

God is Self-Sacrificing Sermon **May 27, 2018**

Tomorrow is Memorial Day. The day in which we pause to remember and appreciate those men and women who died while serving in the U.S. military. This observance was originally known as **Decoration Day** and arose after the tragic Civil War in which **620,000 individuals died**. In towns across our nation people would have small services of remembrance and would go to the cemeteries and place flowers or wreaths on the graves of these soldiers. Much later, this day of remembrance came to include all men and women who have died serving in the U.S. military fighting in any war. The number of those who have died has now grown to **1,264,000**. A huge thank you to those who have given their lives on behalf of this country.

This morning I want to look at the aspect of **God is a self-sacrificing loving God**.

One definition of "self-sacrifice" is *giving up something you want or something you desire for the greater good or to help others. An example of self-sacrifice is when you go without your morning latte so you **can** donate that amount of money to charity instead.*

I would imagine that most of us in this room have committed a self-sacrificing act at some point in our lives. Every time the offering plate is passed you may choose to give a portion of your money to the church for the ongoing work of ministry here or elsewhere. That could be a self-sacrificing act.

And often when it comes to most religions there are many acts of self-sacrificing that are required of the followers of that religion. However, this concept of self-sacrificing is rarely used in reference to the various gods themselves. It's practically inconceivable that God would be self-sacrificing for his followers. He's got all the power and control so why would God ever consider or see it as necessary to give of Himself for his followers.

And that's why the apostle Paul, when talking about God coming and dying on a cross, says it's foolishness to people of this world.

1 Corinthians 1:18 (NIV) *For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.*

Paul points out that to nonbelievers the concept of God leaving His place in heaven to come down to earth and willingly die on a cross for us makes absolutely no sense. And on a certain level I would agree with the world. **First**, of all if God is truly God, by essence of his being, He shouldn't be able to be killed on a cross. And **secondly** why would God ever set up a system in which this horrible act would ever come into play for Himself. Have you ever pondered – why did Jesus have to die on a cross? Have you ever wondered why it took such extreme measures for my sins to be forgiven and for me to come into a right relationship with God? Why couldn't God have just decided to forgive us without the necessity of the death of His Son?

The reason is that if God could simply wave his hand and wipe away all of our sins, it belittles the tragedy of man's rebellion against God and goes against God's original instructions to Adam and Eve. God had told Adam and Eve that on the day that they sinned they would die. Now on the day they sinned they didn't die physically but in essence their relationship with God and others suffered a death on that day. They no longer experienced that deep daily communication that they once had. And pretty immediately we see the effects of sin on human relationships as Cain murders his own brother.

The remainder of the Bible from Genesis on is really the revealing and carrying out of God's plan to bring His people, who He loves deeply, back into a restored relationship with Himself. But in order for that to happen God had to deal with our sins. Why? Because God at His core, is a holy God (which means that He has no evil or sin or even any evil intentions at His core). And because that's God at His core, He cannot have anything to do with evil, which includes us. And all of our good deeds, even if we have a whole lot of them, still can't remove the sin in our lives. And if God just simply winked at our sins and patted us on the head and said, "That's ok" I understand and invited us in to a relationship with

Himself, which would belittle His righteousness and justice. For a judge, which is one of God's roles, to be justice He has to maintain fairness in His dealings with sin or crime. If a relative came before a judge guilty of a crime, the judge can't simply dismiss the case because he's related to the criminal or because he love them. Justice still has to be served. And in order for justice to be served for you and for me, a perfect sacrifice needed to be offered. Because even if someone loved you enough to be willing to die for your sins, it wouldn't help because they are just as much a sinner as you are. Therefore, full forgiveness of sins required a perfect sacrifice and there aren't any available on this planet, therefore Jesus came.

Romans 5:6-9 (NIV) *You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. 7 Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous person, though for a good person someone might possibly dare to die. 8 But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. 9 Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through him!*

This was both a demonstration of God's love for you as well as God's justice. God hates sin!! Let me repeat that – God hates sin!!! And He hates it because it's an affront to Him. He's given us everything and yet we still snub our noses at Him everytime we sin and say, *"I prefer to do it my way rather than your way. I find greater satisfaction and pleasure in this sinful act then in a relationship with you."*

Notice in this verse who it says Christ died for. Was it the **lovely** or the **smart** or the **witty** or the **well behaved** or those who have their act all together? No, Christ died for the **"ungodly"** and then as if to emphasize that point he says, *"While we were still sinners, Christ died for us."* That's you and me. And that's what makes it so astounding. Christ died for those who didn't want anything to do with God. And yet God wanted them. He wants you, not matter how messed up or against Him you are – He wants you. And so Jesus came and willingly gave up His life so that you might live eternally in a relationship with God.

If you accept this sacrifice of Christ for you, you not only have a restored relationship with your Heavenly Father but you're also called and equipped to demonstrated this same type of self-sacrificing love toward God and others.

Ephesians 5:1-2 (NIV) *Follow God's example, therefore, as dearly loved children 2 and walk in the way of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.*

What is this "way of love" Paul refers to? It's willingly and lovingly offering up yourself for others.

Brennan Manning, author of the **Ragamuffin Gospel**, witnessed this **"way of love"** firsthand. Brennan wasn't his name given at birth. His birth name was **Richard Francis Xavier Manning**. But he changed it because of his best friend **Ray**. Ray and Richard were best friends growing up. They did everything together, bought a car together as teenagers, double-dated, attended school together etc. they even enlisted in the Army together, went to boot camp together and fought on the frontlines together. One night, while sitting in a foxhole, Richard was reminiscing about the good old days in Brooklyn while Ray listened and ate a chocolate bar. Suddenly a live grenade was thrown into their foxhole. Ray looked at Richard, smiled, dropped his chocolate bar and threw himself on the live grenade. It exploded killing Ray, but Richard's life was spared.

