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Series: Romans: The Just Shall Live by Faith
Message: An Act of Worship

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Romans 12:1

Over the past couple of months one of the books that I've been reading is called *The Rhythms of Grace* by Mike Cospers. It has to do with the whole matter of worship and what that looks like. The subtitle I think gives the thesis of the book. The subtitle is "How the Church's Worship Tells the Story of the Gospel." I'm pretty sure the apostle Paul would give a strong amen to not only the idea in this book but that subtitle that what we do as the church of Jesus Christ day-to-day and on Sunday is really is a telling of the story of the gospel. In Romans 12:1 this is really highlighted in a very specific way. We want to look at that this morning. We want to see that we'll never be satisfied if our lives are lived for ourselves. If our lives are lived with a focus on self, we're not ever going to be satisfied in the deepest parts of our soul and spirit. It is only going to be the true joy is found when we live life to the glory of God. I think that would be a summary of Romans 12:1.

Let's go back and reset the context as we've been working our way through this first verse. We are reminded that it begins with an appeal. When I say it begins with an appeal, it begins with an appeal. Paul's very first words are I appeal. We talked about the sense of urgency that comes with that family sense that Paul is calling out to them. He's answering the question how should we then live. His answer begins with I appeal to you. The Christian life, this matter of belonging to Christ means something very practical. It means something very significant. It's to touch every area of our life.

It flows secondly from the mercies of God. It flows from the mercies of God. What would we have if it were not for the mercies of God? Nothing. We would have nothing. Everything that we have flows from the mercies of God. A big view of God's mercy is the starting point and continuing point of the Christian life. The banner over Romans we said when we came to this verse might very well be Paul saying to put as the banner over Romans the mercies of God. Put over your own life the banner that says the

mercies of God. We live every day by the mercies of God. We look at our past by the mercies of God.

Then thirdly it's all about what came before. It's all based on what came before and that is captured in that little word "therefore". It takes us back into the first 11 chapters. Those 11 chapters filled with doctrine laying the foundation for what is to come. God's truth is then to be applied and that's all about duty. Never ever separate doctrine and duty. Don't ever make doctrine and duty the enemies of each other. They're not. They're best friends. Doctrine and duty go together. Without doctrine there is no duty. We don't understand; we don't know how to apply. Without duty there is not doctrine. Both of them are needed and both of them are necessary. God's truth is to be lived out. That's what Paul wants us to see. He wants us to look into the mirror of the word every day and he wants us to see what it is that we need to do to live out that word.

Let's pick up where we left off. Where we left off would be to simply say this is a fundamental principle of the Christian life. Romans 12:1 and 2 are introducing us to the fundamental principles of the Christian life. We noted the last couple of times that we've looked at this verse that we're no longer functioning under the Old Covenant. We don't come to a priest. We are one. We talked about when Paul says present your bodies as a living sacrifice it is the language of worship. It is the language of the Old Testament believer bringing a sacrifice to the priest and the priest taking that the animal and the priest being the one who would take it to the altar. We don't do that anymore. Not only do we not bring an animal, but we don't go to a priest because we are priests. Peter says it in 1 Peter 2:9. You are a chosen generation. You're a royal priesthood. That's who we are. Every one of us a believer priest. We today are believer priests before God. We're the presenters of the sacrifice.

Secondly, we don't bring a sacrifice. We are one. What are we presenting? We're presenting ourselves. We're presenting our bodies. Remember back in that opening set of doctrines that Paul dealt with in that third chapter. I think when he says this in chapter 1, it is a matter of presenting yourselves and being a presenter of a sacrifice. I think he had to have in mind what he had said in in Romans 3. When he speaks in the 13th verse and he says "Their throat is an open grave. They use their tongue to deceive. The

venom of asps is under their lips. Their mouth is full of curses and bitterness. Their feet are swift to shed blood. In their path is ruin and misery and the way of peace they have not known. There is no fear of God before their eyes.” Paul is saying us – present your bodies as a living sacrifice. Your body which had been an instrument according to Romans 3:13 to 18 of everything that now he says that we should not have in our life. John Stott puts it this way when he speaks of what it is that we’re presenting now instead of our bodies as instruments of sin. He says conversely, “Christian sanctity shows itself in the deeds of the body. So we're to offer different parts of our body, not to sin as instruments of wickedness, but to God as instruments of righteousness. Then our feet will walk in paths, our lips will speak the truth and spread the gospel. Our tongues will bring healing. Our hands will lift up those who have fallen and perform many mundane tasks. Our arms will embrace the lonely and the unloved. Our ears will listen to the cries of the distress and our eyes will look humbly and patiently towards God.” There's been this transformation. We're bringing now our bodies as a living sacrifice to God because we now are the sacrifice and every part of our body is being offered to God.

