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Series: Romans: The Just Shall Live by Faith
Message: Total Commitment

Transcribed Message
October 2, 2022
Romans 12:1

I'm pretty sure you've heard the story of the farmer who went into his barn to ask which of his animals might provide something for his morning breakfast. The hen said sure I would love to do that. Here are a couple of eggs. The cow said of course. I'll contribute. Here is a gallon of milk. They looked over at Mr. Pig who seemed somewhat nervous and they asked aren't you going to contribute something to our dear farmer's breakfast this morning? Mr. Pig said easy for you to say. For you it's a minor contribution. For me it's total commitment. But then again what's breakfast without bacon.

We look this morning at this matter of total commitment. What does it look like? What does it mean? What is involved in my commitment to Christ? In doing so, we're really answering this question: who is going to direct my life? Who is going to be in charge of my life? Who is going to be Lord of my life? We are in the book of Romans for those of you that are with us as guests this morning. We're working our way through what is often called Paul's greatest epistle. We are in the 12th chapter. This week as I was studying, I thought of the fact that in the 1st century when Paul wrote this letter, he writes to the church in Rome, this relatively tiny (small in number population) in what was then the capital of the most powerful empire in the world. He writes to them all of these glorious truths to encourage them in their walk with God. We started last Sunday on the first verse of this chapter and we have good news this morning. Because we have 18 people to be baptized this morning, I have had to shorten my thoughts to a mere meditation. So we're going to look at one word this morning. It's the word "the". No, we won't go quite that far, but I do want to be more mindful of the time than normal, and if you see that I am not paying that close attention, then you all start waving at me and say we do have 18 people to baptize.

But here's what we know by way of review. There are three matters that we looked at last week of importance. One was theology matters. That was introduced by the word "therefore", which causes the reader of the Bible to look back and see what's being referenced. What's being referenced are in fact 11 chapters of theology and doctrine. It reminds us that practical living requires and depends on theology and doctrine. Right living starts with right thinking. You have to think right about God and right about yourself to ever live in the way that God wants you to live.

Then we noted secondly that attitude matters. We captured that in the introductory words "I appeal to you". Paul gives this appeal. It's an urging on his part, a pleading, a beseeching. It's heartfelt. It's for the family of God. Paul includes himself in this when he talks about this family appeal that he is making to these brothers and sisters in Christ.

Then thirdly it's God's initiative that matters. It's all about the mercies. Yes, plural. It's all about the mercies of God. God gives us what we don't deserve in His grace. In His grace, He gives us what we don't deserve. In His mercy, He withholds from us what we do deserve. I would say to you this morning if we know the gospel and if we know the righteousness of God and we understand that that has truly been given to us as a gift, then we have to ask the question how in the world then do I respond to the grace and mercy of God in my life? I think that's what we see in this first verse as we look at this matter of total commitment. What commitment looks like. And when we look at that, we're really again in effect saying to God, I'm Yours. That's how I picture baptism. Baptism is people stepping out and publicly saying I'm Yours. I belong to You. That's the thing that we noted last week.

So we'll just set that before us again. The motive of this total commitment. What would motivate us to make a total commitment to God and to Christ? Well, of course, we've already noted that it's the mercies of God. It's chapters 1 through 11 of Romans. Everything that has gone before in this book. There's always a motive to what we do, isn't there? There's always a motive. There's a motivation behind every word, behind every act. That's why it's always good to spend some time in Psalm 139. Search me, O God, and know my heart. Try me to see if there's something in me that I need to be dealing with, because we're always motivated by something. We may be motivated by a

desire for fame or fortune. We may be motivated by a sense of guilt or fear. We may be motivated for the glory of God. There are all kinds of motivations, but here our motive flows right out of the mercies of God. It simply is enough for us to read what we have already looked at in this verse and answer the question very boldly, very openly. Our motivation in giving ourselves totally to God and to Christ and to the Spirit is out of the abundance of the deep gratitude to God for His mercy.