Later when Richard became a priest he was instructed to take on the name of a saint. He thought of his best friend, Ray Brennan and chose to take on his name. Years later Brennan went to visit Ray's mother in Brooklyn. They sat up one night having tea when Brennan asked her, *"Do you think Ray loved me?"*

Mrs. Brennan got up off of the couch, shook her finger in front of Brennan's face and shouted, *"Jesus Christ – what more could he have done for you?"* Brennan said that at that moment he experienced an epiphany. He imagined himself standing before the cross of Jesus wondering, *"Does God really love me?"* And Jesus' mother, Mary, pointing to her son, saying, *"Jesus Christ – what more could he have done for you?"*

Now, think for a moment – Jesus left heaven and came down and entered your personal foxhole, which we call earth, and willingly gave up his life for you, even though you didn't even want him in your foxhole to start with. So, what's your response to Jesus?

Let me bring you back to the very beginning of the sermon.

Remember that tomorrow we remember and honor all Americans who have died in wars. That number is currently around 1,264,000 Americans.

Since Christ died on the cross – an estimated 70 million Christians have died for the cause of Christ. Over 100,000 Christians are martyred every year over the past 10 years. In the year 2016 one Christian was killed every six minutes.

Now, you might not be called upon to give up your life for Jesus, but would you if you were called upon? When Jesus put out the call for disciples he raised the bar quite high. He said, *“Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross **daily** and follow me. For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will save it. What good is it for someone to gain the whole world, and yet lose or forfeit their very self?”* (Luke 9:23-25 (NIV))

How often are we supposed to pick up our cross – daily? This is an everyday type of discipline. What Jesus means at it’s core is that everyday you die to your own agenda and commit to living Christ’s agenda for your life. It means that your plans for that given day might have to change if Jesus has different plans for you. It means you must love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you (Jesus’ words not mine). It means that you don’t have the luxury to love just those individuals who look like you and act like you and even like you. You need to reach out and love those who don’t even like you.

What the specifics of that looks like for you – I have no clue. God doesn’t talk to me about you, He’s giving me enough challenges to work on in my own life.

I do know that as a **husband** I can’t selfishly be concerned about only my own interests because I’m called to love Connie to the full extent that Christ loved the church and gave Himself up for her (*Eph 5:25*).

I also know that if I want to really understand what God’s daily will for my life is, it requires me **daily offering up my whole self to God sacrificially** and allowing God to transform my mind, heart and will from the inside out.

Romans 12:1-2 (NIV) *Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship. Do not conform 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.*

And did catch what Paul calls this daily sacrifice of myself to God – he calls it *true and proper worship*. Apparently real worship involves more than just showing up on a Sunday morning and singing. It apparently involves how you live your life every single day.

I also know that living a sacrificed life for God means **more than merely lip service**. It involves more than just saying I’ll pray for someone. It actually means **opening up my pocketbook and my daily calendar** and helping meet the needs of those around me (*1 John 3:16-18*). That was part of the power of the witness of the early church. They were actively meeting the needs of those within and outside of the body and the world sat up and noticed and were drawn into a relationship with God because of it.

The last thought I want to leave you with is that this isn’t just something you are called to produce on your own power or strength. Christ wants to do this through you and He’ll provide everything you need to live the life He’s called you to live. Paul talks about how this works in his life: *I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.* (Galatians 2:20 (NIV))

So this weekend as you remember those who’ve given their lives for this country also take time to thank God for the sacrifice He gave for you and pause to ask God what’s He wanting to do through you to demonstrate His love to others.

God is Self-Sacrificing Sermon Notes
May 27, 2018

Who do you know that gave up their life in service to this country?
Take a moment to offer up thanks to them this weekend?

One definition of “self-sacrifice” is *giving up something you _____ or something you desire for the greater good or to help others.*

Why is Christ’s death on the cross *foolishness* to the world?

Why did Jesus have to die on a cross for you?

What does it mean to you to pick up your cross daily for Jesus?
What does that look like in practical terms?

What areas of your life have you surrendered to God?

Which areas of your life are you still holding onto?

Why is it difficult for you to release these areas?

Describe how you live life sacrificially in:

- Your home
- Your church
- Your workplace
- Your community

Outside of Christ, what’s the greatest example of self-sacrifice you’ve seen in your own life?

In what ways could you be hindering Christ from fully showing His love through your life?

God is Self-Sacrificing Sermon Notes
May 27, 2018

Who do you know that gave up their life in service to this country?
Take a moment to offer up thanks to them this weekend?

One definition of “self-sacrifice” is *giving up something you _____ or something you desire for the greater good or to help others.*

Why is Christ’s death on the cross *foolishness* to the world?

Why did Jesus have to die on a cross for you?

What does it mean to you to pick up your cross daily for Jesus?
What does that look like in practical terms?

What areas of your life have you surrendered to God?

Which areas of your life are you still holding onto?

Why is it difficult for you to release these areas?

Describe how you live life sacrificially in:

- Your home
- Your church
- Your workplace
- Your community

Outside of Christ, what’s the greatest example of self-sacrifice you’ve seen in your own life?

In what ways could you be hindering Christ from fully showing His love through your life?