The second thing. The New Covenant calls for a dedication. This New Covenant truth that we're stepping into calls for a dedication. It calls for a presentation that can be viewed as both being in time and ongoing. We touched on this briefly last Sunday. It reminds us again that the sin issue was resolved at salvation. The sin issue was resolved at salvation. Romans 5:1 – “Therefore because we have been justified by faith we have peace with God.” We've been declared righteous. Romans 8:1 – “There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ.” The sin issue has been taken care of. We step into this New Covenant relationship with God through Christ. The old things are passed away and all things have become new. This is now our position in Christ so that as God sees us He sees us clothed in the righteousness of Christ. Obviously, that's the point of faith. That is a decision that you have made of faith and trust in Christ and in the gospel that brought about the forgiveness of your sins and transferred you from death into life. That occurred in a moment of time.

But now in Romans 12:1 Paul is reminding us that there is an ongoing need. We face the reality of the lordship of Christ needing to be lived out in our life every day. We

are confronted with this matter of the lordship of Christ. Every day of our life we're making this decision that he speaks of. When Jesus says back in Luke chapter 9 and verse 23: "If anyone would come after Me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow Me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will save it. For what does it profit a man if he gains the whole world and loses or forfeits himself?" That is speaking of Romans 12:1. I appeal to you, brothers and sisters, based on the mercies of God to present your bodies as a living sacrifice every day of your life to God. It is simply a matter of the lordship of Christ over every area of my life.

Rosaria Butterfield, remember, was an avowed open lesbian leading in one of the major universities on the East Coast the women's studies. God pulled her out of that life circumstance, gloriously saved her. She said, "When I made that transition from where I was to being a fully devoted follower of Christ I lost everything but the dog." I lost everything but the dog. She said, "It was worth it all." It was worth it all. Walking in obedience to Christ. We ask ourselves this question: Can we say this morning that everything that we are we have offered to God? All that we have we have offered of ourselves to God. It's all on the altar. We're the presenter. We have come and we have literally given ourselves over to God. We do that both at a point in time but we do it every day. Every day we're faced with this matter of obedience. And make no mistake. What Paul is saying here by the ministry of the Holy Spirit is God is not in the business of bargaining with us over what we can keep for ourselves and what He wants. Because He wants it all. He wants all of us. He wants us to present ourselves as a living sacrifice.

To help us see that clearly, Paul gives us three very powerful, strong, descriptive adjectives about this dedicated life. What does this dedicated life look like? We've already looked at that first one but let's look at it again. It is that we are to be a living sacrifice. We mentioned last week that in the Old Testament there was no such thing as a living sacrifice. Every sacrifice that was brought and given to the priest, the priest would kill it, and then he would take it to the altar. There was no living sacrifice in the way that we're called to now under the New Covenant to live out our life. We are to be a living sacrifice. We are offering ourselves every day to God. It is our living that is an act of obedience and worship. God, You are at the center of my life. God, everything that I

have is at Your disposal. I am totally Yours. I surrender all things over to You. I don't know about you but I think it's very easy for us to have a tendency to want to give God certain things but maybe not fully of ourselves. We give Him some of our money. We give Him some of our time. We give Him some of our talents and our resources. We give Him some of our relationships. We give Him some of our service. We give Him even some of our Sundays if we don't have anything better to do. But we don't always understand that what Paul is pressing on us here is we're to be a living sacrifice. Every day we are giving of ourselves totally to God.

Remember the story in Genesis 32 between Jacob and Esau. Remember Jacob is now leaving Laban and he's coming back home. His greatest concern is the fact that Esau is back home and he had left that relationship shattered. He had treated Esau very poorly – deceived him, lied to him, the whole thing. Now he is coming back and his concern is what is Esau's attitude going to be towards him. Remember as that journey unfolds, he sends some servants ahead. He says go and see about Esau and what he's up to and if he's even heard that I'm coming. You remember what happened. They come back and go yeah, he's coming and he's got 400 men with him. That just puts the fear of God into Jacob. He begins to divide up everything. He sent hundreds and thousands of lambs and camels and donkeys and everything that he could think of. A parade of animals. He sends them ahead. And then he says, Leah, I don't love you as much. He probably didn't say that but he said I don't love you as much. You take your children and you go next. And then Rachel, since I love you the most, then you take your kids and you go after that. And remember he held back. Everybody was moving towards Esau but him. God encountered him that night. The Angel of the Lord began to wrestle with him and He said, Jacob, I'm not really interested in all of your stuff. I'm interested in you. I want you. you can have all of your stuff. I want you. God touched him in the hip and he limped around and changed his name from Jacob to Israel. That's a picture of Romans 12:1. It is God saying we are to be a living sacrifice because God wants us in that way.

