

Dying to Live

by Aaron Hills

The sermon emphasizes the importance of sacrifice in human life, highlighting the need to die to self and live in the service of others, following the example of Jesus.

Scripture: Mark 8:34, John 12:23, Romans 12:1, Galatians 2:20, Philippians 2:3

Topics: "Self Sacrifice", "Redemptive Love"

Description

Aaron Hills delivers a powerful Baccalaureate Sermon before the Graduating Class of Texas Holiness University in 1905, focusing on the theme of self-sacrifice as exemplified by Jesus Christ. He highlights the necessity and glory of sacrifice in both involuntary and voluntary forms, emphasizing the divine purpose and results of sacrificial love. Hills draws attention to the dark side of sacrifice, where suffering and pain are inevitable, and the brighter side of voluntary sacrifice, where individuals willingly give of themselves for the benefit of others. He eloquently portrays Jesus as the ultimate example of self-sacrifice, showcasing how His death led to the ultimate triumph and redemption of humanity.

Transcript

A Baccalaureate Sermon Before the Graduating Class of Texas Holiness University, June 11, 1905.

John xii. 23-28 "And Jesus answered them saying, The hour is come, that the Son of man should be glorified. Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except a grain of wheat fall into the earth and die, it abideth by itself alone; but if it die, it beareth much fruit. He that loveth his life loseth it, and he that hateth his life in this world shall keep it unto life eternal. If any man serve me, let him follow me; and where I am, there shall also my servant be: if any man serve me, him will the Father honour. Now is my soul troubled; and what shall I say? Father, save me from this hour. But for this cause came I unto this hour. Father, glorify thy name."

This passage is one of the most complete statements in the whole Word of God of the dignity and glory of self-sacrifice. The truth is here put with all the Savior's inimitable art of statement. Our thoughts are brought to consider the great law of sacrifice which, now dark and forbidding, and now radiant and glorious, runs through the whole creation of God. It is a law without which society could not hold together nor our race live; without which, indeed, the whole animal kingdom would become extinct. We shrink from sacrifice if we are base and selfish. We are drawn toward it if, and just so far as, we are noble. It is at once so difficult and so satisfying! so radically opposed to our innate selfishness, and so inseparably connected with our highest sympathies and noblest impulses! It is enshrined in our affections as connected with the

life of Him who is the center of our faith. It is intimately interwoven with the highest theory and practice of Christian ethics. We must, therefore, in our religious study and meditations give this theme of sacrifice more than ordinary attention. We must study it; we must question it; we must wrestle with it until the gloom of its darkness changes into the radiance of its brighter aspects, and it gives us a blessing as its shadows flee away.

I. Then let us look at its dark side -- involuntary sacrifice. How very dark it is! The constant suffering! The necessary pain! The inevitable sacrifice of beautiful, glorious life in innumerable ways, to sate the insatiable maw, not of death, but of other life!

It has been so from the beginning of earth's history. The rocks which we unearth today have their fossil remains, skeleton inside of skeleton, mute witnesses of what transpired on the primeval earth. Life everywhere fed upon life, one creature being sacrificed to keep another creature alive. And the same dark, mysterious spectacle is witnessed around us every hour. From the lowest form of insect life, through all grades of being up to man, we behold one preying upon another. Sometimes an insect carries about the germ of another attached to its back, that will in time take its life. We behold the feeble and the little sacrificed to the appetite of the large and the strong. Insects are consumed by other insects, by reptiles and by birds. The mouse and the sparrow are the ordained food of the hawk. The smaller fish are eaten by the larger. The lamb is the prey of the fox and the wolf. The kid is pounced upon by the eagle. The antelope is devoured by the leopard, and the lion and the tiger leap upon the ox. They all live by sacrificing each other and cannot live without it.