In light of that, notice then the action that we're to take. What's the action we're to take? It is seen in that word "present". When he says "I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God to present..." That's the action word right there. To present. That is a word that draws us into the language of worship. We'll see more of this, Lord willing, next Sunday as we finish out this verse, but this is a word that draws us into the language of worship. This word is a word that is used in the Old Testament of the priest who has the sacrificial animal and he is bringing it to present it on the altar. I can assure you that in the 1st century as they're reading this, they're thinking of that very thing.

For us today, we're all believer priests. That is what Peter referenced in 1 Peter 2. He called us a royal nation, a holy priesthood. Every believer in Christ is a believer priest. We don't need a mediator. The only mediator that we need is Jesus Christ. we step into the priesthood and that is the picture here. It is a picture of a priest bringing sacrifice to God. When you go in to the Old Testament, these 1st century Jewish believers were visualizing this. They knew exactly what it looked like. It was the presenting of an offer on the altar. Even the pagan Gentiles who had come to Christ would have been able to think along the lines of what this picture was. They had seen pagan sacrifices offered on an altar. I don't mind saying I'm not that familiar with the killing of an animal for either food or any other purpose. Certainly not for sacrifice. But I'm not even all that familiar with killing an animal for food. I'm very glad that I was born into this country and this time. I'm very glad that I can go to the grocery store and find my meat in a shrink-wrapped package. As far as I'm concerned, I'm just happy to leave it there. They go somewhere, they get the shrink-wrapped package, and they bring it to the store. But that isn't really the world, is it? There's an animal that died. There's a sacrifice that has been made. That's the image we have here. When you step back into

the Old Testament, you remember if you've been with us in the first 11 chapters Paul is constantly taking us back into the Old Testament in Romans.

Here again you are thinking in terms of the Old Testament and you're remembering that there are five major offerings that the Jewish believers were required to bring by way of sacrifice. They were to bring the offering that was a burnt offering. They were to bring the sin offering. They were to bring the guilt offering. They were to bring the grain offering. They were to bring the peace offering. Almost certainly what Paul envisions here, when he says I urge you, I beseech you, I plead with you, I appeal to you to bring, to present yourself as a living sacrifice, he has in mind this peace offering. In Leviticus 7, a part of the peace offering was bringing a thank offering. It was a spontaneous, joyful part of the peace offering. They would bring an offering simply out of gratitude to God. This idea is that they're presenting out of the abundance of God's mercies something that is an expression of their gratitude, of their thanksgiving.

Sometimes in the language that we use we think of yielding ourselves to God. We think of surrendering. Those are good words. There is nothing wrong with those words. But here Paul uses this word "present". I wonder if he doesn't use this word instead of calling for us to yield or to surrender because when I think of those words, frankly I think of something of a little bit of a reluctance. I yield. I surrender. I guess it doesn't have to, but it almost connotes that there's a sense of reluctance. It would be as if I bought a gift for Bonnie. I brought it to her and I said honey, I want to yield this gift to you. I want to surrender this gift to you. Now, if I had just bought her a beautiful shotgun, then I could understand why I might say I just want to yield this gift to you. or if I got her a new socket set I would yield it to her. I would surrender it to her. Then there might be a "sock it" right back of a different kind. But when we think of present, this is the idea that Paul has in mind – out of an abundance of gratitude, without reluctance, with total joyfulness, with a sense of celebration. That's what we're doing here.

Let's just go into the weeds very briefly because I want you to see something about the verb tense here. The verb tense of this word "present" is what's called an aorist tense. The reason that's important is because sometimes the aorist tense can mean once and for all. Sometimes it can mean once and for all. It doesn't have to mean that. The context tells us whether it means that or not. But sometimes it can be once for

all. It is true that at a point in time you and I are called upon to make a decision. We're called upon to make a point of saying I present myself to you, God. Everyone of us is called on to do that. Nobody could do it for us. We have to do it. So there is a point in time when we need to do that.

