

## **Sunday September 27, 2020**

### **Service for Swansea & Charlestown Presbyterian Church**

#### **Welcome & Prayer (Simon Mulready)**

Welcome along to church wherever you may be joining us from this morning.

Over the past few weeks I've been reading through the book of Luke. My routine is to sit with the Bible over breakfast, and read and pray as I eat my weetbix. Luke is a very easy book to read, and it's great to journey with Jesus through the towns, villages and countryside, as he heals the sick, casts out demons, and preaches the good news of the Kingdom. I've loved seeing afresh his power and authority, as well as his interaction with his disciples, the church leaders, and the many individuals along the way. In chapter 9 I read his words of challenge to his disciples, "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross daily and follow me." (Luke 9v23) What does it mean to take up our cross? What does it mean to live as a follower of Jesus?

Over the next two weeks, Jon Brown will taking us through the first eight verses of Romans 12, which provide a similar challenge in what it means to live as a follower of Jesus within the church. Let us come to God's word, with hearts that are soft, in humility, and ask for the help of the Spirit as we offer our bodies as living sacrifices.

#### **Prayer**

Heavenly Father, Help us to walk as followers of Jesus. May we hear his good news of the Kingdom. May we see his power and authority. May we walk in faith and obedience. In humility, we bring ourselves to the foot of the cross. We see his wounds. We hear his cry of agony. We hear his voice, "Father forgive them, for they know not what they do." We see his blood poured out - pierced for our transgression. We see his body broken – crushed for our iniquity.

We see the empty tomb. "He is not here," the angels say. Behold Him there, the risen Lamb. Our perfect, spotless righteousness. The great unchangeable I AM. The King of glory and of grace.

Lord, grant to us hearts that are open to the teaching of your word. May we learn this day, more of what it means to be a follower of Jesus, to take up our cross and follow him.

In His name we pray. Amen.

# BEFORE THE THRONE OF GOD ABOVE

## Bible Reading - Leviticus 1 (NIV)

### The Burnt Offering

1 The Lord called to Moses and spoke to him from the tent of meeting. He said, 2 “Speak to the Israelites and say to them: ‘When anyone among you brings an offering to the Lord, bring as your offering an animal from either the herd or the flock.

3 “‘If the offering is a burnt offering from the herd, you are to offer a male without defect. You must present it at the entrance to the tent of meeting so that it will be acceptable to the Lord. 4 You are to lay your hand on the head of the burnt offering, and it will be accepted on your behalf to make atonement for you. 5 You are to slaughter the young bull before the Lord, and then Aaron’s sons the priests shall bring the blood and splash it against the sides of the altar at the entrance to the tent of meeting. 6 You are to skin the burnt offering and cut it into pieces. 7 The sons of Aaron the priest are to put fire on the altar and arrange wood on the fire. 8 Then Aaron’s sons the priests shall arrange the pieces, including the head and the fat, on the wood that is burning on the altar. 9 You are to wash the internal organs and the legs with water, and the priest is to burn all of it on the altar. It is a burnt offering, a food offering, an aroma pleasing to the Lord.

10 “If the offering is a burnt offering from the flock, from either the sheep or the goats, you are to offer a male without defect. 11 You are to slaughter it at the north side of the altar before the Lord, and Aaron’s sons the priests shall splash its blood against the sides of the altar. 12 You are to cut it into pieces, and the priest shall arrange them, including the head and the fat, on the wood that is burning on the altar. 13 You are to wash the internal organs and the legs with water, and the priest is to bring all of them and burn them on the altar. It is a burnt offering, a food offering, an aroma pleasing to the Lord.

14 “If the offering to the Lord is a burnt offering of birds, you are to offer a dove or a young pigeon. 15 The priest shall bring it to the altar, wring off the head and burn it on the altar; its blood shall be drained out on the side of the altar. 16 He is to remove the crop and the feathers[a] and throw them down east of the altar where the ashes are. 17 He shall tear it open by the wings, not dividing it completely, and then the priest shall burn it on the wood that is burning on the altar. It is a burnt offering, a food offering, an aroma pleasing to the Lord.

