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Living as a Sacrifice

Romans 12:1, "I urge you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, *which is* your spiritual service of worship."

Years ago, I heard a sermon on this passage in which the preacher illustrated the difference between a "Living Sacrifice" and a "Dead Sacrifice." He said that a "dead sacrifice" would be the animal's used in a sacrificial service of the Old Testament. For truly, the net result of each sacrifice would be a dead animal.

In contrast, a "living sacrifice" speaks of a living being claimed by God to be used exclusively for His purpose and praise — as in having gone to Mount Moriah (which was the OT name for the

mountain on which the city of Jerusalem would one day be built), we read of Abraham's call to sacrifice his son, Isaac,

Genesis 22:9-12: "Then they came to the place of which God had told him; and Abraham built the altar there, and arranged the wood, and bound his son Isaac, and laid him on the altar on top of the wood. And Abraham stretched out his hand, and took the knife to slay his son. But the angel of the Lord called to him from heaven, and said, 'Abraham, Abraham!' And he said, 'Here I am.' And he said, 'Do not stretch out your hand against the lad, and do nothing to him; for now I know that you fear God, since you have not withheld your son, your only son, from Me.'"

We know from Scripture that God never intended Abraham to go through with the sacrifice of his son... this was a test! Yet it illustrates the life of a Living Sacrifice: our children are not our own... neither is our marriage, job, health, life!

Yet that is Christianity! In it God makes a claim upon the life of a sinner by which He NOT ONLY forgives their sin BUT calls them for His purpose... to which we respond by "presenting [ourselves] to God as those alive from the dead, and [our] members *as* instruments of righteousness to God"! (Romans 6:12-13)

It was with this in mind that Peter addressed the people of God of his day in this epistle. They truly were, "aliens, scattered throughout" the world on account of God and His claim on their life! (1 Peter 1:1) And as the world in which they lived was turning more hostile toward the people of God — recall, 1 Peter was written on the cusp of the Neronian persecution- the life of these "aliens and strangers" was about to get very difficult (which again is why Peter penned this epistle)! Having laid a solid foundation regarding the value we are to God, the salvation we have received, and that which awaits us in Christ (1 Peter 1:2:10), Peter turned in our current section (1 Peter 2:11-4:11) to application: specifically, what Godly living ought to look like in a hostile world! The section at which we are looking this morning takes the threat of persecution head on — describing what it means to be a living sacrifice in the midst of trial and difficulty! Recall that Peter began addressing the cost of persecution for the believer in which we saw two things:

- Persecution can't hurt you, v. 13.

1 Peter 3: 13, "And who is there to harm you if you prove zealous for what is good?"- this is akin to the words of David when he fled from Saul to Gath, "In God, whose word I praise, in God I have put my trust; I shall not be afraid. What can *mere* man do to me?"

Because our life is hidden in and protected by Christ, we can lose nothing of substance in this world! This brings us to Peter's second observation when it comes to The Cost of Persecution...

- Persecution can't rob you, v. 14a.

1 Peter 3:14a, “But even if you should suffer for the sake of righteousness, *you are* blessed...”- recall, no man, demon, or devil can take anything from you which God hasn’t and won’t restore 100-fold in Christ...

Matthew 19:29, “And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or farms for My name’s sake, shall receive many times as much, and shall inherit eternal life.”

With this, Peter turned his focus to the inner man and how we therefore ought to respond on the inside to *the THREAT of Persecution*.

- Do Not Fear, v. 14b.

Recall, the text literally reads, “Do not fear their fear.” So often it is this that paralyzes us... the fear of what might happen. Yet because this world cannot touch our soul (Matthew 10:28) — and so that which is of eternal importance — there is no reason to live in dread as Christians! We can be as Shadrach, Meshack, and Abed-Nego facing their impending death...

Daniel 3:16b-18, “O Nebuchadnezzar, we do not need to give you an answer concerning this matter. If it be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the furnace of blazing fire; and He will deliver us out of your hand, O king. But *even* if *He does* not, let it be known to you, O king, that we are not going to serve your gods or worship the golden image that you have set up.”

Talk about boldness! Truly, we need never fear what man can do to us! Peter secondly encourages us never to be troubled by the prospect of suffering.

- Do Not Be Troubled, v. 14c.

Recall the word used in this context — *ταράσσω (tarassō)* — refers to a violent shaking; it is to be terrorized in the inner man! And so not only are we not to fear fear, but we are not to allow the world in which we live to shake us to our core. Now both of these exhortations are beyond the natural ability of anyone of us. So how do we do it? Recall, the answer is given in the text from which Peter here is quoting, Isaiah 8:12-14a. Included in the quote is this statement, “It is the Lord of hosts whom you should regard as holy. And He shall be your fear [as opposed to persecution], and He shall be your dread. [Now when this is true, when God is that which moves us in life...] Then He shall become a sanctuary...”-

Proverbs 18:10, “The name of the Lord is a strong tower; the righteous runs into it and is safe.”

