

# A Living Sacrifice

by Thomas Cook

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*To be a living sacrifice means to offer our lives to God, not just our bodies, but our whole being, in service and obedience to Him.*

**Scripture:** Matthew 16:25, John 12:24, Romans 6:4-12, 1 Corinthians 10:31, 2 Corinthians 4:10, Galatians 2:20, Philippians 2:17

**Topics:** "Sacrificial Living", "Practical Holiness"

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## Description

Thomas Cook preaches about the two kinds of sacrifice in the Levitical economy - of atonement and of acknowledgement. While the former found fulfillment in the Lamb of Calvary, the sacrifice of acknowledgement is perpetual in the Church, requiring a living sacrifice of service and noblest life. Practical holiness is built upon doctrinal truths, with the apostle emphasizing that morality is rooted in theology. The essence of sacrifice is highlighted, showing that to save others, one must be willing to sacrifice oneself, echoing Christ's teaching of dying to live.

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## Transcript

There were two kinds of sacrifice in the Levitical economy -- of atonement and of acknowledgement. The former found their fulfillment and their end in the Lamb of Calvary, and are to be offered no more; but the sacrifice of acknowledgement is perpetual in the Church.

Having clearly demonstrated, in the Epistle to the Romans, that justification could not come by the law, the apostle shows that the Gospel absorbs into itself the sacrificial ideas of the law, spiritualizes them, and in their most perfect form re-issues them as the rule for the Church in succeeding ages. "Present," he says, "your bodies," not your oxen, and sheep, and goats -- the one great sacrifice on Calvary hath swept these away for ever. The sacrifice required now is not blood, but service, not death, but noblest life. "A living sacrifice" refers to the contrast between the death of the victim under the law and the life which is now to be presented to God; and to be consumed not by fire, but in doing God's will, and in the service of humanity. Just as the Jew brought the body of the dead sheep and laid it on the altar to be consumed, "a whole burnt offering," so we are invited to bring our living bodies, and present them to God to be consumed in a life of perfect deeds and continual self-denial and devotion.

The term "body" is employed in this connection not because it is the whole of man, or the chief part, but because it is that alone which we can visibly offer to God; and hence it embraces the whole man in the meaning of the apostle. It expresses the same idea as the significant ceremony which took place in

connection with the consecration of Aaron and his sons to the priest's office. The blood of the ram of consecration was placed first upon the tip of the right ear, then upon the thumb of the right hand, then upon the great toe of the right foot. "The boundaries of the man," as Matthew Henry phrases it, were thus claimed for God. The ear was marked first as if to show that before using the hand or the foot we must listen for the Divine Voice and only use them as God commands, being deaf to all other voices that would call us in other directions. It is indeed a solemn day in our history when we recognize to the full the claims of God, and bring not only our souls to Him for salvation, but our bodies for sanctification and service.

We offer our bodies to God a "living sacrifice," when in all the common actions of life we act with supreme regard for, and distinct reference to, God and His will concerning us; when, with all the sacredness with which a Jew regarded the animals laid on the brazen altar, we regard ourselves as belonging to God. Henceforth we exist to work out God's purposes. "Sacred to Jesus" is inscribed upon all that we possess, and all is kept sacredly for the Master's use. We then practically recognize, in everyday life, God's absolute proprietorship of body, soul and spirit, and whether we eat or drink or whatever we do, we do all to the glory of God. We resolve that Christ shall lead us, plan for us, and have His way with us in everything, in a word, that Christ shall possess our whole being and reign supreme. The idea is that our whole life is to be sacred -- there is to be nothing secular in it. What cannot be done for the glory of God is not to be done at all; and what is done in every matter, from the least to the greatest, we are to do "unto Him." The bells that jingle on the horses of the wagoner's team are to bear the same inscription as is blazoned on the High Priest's miter, "Holiness unto the Lord;" and the shop-girl behind the counter may offer as acceptable an offering to God as the priest by the altar. That is the true sacrifice when we think as in His sight, and will, and love, and act always in obedience to Him.

Some say, "Give us the morality of the New Testament, never mind about the theology." But the apostle devotes the first eight chapters of his Epistle to building up the doctrinal structure of the Christian faith tier after tier, before he attempts any exhortation to Christian duty. He would teach us by this that all the practical is to be built upon the doctrinal; that, as Dr. Maclaren says, "You cannot get morality without theology, unless you would like to have rootless flowers and lamps without oil." Practical holiness is not something that begins by doing, but by being. It is not something to be manufactured, nor is it a mere question of imitation. A flower may be imitated, but we can always tell an artificial flower. Drummond compares a Christian and a moralist to a living organism and a crystal. The crystal does not grow, it increases by accretions from without. The living organism grows vitally from within. The Christian works from the center to the circumference, the moralist from the circumference to the center. Holiness works from the heart to the surface. It is the outcome of Christ's own indwelling. When the apostle said, "Christ liveth in me," he meant more than the mere fact of Christ's presence -- he meant that his life and service were the direct outcome of the unhindered working of Christ's indwelling. As the very life of the vine itself is in the branch, so Christ would live in us and manifest Himself in our mortal bodies to those around us.