## 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. **2** 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.

## Prayer Points for 27<sup>th</sup> September 2020

**Pray for Sri Lanka (Population 21 million, Christians 2 million).** Though secular in concept, Sri Lanka’s constitution places Buddhism first, a view which is widely shared throughout the country. Extremists continue to persecute religious minorities. On Easter Sunday 2019, Islamic extremists attacked three churches during their Easter services, claiming hundreds of lives. New Christians often come to faith from Muslim, Hindu or Buddhist backgrounds. Their faith in Jesus is viewed as a betrayal of their family and community and they often face immense pressure to return to their former religion. New believers are harassed, discriminated against and face violent persecution. Many churches have been shut down. Pray that in the wake of several church bombings, Christians will continue to be bold in their faith. Pray for peace and comfort for converts rejected by their family and community because of their faith.

**COVID-19.** Pray for those trapped around the world who would like to get back to Australia. Pray for safety while overseas and a solution that will enable them all to come back home.

**School Holidays.** Pray for a great break for teachers and students over the NSW School holidays. Pray that COVID cases do not spread due to those travelling on holidays.

**Josh Montzka (Power to Change, Melbourne).** Praise God for a good Member Services (virtual) Retreat. Praise God the work Maria has done to produce the series of videos. Praise God enthusiastic people showed up to the #Hack meetup. Please pray for high quality work as Josh works from home and for ongoing human interaction during the Melbourne shut down. Pray for people to register and be involved in #HACK.

**Our Church.** Pray for the Church as it makes its plans for Term 4, what should we do and what can't we do coming up to Christmas?

## Announcements – 27<sup>th</sup> September

- **Church Services this term.** Each week there are about 10-15 spots available at our Charlestown morning services and around 5-10 spots available at our Sunday @ 6 services. Seeing most of us are not going to church as much as we did pre-COVID there is room for most of us to come at extra week per month. So if you are currently not coming at all, why not try to come once a month? If you are coming once a month, why not come twice a month? And some people will be able to come every week! That way we can all make the most of the opportunities we are given during these difficult days.
- **Face masks.** Currently the NSW State government strongly recommended that people wear Face masks if they attend places of worship but stopped short from saying you had to wear face masks. We would strongly recommend that you do wear Face masks in church at the current time. There will be some washable facemasks available from the back of the Church if you would like one.
- **Operation Christmas Child.** Our church is hoping to participate again in Christmas boxes for disadvantaged children overseas. Would you like to help by packing a shoe box for someone less fortunate than our own families??
- **Focus for September – Sport/Leisure.** I was once challenged when someone asked me if I had a whole day with nothing on what would I choose to do? And would that deal show a balance between the spiritual, the relational, the physical and the intellectual? It's a good question for us all to ask. What do you desire to do with your spare time? And would an impartial observe say that you have the balance right?
- **Prayer meetings.** Don't forget we now have just one prayer meeting for the church, each Monday at 7m on ZOOM. <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/89793950885>
- **Charlestown Work Day.** Please put Saturday 17<sup>th</sup> October in your diaries for a much needed work day around the church. More details to come.
- **Training Event.** Sunday October 25 from 3-5pm via ZOOM or live at Church we will be having time to grow our skills (and grow the pool of people willing to use their skills) in all aspect of service in our services including sound, computer, music, leading, welcoming, bible reading and public praying)
- **A simple Service?** Since the beginning of COVID we have been sending out a copy of our services to all those who are shut in. It has recently come to our attention that for some people in nursing homes this is a little too much for them. So we are looking for someone who might take our paper service and make it more workable for an elderly audience. Could that person be you? It would be a weekly thing and would need to be produced on the Sunday/Monday and placed in the post so that the recipients would get it in time for each Sunday. Ideally it would be someone who isn't doing lots of other things within our church. If you are interested in doing it (or if there are a number of people who could help out) please see Stephen.
- **Rosters for Term 4.** We are in need of about 5-10 extra people to help out with our rosters for our morning church services. In the past the rosters have meant a four week rotation but since we have added an extra service it is now a two week rotation. So if you would be willing to help out with sound, computer, prayer, bible reading, welcoming, music or singing, please let Liz or Stephen know in the next couple of

days. And if you are not sure why not come along to the training event on Sunday October 25 where there will be half hour training modules for each aspect.

