

Saved To Serve: Surrender to God

by Mark Jarvinen

Some years ago, the *World Press Review* carried a quotation from a Nigerian newspaper, which stated that on one of the missions of the Columbia space program (1981-2003), the shuttle, **Columbia** recorded echo soundings as the craft orbited over Africa. It was discovered that **26 lakes**, or fresh water reservoirs, were located under the surface of the **Sahara Desert**. As we know, the Sahara Desert is one of the most arid locations on earth. Just think of the life giving flow lying beneath that sandy surface. ***What an untapped resource!***

In a similar way, there are a number of spiritual resources that lie untapped in the church and in our lives that are just waiting to be unleashed. The Christian life is so much more than merely warming a pew on Sunday mornings. God has something far more fulfilling in mind for us as followers of Christ, and far more beneficial to His Kingdom cause than what many experience. Let's consider how we can tap into the resources each of us have available as we seek to serve the Lord and one another. Today's message is entitled: ***"Saved to Serve: Surrender to God,"*** based on ***Romans 12:1-2*** –

"Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God – this is your spiritual act of worship. Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of

your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is - his good, pleasing and perfect will."

Chapters 12-16 of Romans speak about serving God. However, before we can even begin to talk about serving God, we must touch briefly on what God has done to save us, something Paul spends 11 chapters in Romans establishing. Chapter 12 begins with the important little word ***"therefore."*** Whenever you see the word ***"therefore"*** in the Bible, you should always ask what it's ***there for.*** (Enjoy this little play on words 😊) When it comes to chapter 12 of Romans, Paul is making a shift from doctrine to practice. Theology is never meant to be merely an academic exercise. We must ask of scripture, ***"What does it mean for those of us with boots on the ground?"*** It's as if Paul is saying, ***"Based on everything I've just said in chapters 1-11, this is what you must now put into practice."***

Now look at ***v. 1.*** Based on all that God has done, Paul says, ***"I urge you brothers ..."*** This is not a command, but an ***appeal of affection*** to other members of the Christian family. This is not the language of law, but of love. An exhortation to obedience is couched in God's love, not hierarchical demand.

Furthermore, Paul makes his appeal ***"in view of God's mercy."*** Notice, Paul doesn't say, ***"in view of God's grace,"*** but instead focuses on God's mercy. Why is that? God's grace is demonstrated when we are offered a gift that we don't deserve.

However, God's mercy is what keeps us from getting what we do deserve. We'll never worship God with a completely sincere heart or serve Him with full zeal this side of glory because of our ongoing battle with the old nature. Furthermore, we'll never even move meaningfully toward wholehearted devotion until we understand just how much we are indebted to His mercy. The degree to which we comprehend the extent of God's mercy toward us in Christ is the degree to which we will "**surrender**" our lives to Him, which is another way of saying that we'll submit to His Lordship, or in the language of **Romans 6:11** - "**count (ourselves) dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus.**"

A man stormed into a **photo studio** complaining about the quality of his newly developed photographs. He smashed his fist on the counter and fumed, "**Sir, these pictures simply don't do justice to my looks.**"

To which the photographer responded, "**Sir, with a face like yours, you don't want justice, you want mercy!**"

In real life, if we all got what we deserved, we'd all end up eternally separated from God. But as **Lamentations 3:22** says, "**Through the Lord's mercies we are not consumed, because His compassions fail not.**"

Therefore, God's mercy toward us in Christ invites and encourages our surrender to Him. Paul then gives **three ways** to fully express our surrender to God:

- 1) **Offer Your Body** – We are urged to offer our bodies as living sacrifices. To “**offer**” refers to the bringing of an animal for sacrifice on the altar according to OT worship practice. But whereas the animals offered were already killed, we are to be “**living sacrifices,**” presenting our total being (as much as we are capable of giving at that moment in time) to Him, not just bits and pieces. If you picture the human soul as a house in which God comes to live, when we receive Christ by faith, He doesn’t just want to dwell in certain select areas or rooms within our soul, He wants to have access to every room in our heart and completely occupy every corner of that living space. Now, back to the idea of “**sacrifices,**” God isn’t interested in animal sacrifices today, He’s looking for “**living sacrifices,**” believers who will offer themselves to God, which is our “**spiritual act of worship.**” In other words, even though we are admonished in **Hebrews 10:25** to “**not give up meeting together, (in worship) as some are doing,**” we are to be more than merely Sunday morning Christians. The new normal for the believer is to live for Christ’s honor and glory every day of the week!