Some writer has said, "If the graces of the Spirit are within us, they will sometimes look out of the windows," and if Christ really dwells in our hearts, it will not be long before He will be seen and felt in our thoughts, words and actions. As He lived we will live, as He ministered to others we will minister, as He was patient, thoughtful, unselfish, and kind, so will we be. We are to manifest in our daily walk that the very life of the Lord Jesus, which was poured out for us, has been communicated to us. "Always bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our body." Our life, measured by every standard of human measurement, may be very poor, weak and insufficient, but if Christ's life flows into us and through us, we shall not fail to make some contribution

towards the accomplishment of His blessed purposes of love and mercy to a fallen world. With our feet we shall then run errands of mercy, with our lips we shall tell of His love and faithfulness, with our hands we shall do deeds of kindness and tenderness; our whole being shall be employed in scattering blessings of helpfulness and gladness all about us.

To increase by scattering and grow poor by withholding, to save by losing and lose by saving, is the climax of absurdity to a carnal heart, but it is a first and fundamental principle of Christ's teaching. The taunt, "He saved others, Himself He cannot save," was truth unconsciously told. Jesus Himself could not become fruitful until, like the corn of wheat, He had fallen into the ground to die. His friends said He wasted His life. But was that life wasted when Jesus was crucified? Who knows the blessed gain of Christ's life through His sacrifice and death? Was Mary's ointment wasted when she broke the vase and poured it upon her Lord? What remembrance would it have had if she had not poured it out, lost it, sacrificed it? Nor can our lives ever become of much blessing to the world until the law of self-sacrifice has become the predominating principle. As Dr. Miller says, "The altar stands in the foreground of every life, and can be passed by only at the cost of all that is noblest and best. There is more grandeur in five minutes of self-renunciation than in a whole lifetime of self-interest and self-seeking."

The Master's teaching is that we have to die to live. Death is the gate of life. If we would save others, we must sacrifice ourselves. Poussa, the potter, after many efforts to make a set of porcelain worthy of the emperor's table, despaired at last of making anything worthy of the royal acceptance, so he flung himself into the furnace where he was glazing his wares. The Chinese sages say that such heavenly beauty never gilded porcelain before as made it shine. They were writing more wisely than they knew. "Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone; but if it die in bringing forth much fruit." The teaching is that that which cost nothing accomplishes nothing. Service without sacrifice secures no results, no achievement, no victory that is worth the name. If we would keep our life we shall lose it, but if we empty it out in loving service we shall make it a lasting blessing to the world. No high thing can be done easily or without cost. To be consumed in God's work as "a living sacrifice" means burning up and burning out; the candle will grow shorter and the battery weaker. That is a true symbol of the consecrated life, which is inscribed on the tomb of Dr. Adam Clarke -- a burning candle, with the superscription, "I give light by being myself consumed." We give light by giving up our lives to Him who loved us; we are consumed by the zeal of His house while we carry light and salvation to those from whom He died.

In the Gallery of Arts in Paris stands a beautiful statue, which has a strange and touching history. The sculptor was an unknown man, who lived in a garret and was very poor. He spent some of the best years of his life on this work, and after many disappointments and failures it was finished to his satisfaction. He cemented the parts together, and lay down to rest. But in the middle of the night he awoke with a start. A terrible frost had come over the city, and he was afraid lest his life's work should be marred, so he got up and wrapped what scanty bedclothing he had around his work to preserve it. He then lay down again and slept, but he never awoke. The next day he was not moving about as usual, so the neighbors burst open the door, and they wept when they saw how he had sacrificed himself for his work. They buried him, but his work still lives and will live, the wonder and admiration of all who behold it. Much like this will it be with those who have renounced themselves in order to glorify God and do good to men. When they are dead and gone their work will live, and some day rich and glorious reward will be given. Their work at present may be unrecognized and unnoticed. It may be like the dew which falls at night unobserved. Who takes any notice of it? But in the morning the beautiful result is seen on every blade of grass and the spray of every tree, and by-and-by the morning will dawn, the shadows will flee away, and one of the sweet

surprises of heaven to those who have sacrificed themselves for their work will be how much has come out of their poor efforts.

It is mercy that calls for duty and melts us into compliance. After setting forth Divine mercy as never in the world before -- in its sovereign freeness, unfathomable depths and glorious issues, the apostle says: "By all that through the inspiring Spirit I have showed you, I beseech you "Present your bodies a living sacrifice ... unto God." Such an appeal should be irresistible. It is as though Christ Himself said, "By the blood I have shed, by the pangs I have suffered, by the life that I have lived, and by the death that I have died, I beseech you present yourselves to Me." How sweetly cogent: who can refuse?

Love so amazing, so Divine, Demands my soul, my life, my all.

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