- **Vaccines.** Did you get to see Jo Barlow's short talk on vaccines and a Christian response to the issues surrounding the COVID-19 vaccine. It is well worth a view. It is currently on our Church Facebook page or you can access by clicking the link <https://youtu.be/eAOJJfUX6ek>



## Church Prayer (Steve MC)

Dear Heavenly Father,

We thank you for your splendour and majesty, for your blessings, and that you provide for our needs. And we thank you Lord that you answer our prayers and that we are able to bring our concerns before you in prayer.

For our world Lord, we pray for the country of Sri Lanka. We know that new Christians often face immense pressure to return to other religions, that they are harassed, discriminated against and face violent persecution. We therefore pray for protection for these Christians and that you will help them to stand firm in their faith. We pray that they may continue to be bold in their faith, preaching your word at every opportunity, and that they will continue to rely on you for their strength.

We continue to pray for the ongoing situation with COVID-19. As many countries are experiencing increasing numbers of cases, we pray that you will be with the leaders of these nations and help them to make wise decisions to respond to the growing crisis. We pray for the many people around the world who are separated from their homes or their loved ones because of the crisis. We pray for solutions to enable



them to get back to their homes or their families, and that you will bring them peace during these difficult times.

For our nation Lord, we pray for the upcoming school holidays. We pray that both the teachers and students might enjoy the break, and that they will have time to relax and recharge. We pray that with increased travel throughout the nation during this time, that it does not lead to an increase in COVID cases. And for our church family, we pray for Josh Montzka who is working with Power to Change in Melbourne. We praise you for the enthusiastic people who showed up to the Hack meet-up, and the series of videos that have been produced. We pray that you will be with Josh as he continues to work from home during the shut-down, that you will help him to continue to produce high quality work, and that he will stay motivated in his work for you.

And finally, Lord, we pray for our Church as we make plans for Term 4. With great uncertainty as to what we can and can't do in the lead-up to Christmas, we pray for your wisdom and guidance as we make decisions. We pray that despite whatever restrictions may be in place, that during the Christmas season, we will still be able to get the message of your good news out to non-Christians, and that there will be opportunities to share our faith with others.

And as we shortly come to hear your Word, Lord, help us to be open to it, reflect on what you are saying to us, and to apply it to our lives.

We ask all of this in your Son's glorious name.

Amen.



## Sermon - *A Living Sacrifice* (Romans 12:1-2) by Jon Brown

**Sermon link** - <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC7jzfHbqKGk-TjLNfTE6DzQ/>

Romans 12:1-2 is a classic statement of the Christian life. Paul has just spent eleven chapters with an incredible survey of the gospel. It's full of Christian truth. It's all about God, sin, salvation and the Holy Spirit. It's jam packed with rich doctrine. And then we hit chapter 12. A new section. It seems like a major break. Maybe even a bit of anti climax. You might want to stay in Romans 1-11 forever exploring the rich doctrine. But that's not where it ends is it? In chapters 12-16 Paul gets really practical. It's all about how the Christian should live as a changed person. Your relationship to the church. Your relationship to people who mistreat you. Your relationship to the state.

And this shouldn't surprise us. It shouldn't feel like an anti-climax. Why? Because the Bible never separates doctrine and life. Right thinking and understanding leads to right living. If your doctrine is wrong your life will tend that way. But it also works the other way as well. If the way you live doesn't line up with Scripture then your doctrine will change to accomodate your lifestyle.

Paul isn't an arm chair theologian but a pastor. So his doctrine is all application and his application is all doctrine. All his practical teaching on Christian ethics springs out of union with Christ. So Romans 12 naturally flows out of chapters 1-11. Doctrine leads to a changed life.

I wanna unpack Romans 12:1-2 with you now under three headings.

1. The heart of the Christian life
2. The habits of the Christian life
3. The horse power of the Christian life

### 1. The Heart of the Christian Life

Notice how Paul starts off in verse 1? He says, "if you've understood everything I've told you about the gospel then you will be a living sacrifice." This is the heart of the Christian life. A living sacrifice is the Christian life in a nutshell. But what is it? It's stranger than it sounds.