- 2) **Renew Your Mind** – Verse 1 calls for full surrender, but **v. 2** tells us how this posture is maintained – **by not conforming to the pattern of the world and by the renewing of the mind.** Sadly, in the American culture of today, there is very little distinction between the Christian and non-Christian way of life. A Christian counselor with an office in another part of the Metro, mentioned to me in passing on one occasion, without violating

confidentiality, that one of her clients, a professing Christian, is engaged to be married while living a secret life as a call girl. Why? Because the money is so good. Sadly, many Christians are chameleons, just blending in with the surroundings and making decisions about lifestyle based on the dictates of culture rather than the Word of God. A surrendered Christian is someone whose identity is in Christ – who is **redeemed, restored, and forgiven** by the blood of Christ, and therefore, in response, lives a holy life, set apart for His glory. In other words, the Christian whose mind is being renewed is becoming transformed to live a new life in Christ, which here speaks of a process rather than an event. Some of you are facing incredible temptations to conform to the world's ways right now. God's Word admonishes you to stand firm and stay the course. The Phillips translation of **Romans 12:2** says, ***“Don't let the world around you squeeze you into its own mold, but let God re-mold your minds from within,”*** Right now, unless you're living under a rock, you've got friends pressuring you to sail in the uncharted waters of self-gratification. Stay the course! Don't internalize the world's values. Live a life pleasing to God. Feed on God's Word. Allow the Holy Spirit to transform your thinking.

- 3) **Do God's will** – As we offer our bodies and allow our minds to be renewed by the Holy Spirit, we will be able to ***“test and approve what God's will is,” (v. 2)*** Isn't it great that God allows us to test and approve his will for us? God is a

gentleman. He will not force us into anything. He does not dominate our wills, but as His children, saved by His grace, He grants us freedom to keep in step with the Holy Spirit and to choose His will.

CONCLUSION

And so the question is: ***Have you presented yourself to God in surrender as a living sacrifice?*** You reply, ***“Numerous times, but nothing seems to change.”*** Perhaps you’re discouraged. You began your walk with Christ full of excitement, fully intending to do whatever it takes to make it all the way. But after a while, Christianity became too daily. It was the same thing over and over again. The same prayers, the same worship, the same Bible stories ... you wanted to follow Jesus but you began to drift. You got distracted. The excitement cooled, your dedication weakened, you began to neglect prayer, Bible study and fellowship. Does this in any way describe you? Is there help?

Luther characterized the Christian life in terms of **daily repentance and faith**, coming to the cross each day with all our weaknesses and failures to be met there by our crucified and risen Savior, whose blood cleanses us daily of all our sins. Instead of striving to do better and growing discouraged with the apparent lack of success, we must change our focus. As another 12:2 passage states, this time in **Hebrews 12:2** –

“Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him, endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of God.”

In other words, instead of focusing on our own progress in the faith, or lack thereof, look to Jesus, the one who endured the cross and ultimately finished his course, for us. **He did for us what we’re not able to do for ourselves. His endurance becomes ours by faith.** On the cross, he took upon himself our failures, inconsistencies, weaknesses, and double-mindedness and paid for them all with His blood. As a result, we’re different people, not based on how well we have performed, but based on what Christ has done for us. We see ourselves differently, as God sees us, with the righteousness of Christ as our covering. Our thinking is reshaped around this new identity. We now serve Christ, not to curry His favor, but in gratitude for what He has done for us. Once we’re clear on our identity in Him, we serve Him in freedom, motivated by love and not obligation.

On the Sermon Central website, **Pastor Clark Tanner** shares a story from his life before he became a pastor, while he worked as a car salesman in California. He became a car salesman at about the same time as a young woman named Sheri, who over the previous 6 months had lost about 50 pounds. Sheri showed him a “before” picture and the change in her appearance was astounding. After becoming friends with Clark, Sheri asked him to help her shop for a new wardrobe. As they shopped, Clark noticed that everything Sheri picked out was too large for her. He politely suggested she choose a

smaller size, but to no avail. She thought she was too heavy to wear anything smaller.

But one day, a couple of months later, Sheri showed up at the dealership beaming and said to Clark, ***“Guess what? I’m skinny!”*** Apparently, she was vacuuming her apartment when she walked past a mirror and saw a stranger looking back at her. Suddenly, she realized ***“It’s me!”*** It was the first time she saw herself thin. That weekend Sheri went shopping again and bought a whole new wardrobe of clothes that fit her new figure. According to Clark, after that she acted differently. She walked with a more erect posture. She approached her customers with more confidence. Her mind had been renewed as to the way she saw and thought about herself.

Beloved in Christ, let Him renew your mind today. Look in the mirror that is in His eyes and see yourself as He sees you, as you really are, cleansed, restored, and forgiven. You’re not that old person anymore. You’ve put on the robe of righteousness supplied by Christ that has been tailored just for you. You’ve been saved by Christ. Fix your eyes upon Him. Now you’re ready to serve.

A-men.