But I don't think that what Paul is saying here by using this aorist requires that we look at it as I did that once and I don't ever need to do it again. In fact, I think the context here requires that we see this as ongoing. It's actually a continuous action that takes place at a point in time. Someone rightly pointed out that the problem with living sacrifices is they have a tendency to crawl off of the altar. You put a living sacrifice on the altar and they don't want to stay on the altar. There is a sense in which we should look at this and say and understand that as you grow in Christ in your Christian life, there are going to be things that the Spirit of God, through the word of God, through other people points out to you and He says what about this? What about presenting this? What about presenting that? As we grow in our spiritual journey, I believe the Holy Spirit rightfully shows us areas of our life that maybe we haven't made that presentation to God in the way that we should. It might have to do with some relationship. It might have to do with material things. It might have to do with the very pursuit as we said before about being motivated out of a desire for fame and fortune and all of the other things that appeal to us. The Holy Spirit is faithful in doing that – making us aware of the Lordship of Christ in every area of our life. But the point is simply this. I see it as something that is progressive and I see that it is something ongoing.

We read that 12th verse. I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters in Christ, by the mercies of God, make it a regular practice to present yourselves to God. Whatever He lays claim on, whatever He shows you, you need to give back to Him. You need to present. You need to submit to His Lordship. We have our hands open before God. We don't grasp things that we want to hold onto for ourselves. Those are the very things that God wants us to present and give to Him.

Now look at the object of our action. What is the object of our action? Our bodies. We look at that and we go why start off with our bodies? What is the point that Paul wants to make? What's in view here when he said present your bodies. It is easy to read that and to just say Paul is speaking figuratively. He says I want your bodies. I

know what he means. He wants my mind, heart, soul, and spirit. That's just Paul's way of saying he wants all of you. Of course, that is true. But Paul specifically here is referencing and calling for us to literally present our physical bodies to God. The body of course can and often does reference our whole self – our body, soul, spirit, mind. But when we get to verse 2, he will talk specifically about our mind so he differentiates there. The emphasis here is literally on our physical body.

The question is why? Why does Paul, if that in fact is the case, say to us I want you to present your physical bodies to the Lord in that way? I think there's probably a couple of reasons. Why would God care about our body? Why would God care about our physical body? Depending on the stage of life that we're in, we're like yeah, why would God care about my physical body? I've got aches and pains and all kinds of stuff going on. Is that really what He wants at this point of my life, or at any point of my life? And the answer is yes, and let me give you a couple reasons why.

One had to do with the worldview in which Paul is writing. The major philosophy of Paul's day and it certainly had crept into the church because we know it as we read in other letters, the worldview was that this physical body is bad, this physical body is of no real spiritual value. There was a view that said that the soul is entombed in the physical body and just can't wait to be released. That was the worldview of Paul's day. Clearly Paul would be writing and saying that is an un-biblical perspective of the gift that God has given to you of your physical body of which you and I are to be stewards of, caring for it. We have an illustration of this in Acts 17. In Acts 17, Paul is in Athens and he is invited to go to the Areopagus and to speak to the philosophers of that day. He begins to interact with them and he begins to share his worldview. They're listening evidently with some intensity and then he gets to a point in his presentation and he talks about the resurrection of the body. He talks about the fact that this body is going to die but it will be raised again and he lost the crowd. A few, it says, believed. But most of them mocked him and they left. Why? They could not imagine a spiritual view of life that said the physical body was to be valued in anyway. It was something to get rid of. It was something to not value. I think that clearly had to be a part of Paul's thinking here.