Paul's language is meant to make us think of the sacrificial rituals in the Old Testament. So let's go back to Leviticus 1 for a moment and do a quick comparison. How do our lives as sacrifices now compare with the Old Testament sacrifices?

Let's look first of all at the striking difference. Back then they offered animals didn't they. Leviticus 1 tells us they offered bulls, goats, and turtle doves in the Temple. These sacrifices were killed and offered up to God. There was blood everywhere. These sacrifices were killed to show what needed to happen in order that atonement be made for sin. Blood needed to be shed. Death for life to happen. But Paul is saying something very different here in Romans 12:1. He is saying the human body isn't killed but lives. Why? Because Jesus has atoned for all your sins. His once and for all sacrifice on the cross wiped away our sins: past, present and future! Jesus Christ offered the perfect sacrifice. The Christian life isn't lived to make up for past wrongs. God accepts you once and for all in Christ. So the big difference is you're not atoning for sin. That's why it's a living sacrifice.

But there is a similarity with the Old Testament sacrifices. How so? Because it's still a sacrifice isn't it? You need to offer something otherwise it's not a sacrifice. And because it's living it's everyday. Every moment. It keeps climbing back on the altar. And for this to happen something has to die. You're not living the Christian life unless you put something to death. What is that? You need to put to death your right to choose the way you want to live. This is completely counter-cultural. Everything in our culture screams at us to live the way we want to live. But the Christian life means we put to death our right to choose. You put to death the idea that you belong to yourself. You put to death the idea that you think you know what's best. You put it to death and you give yourself to God. And it feels like a death. I no longer choose how I'm going to live. It's dying to self isn't it. But on the other side is life. Death before resurrection. Cross before glory. We're talking about sanctification: the process of becoming more like Jesus. Paul has already dealt with this back in chapters 6-8. And the basis for it all is union with Christ. It all springs out of union with Christ. If you've put your faith in Jesus you have been united to him in his death and raised to new life. It's happened. It's done. But then we're still in our bodies aren't we. And our part now is to offer ourselves as living sacrifices. The sacrifice that leads to life, freedom, and true happiness.

There's a fella named Dr. John Gerstner who has a sermon called, 'A Living Sacrifice'. And in this sermon tells a story which gets to the heart of what it means to be a living sacrifice. It's a story about a young woman in her teens. And she feels like God wants her to go into Christian service. She was convinced that God wanted her to become a missionary to China. Absolutely certain about it. This was around the 1950s and back then as a woman you had to be married to be accepted as a missionary. So she made one reasonable request to God. She prayed to God, "send into my life a husband." That seems reasonable doesn't it? So she finished four years of college, but no husband. And then after college she went to seminary and got to the end of the three years, and still no husband. No boyfriend even! And she was furious. One night she started wrestling with God and saying, "I've done all of this and I only asked for one tiny reasonable request!" But that night as she was praying she realises something incredible. Suddenly the sinfulness of the whole thing came home to her. Not about the husband. But about laying down a condition to God. She realised that she was a rebellious missionary. This young woman said, "I realised I was using God, not serving God. I was telling him what he had to do. And that night for the first time, I took my hands off my life."

If it was true of this woman, what about you? Have you taken your hands off your life? To be a living sacrifice means you have to take your hands off your life. So how can we know if we're still holding on? If you think of the thing in your life that if you lost you'd be absolutely crushed, that's what you might be living for. It might be your career and success. It might be your health? It might be your kids turning out alright. It could be a relationship. And if you lost that person or that thing didn't work out you'd be furious at God. You'd react like the young woman who said, "I've done all of this for you and only ask for this one thing back!" In spite all of our dedication, we might not have surrendered ourselves completely to God.

And you know how this woman was able to take her hands off her life? Because she viewed God's mercies. She knew in the gospel that God is infinitely wise and infinitely good. Infinitely wise: God knows what is best for us. Infinitely good: everything he sends our way is for our good because he loves us.