But notice secondly, we're to be holy. Again, every sacrifice that was brought under the Old Covenant had to be holy. It had to be blameless. It had to be spotless. It had to be the best of your flock. You weren't ever to offer God something that was

subpar or that was not meeting the qualifications that God had established and set up. So it was without blemish, without spot. Paul no doubt had in mind again when he said back in Romans 6 when he's writing and says in verse 12: "Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body to make you obey its passion. Do not present your members as instruments of sin for unrighteous but to present yourself to God as those who have been brought from death to life, and your members to God as instruments for righteousness. For sin will no longer have dominion over you since you are not under the law but under grace."

Peter picks up on that theme in 1 Peter 1 and he said you have to be holy because I am a holy God. You be holy because I am holy. You be set apart. You walk in obedience to my word and my truth. That's the endpoint of our salvation. That is holiness. Our glorification alternately results in our being sinless, but in that journey until that point, the call of God on our life is that we would live a separated life, that we would live a holy life, that we would be set apart to God and we would be set apart from sin. That's how we put on display the glory of God in our life. Within our family – husbands, wives, parents to children, children to parents – day-to-day we look at each other and we realize God is changing you. God is making you into a different person. You're on a journey towards holiness. You're acting differently. You're speaking differently. Your attitudes are different. The guy that you work for, the gal that you work for, those that you work with – they see something that's going on in your life. It's called the journey towards holiness. The people that you work with. You distinguish yourselves from them because of your walk with God. Walking in holiness is what God called us to. That's what he's saying to us here. Put on display the glory of God and walk in holiness.

Look at the third one. That we would be acceptable to God. Now if we present ourselves to God and we are a living sacrifice and we're holy, what is the absolute certain result that is going to happen? We're going to be acceptable to God. If we present ourselves as a living sacrifice, holy to God, we are offering ourselves in that way, God says you will be absolutely acceptable to me. Just think about that for a minute. Think about the fact that Scripture actually says that you and I can be acceptable to God. That's amazing. In our journey through Romans and what we've seen and the description of our life before Christ, and even Romans 7 the struggles

within our present Christian experience. It's amazing that Paul could say to us, if you do this you will be acceptable to God. Remember Cain? He brings his sacrifice and he wants to do it his way. He doesn't bring in an offering that is acceptable to God and God rejects it. Abel brings an offering that is acceptable and God accepts it. God has given us a book right here. God has given us a book that tells us how to live in a way that is acceptable to Him, that is pleasing to Him. The only possible way that can happen is if the gospel has reoriented my life, reoriented the priorities of my life. I'm no longer driven to be a people pleaser. Anybody struggle with that? Anybody ever live life in such a way that they're constantly trying to please other people? We all do. We all find ourselves wanting to please ourselves more than others and even more than God.

Paul is calling us to live a life that is reflected in 1 Thessalonians chapter 2 and verse 4. This is what Paul says there: "But as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel so we speak not to please man but to please God who tests our hearts." We're living a life of God pleasing. We are living a life in which we're a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God.

Now look at this singular focus. This singular focus which is your spiritual worship. 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. Now notice with me that this is a very difficult word to translate. How difficult is this word to translate? As they went through the many choices that the Bible translators tried to figure out how to translate this word, the NIV translated it true and proper. The NLT, New Living Translation, says truly the way. The ESV says spiritual. The King James, the New King James, the NET says reasonable. They are all trying to translate the same word. The New American Standard said spiritual service. The Christian Standard Bible says true. Maybe we just say they're all good but they're all trying to translate this word in the Greek text called *logikos*. Look at that word. This is the word they're all trying to translate. It's that word "spiritual". It's the word *logikos*. What word do we get from that word? Logical. Logic. In light of God's mercy, how could you possibly do anything less than present your bodies as a living sacrifice to God? Anything less would be illogical. It would be the most reasonable thing that we could do.

But there's also this element as the translator grappled with this word. Within this word, there is also the idea of the word "spiritual". This is a very challenging word, but the point is this. What God is looking for in response to what He has done in the mercies of God, He's looking for something from our heart. He is looking for something that is not simply mechanistic and ritualistic and driven by tradition alone. He doesn't want us to simply go through certain motions that we think He wants from us. No, He wants spiritual service. He wants spiritual worship. As difficult as that word is, there is behind that word the idea of a very simple act of worship. A very simple act of worship.