Man! he, too, lives by the slaughter of innocents, and the vastest and most costly sacrifices are made to satisfy his carnivorous appetites. Man in a real sense lives upon his fellowman. I refer not now to cannibalism, nor to the way in which human lives and human interests are often sacrificed to the selfish ambition, or the grasping avarice, or the cruel hate, or the devouring lusts of men. I refer only to the sacrifices made to the wants and necessities of others. You each live, day by day, because others sacrifice and suffer and die for you. You can scarcely help yourself even if you would; for dependence upon the sacrifice of some one is a necessity of civilized life.

As you sit with your family before the cheerful coal fire in the grate, did you ever once reflect that you have that blessing only because multitudes of men spend their lives underground in the depths of coal mines, covered with filth, and constantly exposed to pestilence and explosion and death? You travel over land and sea, and ship your goods and grain and cattle at a great speed; but the engineers and firemen and brakemen who drive the trains and handle the cars are prematurely cut off. Their lives are shortened to serve you. The man who blows the glass that lets the health-giving and cheerful light into your homes knows that the number of his days will be lessened. The metallic goods, gold and silver and plated, and steel and iron ware, are made by workmen who will sooner or later be killed by the dust they must inhale, and the necessary dangers of their occupations. I have seen the pale workmen making these goods, wearing sponges over their nostrils. But nothing wholly avails. You want the goods; they die to make them.

You go to your stores and buy beautiful fabrics and ready-made apparel. You marvel at their cheapness, but always want them a little cheaper. They are cheap -- cruelly, wickedly cheap -- because the work was undersold and underlet; undersold to you at the price of the cheap life-breath of suffering mortals -- poor men and women compelled to labor by the necessities of their lot, and crushed to death by the competition and rivalry of trade while they stitched and embroidered for you, it was as Tom Hood wrote in his immortal poem: "Stitch, stitch, stitch, In poverty, hunger and dirt, Sewing at once, with a double thread, A shroud as

well as a shirt"

And so remember, with at least a little humane pity, when you buy and wear these wondrously cheap things, remember "O men with sisters dear, O men with mothers and wives, It is not linen you're wearing out, But human creatures' lives."

The makers of certain kinds of lace must work in very dim light, and always go blind. In our great iron-mills, by an explosion or the bursting of a pot, men are often roasted alive by a great mass of molten metal. City policemen are shot down in the defense of other people's homes, and city firemen are often burned to death to keep the property of others from being burned. The pioneers of civilization cut down the forests, drain the swamps and the marshes, fight wild beasts and savages, and die doing it; but others who come after them enter into the fruits of their labors, and enjoy what they have wrought.

Probably a thousand men will lay down their lives for every mile of our isthmus canal; but the Nation wants it, the world needs it, and they die to give it to us. And so on endlessly.

We may, by Christian effort, alleviate this suffering somewhat, and thus mitigate some of the sternness of this law of sacrifice; but still it will remain, woven, dark and cruel though it seems to be, into the very fabric of our being, our progress, and our civilization.

II. Let us now consider the voluntary sacrifice. This is the brighter side. There is now something Divine in its purpose and holy in its results, and we are able, partially at least, to understand it. The generous, the unselfish, the pure, the holy, lavish themselves upon the base and the unthankful. They suffer in the sufferings of others, and stand between them and the normal results of their wrong-doing.

All our voluntary benevolent societies that labor among the poor and vicious, all our free hospitals and charitable institutions, our friendly inns, social settlements, temperance and missionary organizations, are so many proofs that the provident and the good are voluntarily bearing the burdens of the vicious. Somebody must cure these public evils that make society rotten. Somebody must rescue the children that are born in haunts of vice. Somebody must forget ease and self-indulgence, and put a precious home behind him and go after the drunkard, the criminal and the abandoned, or society is undone.

Yes, some, at times, must enter the ranks and brave their bosoms to the missiles of death, and consent to be mowed down by the privation and sickness of the camp that liberty may not perish, that nations may live.

And glorious as this patriotic sacrifice is, you can find sweeter and quite as noble vicarious sacrifice in the quiet obscurity of home and daily life, unnoted of men, and appreciated by and known only to God.

