" (Acts 9:15) begins to emerge in these chapters, there is no evidence that Barnabas became jealous of his friend. The theme of their ministry in Antioch continued into their missionary work, as they encouraged disciples to continue in the grace of God (Acts 13:43). Together, they were led by the Spirit to reach out to the Gentiles with the Gospel (Acts 13:46) and together suffered persecution (Acts 13:50). Barnabas selfless spiritual bearing had an impact on the people. Barnabas' calm and caring character endeared him to the apostles, the people of God in Jerusalem and Antioch, his friend Paul and the people of Lystra. Barnabas and Paul present the harmony of the character and message of the Christian faith.

4. Barnabas sacrificed himself for the spiritual benefit of John Mark

In Acts 15, after the Council at Jerusalem, Paul is exercised to revisit the brethren he and Barnabas had ministered amongst to see how they were progressing (v. 36). It is essential to distinguish between the direct calling of the Holy Spirit in Acts 13:2 and Paul's personal exercise. This personal exercise led to another direct calling from the Holy Spirit in chapter 16:6-10. Barnabas was willing to go with Paul but wanted to take John Mark, who had gone on their first missionary journey (Acts 13:5) but left to return to Jerusalem (Acts 13:13). But Paul doubted Mark's suitability for similar service.

So, these two great men of God and close friends disagreed about John Mark and went their separate ways. Paul's remarkable service is outlined by Luke in the rest of the Book of Acts, and Barnabas goes with John Mark to Cyprus. Barnabas understood that when we serve God, He is not only working through us but also in us. Paul would later write about what he had learned whilst serving God (Philippians 4:10-13). Barnabas had taken Paul and introduced him to the apostles, and he had left Antioch to find Paul and include him in the valuable ministry in that city. He cared about individuals and their spiritual progress. So he personally took responsibility for John Mark. Paul viewed the work of God in its extensiveness: Barnabas was seeking the restoration of a failed servant. Some think that Barnabas was influenced by his family relationship (see Colossians 4:10). This thinking belittles his character but would to God that we all had such a deep interest in the spiritual welfare of our relatives! The children of Christians can suffer from spiritual neglect.

But Barnabas was following the Lord's example. Thomas wilfully rejected the news of the resurrection of Christ, and the Lord restored him and made a worshipper. Peter denied the Lord Jesus three times, and the Lord restored him and called him to be a shepherd. John Mark failed the Lord in service, but ultimately, the Lord called him to write the Gospel of Mark, the Gospel that speaks of Jesus as the Servant of God. Paul did not need Barnabas, but John Mark did. And the

young man who went with Barnabas to Cyprus became the servant of God Paul refers to in some of the last words he wrote:

"Get Mark and bring him with you, for he is useful to me for ministry" (2 Timothy 4:11).

I wonder if Paul saw at the end of his life the devotion to service and the friendship he shared with Barnabas in his younger fellow-servants, Timothy, and John Mark respectively. We need the vision and purpose of servants like Paul and the hearts of Christians like Barnabas, who teach us about the sacrificed self, keep us close to the Lord and fulfil the love of God,

"By this we know love, because He laid down His life for us. And we also ought to lay down our lives for the brethren" (1 John 3:16).

Thank you for listening to the Truth for Today talk on The Sacrificed Self, talk number T1340.

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