Let me start by asking you this. What do we mean when we say worship service? What do we mean when we say worship service? I think this is kind of fascinating because of the way this is translated. I think it would be kind of fascinating to know if this time that we gather that is often called a worship service, where did that begin? Where did that idea of calling this a worship service start? It's a description that we're all very familiar with and we use it all the time to speak of for us this 9:30 hour. I wonder if it isn't drawn out of this last part of Romans 12:1. What do we mean when we speak of this worship service? The last word of this verse is translated in the English Standard Version as worship. It's the Greek word *latreuo* which means to serve. It is the idea of serving. It is the idea of religious service. We have this idea of worship service. We get that from the fact that in Romans 9:4 the same word is used and it is talking about the worship and the spiritual service that the Jewish people enjoyed as being the recipients of being God's chosen people.

What is a worship service? Whatever else it is, it has to be about God. Whatever else is going on, it must be about Him. We're coming together to tell Him that it's about Him. We're coming to sing songs about Him and about what He's done for us and how much we love Him and how much we appreciate that and how much endeared to Him we are. We come to learn about Him. We're really saying when we come together in a worship service God, we value You. God, we want to present ourselves to You as a living, holy sacrifice, acceptable to You.

Do you see how easily we get it upside down and backwards? How often we find ourselves thinking I didn't get much out of that service. The service was kind of boring today. I didn't really like those songs, did you? and then as someone has so aptly said,

that's okay because it wasn't for you. It was for Him. This worship time, this gathering, this God-centered, Christ-centered, Spirit-centered time is about Him. It is not about us. We're not coming that we would be served. We're coming to offer back to Him under the banner of the mercies of God. Surely Paul doesn't just have in mind the 9:30 hour or whatever time that may be.

But it seems to me that there is an application here with that in mind. That application might be what does it look like in our own heart when we come here? What should be our attitude, our perspective, our disposition? I have three E's to offer you. if I could've come up with 3 C's that would've been even better, but I've got three E's. How about when we come to offer our service of worship to God, we come and we're a little bit early? We're a little bit early. There is a shocking thought. We came a little bit early. Why? Because we came with the spirit of expectation. We came with the spirit of expectation and eagerness. Then when we're here, we're operating from a sense of engagement. We are involved. We are engaged in. We're participants. We're not observers in this time of offering our worship to God. All of that to say, we come ready to offer ourselves as a living sacrifice to God, wholly acceptable to God, which is the most reasonable thing we can do.

Because of this. All of life is worship. All of life is worship. What we do on Monday through Saturday impacts Sunday morning. What we do on Sunday morning impacts Monday through Saturday. If we've got it right, it does. It impacts our week. Paul started off in Romans 1 and he said all of us have an idolatry problem. He starts off the book reminding us that we all have an idolatry problem. There are things in our life that we value and raise up more than our worship and service to God. Paul is saying God doesn't just want a part of your life. God wants all of it. He wants all of it. We're not looking at an hour or two on Sunday morning. We're looking at the fact that God wants us 24/7, every day of every week, every part of our life. CS Lewis put it this way: "He cannot bless us unless He has us. Therefore, in love He claims all. There's no bargaining with Him."

What do we take away? Romans 12:1. It is simply this. It's the gospel that reorients our life because the one thing that you will never regret is living life for the glory of God. We can all look around and appreciate even at times in our own life things

that we regret. But we will never regret a life that is lived as a living sacrifice, wholly acceptable to God, which is the most reasonable logical thing that we can do. We say to God, under the banner of Your mercies over my life I surrender all. I am all Yours. I am all in. take my life and let it be. It all begins with the gospel.

If you're a follower of Christ, this is the most logical reasonable thing that you can do. If you've never put your trust in Christ, we would invite you to consider again this morning this glorious gospel. This gospel that says that everyone of us have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. This gospel that says Jesus paid for it all when He died on the cross. This gospel that says all I need to do is simply believe and trust that what Jesus did was enough. There's nothing I can add to it. There is nothing I can do to improve it. It is all that needed to be done and I believe that. I receive that. And then God gives me the gift of eternal life.

Let's pray. Father God, it truly is the most reasonable logical thing that we can do in light of all that You have done for us – to present ourselves, our bodies, to You as a living sacrifice. Lord, when we do that, when we walk in holiness You accept, You welcome, You receive us. It is pleasing to You. We are grateful for that. Help us as Your people to step into this truth, to trust You, and to do that in our life today and in this week that is before us. We pray in Jesus's name, amen.