As we have seen now many times, when we live in light of the greatness of God — when we live *Coram Deo* — the things of this earth truly “grow strangely dim” as it relates to the threat it could pose to us! It is with this posture that we are to receive the exhortations of the next

section pertaining to our witness during trial for we must be ready to make a defense.

1 Peter 3:15, “But sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, always *being* ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and reverence.”

One of the upsides to trial and difficulty is that it gives us the opportunity to serve as a witness to the greatness of God and the glory of His salvation. That being the case, the focus of this verse is on “being ready” when that time comes in our lives. We tend to take a command like as if it said, “Be willing.” Yet that is NOT the focus here. If I told you to “be ready” to run a marathon in six months, what would you do? That is the idea here. Peter’s command brings with it the calling to evaluate what is necessary for you to “be ready” at any given moment to share of Christ.

Now, Peter is NOT implying that all in Christ must be a skilled apologist. Rather, the implication is that at all times we must be ready and willing to be a witness for the Lord. Now from this passage we learn four things about being a witness for the Lord.

- Being a witness of Christ won’t be easy; it will involve conflict!

1 Peter 3:15b, “But sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, always *being* ready to make a defense.”

The word for “defense” here is *ἀπολογία (apologia)* which has the sense of “a reply to an accusation.”¹ It is NOT a neutral word, BUT one that presupposes conflict. That is what is going to happen as you and I live out our Christian lives on the earth. Recall the warning of Christ:

Matthew 10:34, “Do not think that I came to bring peace on the earth; I did not come to bring peace, but a sword.”

This does NOT mean we do the work of God’s Kingdom with swords, guns, knives, or bombs (as in Islam). Recall Christ’s words to Pilate.

John 18:36b, “...If My kingdom were of this world, then My servants would be fighting, that I might not be delivered up to the Jews; but as it is, My kingdom is not of this realm.”

Or Paul’s words to the Corinthians.

2 Corinthians 10:3-4, “For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh, for the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh, but divinely powerful for the destruction of fortresses.”

Accordingly, we understand that Christ is speaking figuratively here of the conflict that will

occur when the world of this darkness is confronted by a child of light! Recall Christ's words in John.

John 3:19-20, "And this is the judgment, that the light is come into the world, and men loved the darkness rather than the light; for their deeds were evil. For everyone who does evil hates the light, and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed."

Accordingly, to live a godly life on this earth will involve conflict with Satan's Kingdom! As such, people are going to accuse and confront the genuine servant of God. It is inevitable.

John 15:20b, "...if they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you..."-

And so we read a warning that Peter gives in the next chapter...

1 Peter 4:4, "And in *all* this, they are surprised that you do not run with *them* into the same excess of dissipation, and they malign *you*."

This no doubt is why the Apostle Paul himself prayed for boldness (Ephesians 6:19!

So, the first thing we learn from our text this morning is that being a witness for Christ won't be easy; it will involve conflict! That being said, how is it that we can be bold in our witness?

- A faithful, bold witness comes NOT from looking within, but from looking upon Christ!

1 Peter 3:15a, "But sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts..."

Truly, rather than fearing man, we are called here to "fear the Lord"! Again, this is taken from Isaiah 8:13 where God contrasts the fear of man with the fear of God. Accordingly, Peter is saying here: Living as ones who are genuinely moved by the greatness of our God who is with us, be ready!

I love this! THE most important element to your preparation to be a minister in a hostile world is a living understanding of who your God is! We are not talking here about mere head-knowledge, for notice the expression, "Sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts". Peter adds this to the quote in Isaiah with the implication that our confession and understanding of the Lord must come from the core of our being! We must endeavor to know God from our hearts! This is the necessary precursor in order to be a faithful witness!

We see it in the life of Moses! The life of Moses! That which equipped him most to be the leader of God's people was the glimpse he had of Lord.

Exodus 34:6-8, "Then the Lord passed by in front of him and proclaimed, 'The Lord, the Lord God, compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in lovingkindness and truth; who keeps lovingkindness for thousands, who forgives iniquity, transgression and sin;

yet He will by no means leave *the guilty* unpunished, visiting the iniquity of fathers on the children and on the grandchildren to the third and fourth generations.’ And Moses made haste to bow low toward the earth and worship.”

This single, limited glimpse of the glory and greatness of God radically transformed Moses as a leader! We see it in Job! Recall his words.