There are parents caring for unworthy children, sitting with them through long days and weary nightwatches in illness, bearing their needless sorrows in thankless sympathy and service, and agonizing over their wretched sins. I have known an elder sister, by far the most gifted mind in the family, to care for a sick mother for twelve long years, and care for the home and the father; and then she helped three brothers and a sister to an education, putting two of them through college, working for years from early morning till midnight to do it, her own mind and heart hungering for the opportunity, she was giving to them, until she was broken in health by the cruel strain. And then she was flung aside by those whom she had served. I sometimes think the shining sun looks upon nothing more Divine among men than such sister-love.

Now, you take all these noblest acts of benevolence, all these voluntary immolations of self for the good of others which human history affords, fashion them together into one harmonious whole then lift them up into infinite exaltation, and you have none other than the Character of God Himself as He stands related to sinful and suffering man -- the God of vicarious sacrifice, The God Of Love.

III. We see in Jesus the interpretation and perfect illustration of this Divine law of sacrifice. Hear the blessed words of the text: "Jesus answered them, saying, The hour is Come that the Son of man should be glorified. Verily, verily, I say unto you, except a grain of wheat fall into the ground and die it abideth alone: but if it die it bringeth forth much fruit. Now is my soul troubled. And what shall I say? Father, save me from this hour. But for this cause came I unto this hour. Father, glorify thy name." Here, you see, is the Incarnate God bowing down submissive to His Own Sacred Law Of Sacrifice. Not without the anguish and the struggle, not without the shrinking of soul which characterizes our own worthiest deeds; but yet He hesitates not. As the grain of wheat must abide alone except it be cast into the furrow and there perish, so, if He would save others, Himself he cannot save.

But He came to save others. And, if it be possible, He will save them at whatever cost to Himself. He therefore keeps back the prayer, "Father, save me from this hour," which instinctively comes to His lips, and breathe out the petition, "Father, glorify thy name." He bows to the inevitable condition and makes the sacrifice.

Friends, from a human standpoint of vision, was ever a life so completely thrown away, so utterly lost? Taking into account the transcendent qualities which Jesus possessed, the keenness of intellect, the penetration, the foresight, the ability to read human nature, the sagacity, the magnetism, the force of character all of which he possessed in unequaled measure, and which He might have used to His own advantage, was ever life so thrown away? History does not afford the parallel of one who, with such matchless abilities and opportunities, so utterly squandered them, and was so completely bankrupted of results. By an easy use of His remarkable powers He might have acquired vast possessions; but He purposely became and remained so poor that He had not where to lay His head often suffering from unappeased hunger, always eating the bread of charity, and redeemed only by love from abject want.

No other man could have so swayed the masses and created enthusiasm for himself; but He never did, and never tried to gain a permanent popular following. He might have handled the influential political leaders of His day, and lifted Himself to the summit of power; but He never sought their allegiance, or even made their acquaintance. He established no new school of philosophy, as other great minds before Him had done; He gained no popular influence; He wrote no books and left not even a line behind Him. He did not make or alter one law; He did not seat or unseat one ruler; He did not cast down one heathen altar, or break one poor slave's chain, or alter one custom. The religions of the world were, when He died, precisely what they were when He was born. The governments were as scheming, as corrupt, as tyrannous, as wicked. He was tried as a common criminal, and made no defense. He was put to death between two thieves, and all seemed utterly and disgracefully lost.

At that hour a thoughtful man might have likened His life to a comet of surpassing brilliancy which had suddenly and unexpectedly appeared from some unknown quarter of the heavens, attracted a brief attention, and then had as suddenly disappeared, to be as soon forgotten. No husbandman ever went into his field and sowed the grains of wheat more carelessly than did Jesus apparently throw His chances away. Was ever life so irretrievably lost? But, yet, with the halo of that cross lighting up the centuries, and destined, as we know, to yet flood the whole world with its light, we are able to add, was ever life so

gloriously saved in the losing?