But I think secondly it is the truth that your body is important to God. Your body is important to God. God has a plan. He has a plan for your body. Your body is important

to God. Listen. Not because of its looks, but because of its acts. Your body is important to God not simply, and maybe we can say categorically, not based on looks but based on the acts that our body is involved in. We have gone obviously in our day the absolute opposite direction of the 1st century. If the 1st century didn't value the body at all and they thought it was evil and bad, in our day we're consumed with body idolatry. I mean, every time I go to the gym and work out every day for five hours a day, I look at wall after wall of mirrors. I'm walking by and that's all I see. What is that? That's body idolatry. They are appealing to something in me. I'm not saying that everybody that goes and works out of the gym –now, if you go and work out for five hours come and see me – but there are people clearly that's what they want to see. They want to see how their body looks. They spend, we all probably spend more time in front of a mirror than is healthy. We're constantly comparing our physical body to something or someone else. Sadly, we have generations especially of young ladies who grow up experiencing eating disorders because as they look at their body they don't see something that God values, God appreciates, that God says you're beautiful. They're more concerned about their looks than they are with the acts of their body. This is I think what Paul has in mind here.

Our bodies, my friends, have been redeemed. Our bodies, my friends, are being sanctified. They're going to be raised from the dead if we die before Jesus returns. They're going to be glorified. What? Don't you know that this body is the temple of the Holy Spirit? That God lives within you? that's why Paul says as he does here. I appeal to you, brothers and sisters in Christ, by the mercies of God. Present your physical bodies to God because He values them. He's given them to you to steward them. He's redeemed them. He's sanctifying them. He's going to glorify them. I think it's clear when Paul says in Philippians chapter 1 verse 20 he had the same thing in mind. The 20th verse: "As it is my eager expectation and hope that I will not be at all ashamed, but that with full courage now as always Christ will be honored in my body, whether by life or by death." Clearly, we don't need to read Romans 12:1 and say that's just figurative. There's that but there is I think the point to be made that the body is important.

Look at the nature of the action. The nature of the action is we're to present our bodies as a living sacrifice. Now this is a paradox wrapped in an oxymoron. A paradox

is something that is an apparent contradiction. An oxymoron is two words that don't seem like they should go together. The Bible is filled with them. There are many paradoxes in the Bible. If you want to be great, be a servant. What? Greatness comes by being a servant. If you want to live, you need to die, and when you die, you really live. If you want to be rich, step in to the poverty of spirit that God calls us to. On and on it goes. Trouble brings joy. Weakness is strength. All of these different ways that God reminds us that living the Christian life is filled with paradox. But this one is striking. It clearly is an oxymoron. A living sacrifice. A living sacrifice. It is striking for a couple of reasons.

One, there never was a living sacrifice in the Old Testament. There was no living sacrifices. You brought your animal to the priest, he killed it, and put it on the altar. It was dead. There were no sacrifices crawling off of the altar in the Old Testament economy.

Secondly, the animal had no choice. The animal had no choice. There never was a voluntary sacrifice. He's calling on us to make a living sacrifice. He's calling on us to make a voluntary sacrifice of ourselves to God based on the abundance of his mercies towards us. Paul is calling for all of the above. Living, voluntary sacrifice.

Once again, that imagery takes us back to the Old Testament, to the Old Covenant. Those of you that read through the Bible in a year, you're well past Leviticus and you're thankful that you are. But when you're pushing through Leviticus, don't tell me that as you're reading chapter after chapter in Leviticus you're not saying to yourself: is this all really necessary? There is a lot of blood and there's a lot of death and I'm not sure I totally understand why that is. I think we ask God what is the point of all of this. It seems so incredibly foreign to us. I would suggest that Paul is drawing us again back into the Old Testament because it is a graphic reminder that sin has consequences.

Why did God establish the sacrificial system? I'm sure there are many reasons but I think for sure he wanted to very visually, graphically picture that sin has consequences. It's picturing the costliness of sin. Atonement had to be made. There had to be a death that would be offered for the price of sin. Every time they brought that sacrifice the reality of that, the graphic nature of it, they aren't any different than we are. You pick out a favorite unblemished lamb and you take it to the priest. There's a mix of

emotions as you hand that lamb to the priest, knowing full well what's going to happen, and that lamb is going to sacrifice its life. It is going to die and be placed on that altar. God was visually, powerfully, graphically repeatedly reminding his children that sin has consequences. But it was also a reminder that God's wrath was being diverted for a time. It was a vivid reminder that his wrath was being diverted for a time. A life had to be given. Without the shedding of blood, Leviticus says there is no forgiveness of sin. The penalty is being paid by another.