Job 42:5-6, “I have heard of Thee by the hearing of the ear; but now my eye sees Thee; therefore I retract, and I repent in dust and ashes.”

Prior to this moment, Job was all fight and blame-shifting! But after coming to a greater understanding of the God who loved him, Job’s life was radically transformed!

We see it in the Apostles — the very ones who abandoned Christ when He was arrested! Yet, what was the impact in their lives after gazing upon their resurrected Lord? Luke speaking of the Sanhedrin wrote this:

Acts 4:13, “Now as they observed the confidence of Peter and John, and understood that they were uneducated and untrained men, they were marveling, and *began* to recognize them as having been with Jesus.”

Christian, do you want to grow in your passion to serve Christ? Do you want to grow in your boldness when it comes to witnessing? It does NOT come from any training you might acquire! RATHER, it comes as we grow in our understanding of who God is: His greatness, glory, holiness, standards, mercy, and grace! I love the words of Jack Miller, taken from two different sermons:

When we think about witnessing, we wonder how we will do it. But the more you focus on yourself, the less you do it. Take your eyes off yourself and see that the gospel is worth everything...

When I don’t share my faith, the issue always is that I have grown cold to my need for Christ. I have forgotten that I am a sinner who needs cleansing. I need the gospel. I need the righteousness of Christ. Jesus died to cleanse me by His blood, and that blood has the power to cleanse others too... When I remember all that Jesus did for me, then I share my faith with everyone I can.” (Sermons preached on 2 Timothy 1:8 and John 4:29 respectively).

And so, a faithful, bold witness comes from the core of our being and so the conviction of the greatness of God and the glory of His grace! That brings us to the content of our witness and how it is focused on “the Hope” that is ours on account of the person and work of Christ!

1 Peter 3:15c, “But sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, always *being* ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you...”

This is another important element! Recall what Christ told the Gadarene Demoniac:

Mark 5:19, "And He did not let him, but He said to him, 'Go home to your people and report to them what great things the Lord has done for you, and *how* He had mercy on you.'"

By way of a footnote, notice the general calling of a witness. It is NOT to convince people of anything, BUT to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. Accordingly, our responsibility when it comes witnessing is simply to tell people "what we have both seen and heard" (Acts 22:15)!

Now as it relates to the Kingdom of God, what is it that every one of us in Christ "have seen and heard"? What is the essential message of our witness? Peter gives the answer: we are to "give an account for the hope that is in us." What is that "hope"? Based on the epistle before us, it would include the following:

- God is our Sovereign Lord who set His love upon us in eternity past, 1 Peter 1:2a.
- In time, He sent His Holy Spirit to open our eyes to see our need for the cleansing blood of Christ, 1 Peter 1:2b.
- Truly, "the wages of sin is death" (Romans 6:23a) such that if we have one sin as we stand before the Lord on the Day of Judgment, we will perish! As that is the case, all men need the forgiveness that comes from the cleansing blood of Christ!
- Accordingly, in Christ- on account of His cross-work- we have peace with God on account of the removal our sin, 1 Peter 1:2c.
- God works salvation in us that we might inherit a kingdom and a life which pertains to the age to come- the New Heavens and Earth, 1 Peter 1:3-4.
- As such, our future now is certain, as no one or thing can come between us and the Lord, 1 Peter 1:5.
- Flowing from this, our greatest joy in life is fellowshiping with and so enjoying the Lord and the incredible gift that is ours in Christ, 1 Peter 1:6.
- Until then, the Lord will be about tempering and molding our faith to prepare us for that moment in time... in the future... at the wedding feast of the Lamb when Jesus will come up to each one of us and publicly give us "praise, glory, and honor", 1 Peter 1:7.
- Because of all of this, we love Christ more than life itself, 1 Peter 1:8.

I could go on and on, for I just walked you through the teaching that Peter gave in the first 8 verses of this epistle! In fact, I would encourage you to read and reread the entire section — 1 Peter 1-2:10 — and you will discover "the hope" that is ours in Christ today! It is this that we share with the unbeliever!

- And so, our goal when it comes to our witness is NOT that we somehow convince the persecutor to trust Christ- again that is the work of the Holy Spirit. RATHER, our goal is that we share of the hope that is ours on account of Who Christ is and What He has done!

- Now in order for you and me to do this, we do NOT need formal training. RATHER, we need to be immersed in God's word with the goal of beholding Christ, knowing Christ, and believing Christ! Without this, our witness will be shallow and, most likely, staged/wooden/formulaic.

Note(s)

¹ cf. Acts 22:1; 25:16; 1 Corinthians 9:3; Phil. 1:7, 16.