Ah! how supremely wise was the Redeemer's conduct, and how Divine His example! This outpouring of God's own life that others might have life and have it more abundantly! The great heart of love, "touched with a feeling of our infirmity" and beating in sympathetic pulsations with the fevered pulse of a suffering humanity! beholding our ruin and hasting to our redemption! It was the self-sacrificing love of God in full display, taking our place and suffering in our stead that you and I, my hearer, and all who will believe, might not perish.

And this was God's way to lift men. It was just then that God was glorified. No other act so became Him. The glory of creating sixty millions of worlds and suns was nothing in comparison! The moment of His extreme humiliation was the moment of supreme triumph. His death hour was the first hour of His reign as a redeeming God. Then was infinite love tested and found true. Then was infinite grace manifested. Then the anthem, "Worthy is the Lamb," began to be sung, and those hallelujahs of praise which shall continually rise and swell and roll in, in ever-increasing waves of melody, till Heaven and earth are full of His glory were first heard! And now notice:

IV. This is the law of godlikeness for us. Hear Jesus state it. "He that loveth his life shall lose it: and he that hateth his life in this world shall keep it unto life eternal. If any man serve me, let him follow me: him will my Father honor."

1. We can reach our own highest good only by a death to self. There is a something within us inherited from old Adam that is so infused into all our faculties that it becomes ourself. We may call this inheritance "depravity," or "the old man," or "the carnal mind," or "the law of sin and death." It matters not by what name it goes, it is a dark, diabolical, perverting thing. It corrupts the heart, perverts the sensibilities, defiles the imagination, drugs the conscience, weakens the will. "The whole head becomes sick and the whole heart faint." This vile infection so possesses every faculty that there is no moral soundness in us.

A human life thus defiled by this satanic virus is alienated from a life of love and a God of love. It does not take to godliness. It has a subtle affinity for evil, a trend downward, a propensity for sin and self-indulgence. It displays inordinate selfishness, regardless of the interests of others and the glory of God. Hence, Jesus said this self must die. "There is a foe of hidden power The Christian well may fear. More subtle far than outward sin, And to the heart more dear. It is the power of selfishness, The proud and willful I; And ere my Lord can reign in me, My very self must die."

When a child of God fully consents to it and seeks the blessing with all his heart, this propensity to evil can be taken out by the baptism with the Holy Spirit. It was only subdued in regeneration; it was not destroyed. It was put down; it was not put out. It "as held in with bit and bridle; but it is a troublesome, fiery steed, ready to run away with its driver at any moment. It pleads for its life; but it must be given over to die. In other words, the heart that has it must consent to die to all that the natural man holds dear, die to all but holiness and God. When all is put on the altar for death, the heavenly fire will fall and consume the dross of the heart. The "old man" will die, and from his grave will come forth "the new man, created in righteousness and holiness of truth."

2. We must thus die to live in the largest usefulness. "Except the grain of wheat fall into the ground and die it abideth alone." It is the great Christian paradox, which Christ Himself so fully illustrated. Die to live; lose your life in order to save it. He who lives for himself only makes an utter failure of life. On the contrary, he who lives as if he hated life, who lays all the forces of his life on the altar of Jesus to be used in the service

of God and humanity, he keeps and saves himself unto life eternal.

This is the essential condition and law of divinest usefulness. "If any man will serve me, let him follow me: and where I am there will also my servant be." Follow Jesus in the death of self-sacrifice, in His indifference to worldly honors, and His contempt for worldly riches and human applause. Follow Him to the firing line, where the cause of right is the most unpopular, and truth is shot at and stabbed by dagger tongues, and the battle is hottest for temperance and righteousness, for humanity and God. Follow Him when others falter and fail, when others hiss and wag their tongues and curse goodness, and cry with the hate of Hell, "Crucify him, crucify him!" To follow Jesus then, through the judgment hall and over the Via Dolorosa and up the steep of Calvary, while demons howl and rocks rend and darkness settles, and Goodness and Love are crucified, is to walk the path of honor and get the crown of final glory.