You can't do this unless you've got God's mercies on repeat. A Christian needs to be constantly hearing the gospel. Preaching it to yourself. The gospel isn't the ABCs but the A-Z of the Christian life. If God's mercies aren't playing on repeat in our hearts and minds, then something will capture us.



## 2. The Habits of the Christian Life

Notice Paul gives a warning in verse 2, “Do not be conformed to this age but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.” The world wants to shape what we worship and what we live for. It was the same back in first century Rome and it’s the same now. If your mind isn’t being filled with Christian truth then something else is filling it. And Paul is saying here, what we think about profoundly shapes us. This goes back to the point I started with about the doctrine driven life. If you think you’re only getting preached at on Sundays, you’re wrong! Notice Paul says, “Don’t be conformed to *this age*.” The world we live in isn’t neutral. It has an alluring power which can shape how we think and how we live.

Here is one issue that we as Christians need to be practice non-conformity. Right and wrong issues have now become right and left issues. Moral issues are now political issues. And if you hold to a certain position on one of these moral issues you’re labelled as politically right or left. Say if someone speaks out on abortion they are instantly labelled right wing. Or if someone speaks out on climate change and greed they are labelled left wing. It’s a trap. These are right and wrong issues not right and left issues. And all of them matter because how we live matters to God. If we view them as right and left issues like our society does, that will divide us as Christians. Our thinking needs to be shaped by the Bible. What does God have to say about these issues, and we go from there. That’s one way we can practice non-conformity in our time.

In the early church when Christians were baptised they stood up and publicly renounced, the world, the flesh and the devil. had these words written on his tombstone, *Athanasius Contra Mundum*. Meaning ‘Athanasius Against the World’. A Christian is to live *contra mundum*. Paul in 2 Corinthians 4 says the devil is the god of this age who has blinded people. There’s a spirit of the age that seeks to pull the wool over our eyes. The world has a will for your life that is contrary to God’s will. To be conformed to this age means we are wrapped up with this life only. If all your plans and ambitions are determined by this life only then there is a big problem. It means you’re conformed to this world. It could be a solemn indication that you are still a child of this age. And the god of this age has blinded you from seeing the glory of Christ. Let me urge you then to turn to Jesus. This world is passing away and everything in it but whoever does the will of God will lives forever (1 John 2:17).

Let’s examine ourselves and be non-conformists.

## 3. The Horsepower of the Christian Life

And instead let yourself be transformed. How? By trying harder? No. Notice what Paul says, “By renewing our minds.” Metamorphosis happens from the inside out. Paul only uses the word metamorphosis in one other place: 2 Corinthians 3:18. The way you change as a Christian takes place as you behold the glory of Jesus Christ. As you behold him clothed in the gospel of grace. Behold means to look and look again. To stare. To view on repeat. And as you do this metamorphosis occurs. Like a cocoon, it doesn’t look much is happening from the outside. But there is a glorious transformation taking place within that will one day manifest itself.

So lets view God’s mercies again. Let’s think of Jesus ultimate sacrifice and how he offered himself for you. Remember in the garden he was wrestling with his Father. Thinking about literally going through hell. And there he said, “Not my will but your will be done.” At that moment Jesus took his hands off his life for you. He offered himself. “No one takes my life from me but I lay it down of my own accord.” Why did he do it? Because he loves you. Jesus took his hands off his life for you. Now you take your hands off your life for him. His sacrifice led him to death. Your sacrifice leads you to life. This is the only response to God’s mercy that makes sense. Notice Paul says in verse 1, “for this is your spiritual worship”. That word ‘spiritual’

is a tricky word to interpret. It could also mean, “your reasonable or logical worship.” Which would mean the only reasonable response to God’s mercies revealed in the gospel is to be a living sacrifice. Not just your heart. But your whole body offered up to God.

Let’s pray this short prayer based on one that John Calvin famously prayed, but with a Romans 12:1 tweak. Lord, I offer my heart and my body to you now, promptly and sincerely. Amen.



## **Benediction - Romans 12:1**

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.

## **Morning Tea**

Our morning tea is a vital way that we give and receive fellowship during a time like this. We don’t want to be just consumers of Church, we want to be a part of the family of God. You could give one or two people a call. Who might you ring now?