

The Cost of the Crown - Sacrifice and the Kingdom of God

Introduction:

- The Kingdom of God is a central theme in Jesus' teachings.
- It is not merely a future reality, but also a present one that we participate in.
- This participation often involves sacrifice, following the example of our Savior.

I. The Nature of Sacrifice

- Sacrifice is not about earning salvation but about surrendering our will to God's.
 - **Romans 12:1**: "I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship."
- It involves a cost.
 - **Matthew 16:24**: "Then Jesus told his disciples, 'If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.'"
- It's about laying down our lives (not only physically, but also our desires, plans, and ambitions) for the sake of Christ and others.
 - **John 12:24-25**: "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. Whoever loves his life loses it, and whoever hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life."
 - The Value Conflict: The reason sacrifice is difficult is often directly related to what we value most. We resist sacrifice because it requires us to release something we hold dear. This could be our time, our comfort, our financial security, our pride, our relationships, or even our self-image. These things often hold a powerful grip on our hearts and letting go of them feels like a loss.
 - Idols of the Heart: Sometimes, what we resist sacrificing isn't inherently bad, but it has become an "idol" in our lives. An idol is anything we prioritize over God, anything that takes the place of God in our hearts. Sacrifice, in this context, is the act of dethroning these idols and re-enthroning God.
 - The Pain of Detachment: Sacrifice can be painful because it involves a process of detachment. We are asked to loosen our grip on the things we cling to for security, identity, or pleasure. This can feel like losing a part of ourselves, and it's natural to resist that feeling. However, this detachment is necessary for spiritual growth and for a deeper relationship with God.
- Ultimately, the core of sacrifice is a realignment of our priorities, a willingness to place God above all else.

II. Biblical Examples of Sacrifice

- Jesus Christ: The ultimate sacrifice.
 - **Hebrews 9:12**: "He entered once for all into the holy places, not by means of the blood of goats and calves but by means of his own blood, thus securing an eternal redemption."
- The Apostles: They left everything to follow Jesus.
 - **Luke 5:11**: "And when they had brought their boats ashore, they left everything and followed him."
- Early Christians: They faced persecution and martyrdom.
 - **Acts 7:59-60**: "And as they were stoning Stephen, he called out, 'Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.' And falling to his knees he cried out with a loud voice, 'Lord, do not hold this sin against them.' And when he had said this, he fell asleep."

III. The Kingdom of God: Here and Now

- The Kingdom of God is not just a future hope, but a present reality.
 - **Luke 17:21**: "Nor will they say, 'Look, here it is!' or 'There!' for behold, the kingdom of God is in the midst of you."
- Sacrifice is a key element in experiencing and advancing the Kingdom of God on earth.
 - **Matthew 6:10**: "Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven."
- When we sacrifice, we align ourselves with God's will, and His Kingdom is made manifest in our lives and in the world around us.

The Kingdom of God is not primarily a geographical location or a political entity, though it has implications for both. It is better understood as the active reign and presence of God. When we say, "the Kingdom of God is at hand," we mean that God's power and authority are present and available to transform lives and situations. This presence is both:

- Personal: The Kingdom of God is experienced inwardly as the Holy Spirit indwells believers, bringing about transformation of the heart and mind. (**Romans 14:17**: "For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking but of righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.")
- Communal: The Kingdom is also manifested in the relationships among believers, as we live out God's will in community, demonstrating his love, justice, and peace to the world. (**Matthew 18:20**: "For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them.")
- Cosmic: Ultimately, the Kingdom of God will encompass all of creation, bringing about the restoration of all things under the Lordship of Christ. (**Revelation 21:1-4**: "Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth...And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, 'Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with

them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God.")

This understanding of the Kingdom as God's active presence helps us to see that it is not something we wait for passively, but something we enter into and participate in here and now. Our sacrifices are a way of aligning ourselves with this present reality, yielding to God's reign in our lives, and becoming instruments of his presence in the world.

IV. The Correlation Between Sacrifice and the Kingdom

- Sacrifice demonstrates our allegiance to God and His Kingdom.
- It purifies our hearts and makes us more like Christ.
- It empowers us to be agents of transformation in the world.
- It leads to true joy and fulfillment.

V. Quotes from C.S. Lewis and Billy Graham

- C.S. Lewis: "The principle runs through all life from top to bottom. Give up yourself, and you will find your real self. Lose your life and you will save it." (Mere Christianity)
- Billy Graham: "The greatest sacrifice is when you sacrifice your own personal desires for the sake of another."

VI. Practical Application

- Deepening our relationship with God through sacrifice:
 - Surrender and Intimacy: When we sacrifice our will, our desires, and our time, we create space for God to fill. This surrender allows for a deeper level of intimacy with Him, as we are no longer clinging to our own agenda.
 - Purification and Transformation: Sacrifice often involves confronting and letting go of aspects of ourselves that hinder our relationship with God, such as pride, selfishness, or sinful habits. This process of purification purifies our hearts and makes us more receptive to His presence and leading.
 - Trust and Dependence: Choosing to sacrifice, even when it's difficult or uncomfortable, demonstrates our trust in God's plan and His promises. This dependence on Him strengthens our relationship as we learn to rely on His strength and guidance rather than our own.
 - Service and Unity: Sacrifice is not just a personal act but also an expression of love for others. When we sacrifice for the sake of our family, our church, or our community, we reflect the self-sacrificing love of Christ. This builds unity within the body of Christ and draws us closer to God, who is love.
- What areas of your life is God calling you to sacrifice?
- How can you deny yourself and take up your cross daily?
- How can your sacrifices advance the Kingdom of God in your family, church, and community?

Conclusion:

- Sacrifice is not a burden, but an invitation to a deeper relationship with Christ and a more meaningful participation in His Kingdom.
- As we embrace sacrifice, we discover the abundant life that Jesus promised.
- Let us, therefore, offer ourselves as living sacrifices, for the glory of God and the advancement of His Kingdom.