I entreat you who are young to learn this all-important lesson. You are not yet hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. You are deliberately adopting life-principles. On the one hand, you see men; all too numerous, who are grasping, selfish, ambitious, unscrupulous, eager to ride to place and power, and willing to crush anybody, and to sacrifice any human interest to do it. On the other hand, here is the perfect God-man, and all who would be like Him, giving themselves to the ministry of others. Which company will you join? The lesson of Jesus' life is this; the path to the divinest and most enduring usefulness lies through the sepulchre where self-seeking is buried. Give thy life away if thou wouldst save it forever! In the meanest, over-reaching, selfishness, labor to make the most of thy little self; so shalt thou lose thy life, thy soul, thy all!

Oh, how we need this lesson! And I thank God that more and more men are learning it. There are multitudes today who are poor because they would be honest and unselfish. They preferred usefulness to a large bank account, and riches of character to riches of purse. They have saved but little; yet they have saved conscience and truth and self-respect and love and faith -- true manhood. They have comforted sorrow, and cured ignorance, and redeemed from vice, and made the lives of others better. They need none of your pity, for they have laid up abundance on high.

I have known a wife to live with a drunkard husband. For his sake and her children's she consented to be covered with shame and disgrace. She told me her parents did not know of her anguish. She had but to speak a word and her family would fly to her rescue; but she concealed her wretchedness and suffered on. And there are innumerable such wives and mothers who are martyrs to debauchery and dissoluteness, and who die daily for others. There are daughters who are sweetly pouring out their lives in the care of aged parents and thus are clothing themselves with the white robes of the saints.

There are some of God's purest who are sacrificing the enjoyments of home and health and strength and fortune to press upon the consciences of this guilty nation the moral reforms of the day. Others are sailing to foreign shores to carry the Gospel of Christ to thankless heathen; others still are giving of their very living to keep them there.

"Sarah Hosmer, of Lowell, Mass., though a poor woman, supported a student in the Nestorian Seminary, who became a preacher of Christ. Five times she gave fifty dollars, earning the money in a factory, and sent out five native pastors to Christian work. When sixty years old, she longed to furnish Nestoria with one more preacher of Christ; and, living in an attic, she took in sewing until she had accomplished her cherished purpose. In the hands of this consecrated woman, money transformed the factory girl and the seamstress into a missionary of the Cross, and then multiplied her sixfold." She died to live; and the story

of her life is as fragrant as the alabaster box of ointment poured upon the head of Christ.

I know of women who have dedicated themselves to the care of half a hundred children apiece in orphanages, mothering the offspring of want and sin without other compensation than the smile of Christ. Others can be named who go from homes of abundance and culture and purity to fish fallen girls out of the purlieu of vice in our great cities. They have been fitly called the angels of the slums; and they are fitting themselves to be the companions of angels forever.

We might point to teachers and preachers in great numbers who are toiling faithfully and enthusiastically for a small fraction of the earthly compensation they might have gained in some other avocations. Gratitude should lead us to remember the men in the Cabinet of our Nation who have laid aside a professional income more than ten times greater than their pittance of a salary, that they may serve their country. And one of them, Secretary Hay, turned from the enjoyment of wealth and the sweets of literature and authorship, to serve his Nation and his age. He became the greatest diplomat of his times, but died prematurely, a sacrifice on the altar to bless mankind.

O, the spirit of Christ is abroad over the world. It is ennobling and sanctifying human hearts. Under its holy inspiration men are living and toiling, they are suffering and dying for others. At times some are troubled in soul like their Master before them, and cry, "How long, O Lord, how long?" He answers them: "Suffer child, and sacrifice a little longer." And they toil on for others, and lose life itself on their heaven-appointed Calvary. Then are they glorified. These are they that come up out of great tribulation, to wear crowns of usefulness and eternal victory. "He that saveth his life shall lose it:" he that gives it in sacrifice shall keep it unto life eternal. May God keep us all from the consuming canker of selfishness, and help us to give ourselves to the service of Christ and this dying world.

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