We just read in Psalm 51 that no sacrifice made literal atonement for sin. It covered for a time. David, crying out to God after he committed adultery and arranged for a man to be murdered, understood full well: God, just bringing You an offering right now is not what You're most concerned about in my life. What You are most concerned about, God, is that I come with a broken and contrite heart. It's not any different today. If you think God is somehow extra-pleased with the fact that you come here on Sunday as often as you do, that's not hardly the point. He is far more interested in what's going on in your heart, that you come with a broken and contrite heart. The sacrifices were graphic reminders that sin has consequences. They were graphic reminders that the wrath of God is being diverted for a time. It was a picture of what was to come.

We quickly go to Hebrews. Hebrews 9 verse 11. "But when Christ appeared as a high priest of the good things that have come, then through the greater and more perfect tent (not made with hands, that is, not of this creation) He entered once and for all into the holy places, not by means of the blood of goats and calves but by means of His own blood, thus securing an eternal redemption." there's so much more going on here in Hebrews 9 that we don't have time for, but let me say two things.

First of all, the sacrifices of the Old Testament were pictures, partial, and anticipatory. That's what the writer of Hebrews is saying here. They were pictures to us of what we just talked about. They were partial. They could not remove sin. But they were anticipating one would come and who could and who would.

Then secondly what Christ did was enough. What Christ did was enough. It was complete. It was total. It was adequate. Listen to what he says in verse 24: "For Christ has entered, not into holy places made with hands, which are copies of the true things, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God on our behalf. Nor was it to

offer Himself repeatedly, as the high priest enters into the holy places every year with blood not his own, for then He would have had to suffer repeatedly since the foundation of the world. But as it is, He appeared once for all at the end of the ages to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself.” That’s what He did! The whole of the Old Testament is picturing it, giving us a partial understanding of what it was anticipating in the coming of Christ. Romans 12 isn’t speaking truth in a vacuum. It is speaking truth to us in a context. The context is set against this Old Testament picture of sacrifice and the ultimate picture of Jesus as the one and only adequate sacrifice.

What could possibly be my response to God in light of that than to offer and to present myself as a living sacrifice every day to Him in return for all He has done for me? What do we take away? In offering yourself to God, you’re saying God, use my life however You desire as long as You desire all for Your glory. I don’t read those words lightly. I don’t say those words casually. Those words are weighty. They’re heavy. They’re significant. They’re meaningful. In response to the mercies of God, what is it as a thank offering, as a peace offering we could possibly offer to God? It is nothing less than ourselves. Taking our hands off of all of the things that we cherish and hold on to and want to hold for our own benefit and selfishness. It’s offering all of it to God and saying however You desire to use me. Do that. However long You want to do that, do that. But God, do it all for Your glory. Not so that I can gain heaven. Not so that I can gain favor in Your eyes. But because of the gospel.

The gospel says I have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. The gospel says that sin has a consequence. It has separated me from God. The gospel says there’s nothing I can do to work and overcome that great gulf that sin has created between myself and God. But that same gospel says that Jesus came, He died on the cross. He did so for my sins and if you this morning are not absolutely sure that you’re going to heaven, you can be by simply believing that Jesus was the final, complete, sufficient sacrifice for sin. God accepts it fully, totally, completely. If you believe that, God says He forgives your sins and He gives you the gift of eternal life.

Let’s pray. Father God, we pray by Your Spirit that You will open every heart in this room and listening and watching online, and You will confirm, Father, in each of our hearts the absolute certainty that You want us to have about our eternal destiny. Lord,

that we would know for certainty that Jesus is our Savior. Father, I pray that as these are baptized this morning, and as they say to us and to You I have decided to follow Jesus, we will celebrate with them all that You have done in their lives. In Jesus's name, amen.