

An Acceptable Sacrifice
Philippians 4:6-20
November 28, 2024
Thanksgiving

Happy Thanksgiving! I am glad you took time out of your day to come here to give thanks for all that the Lord has given you. Nothing could be greater to give thanks for than the fact that God, sent His Son, to this world, to go to the cross, to die for you, taking your sins upon Himself and paying the price for those sins for which you deserved to suffer and die. Yes, there is that and then instead of holding it over your head, He rises from the grave after paying the price with His blood and wants you to look to Him as He welcomes you into heaven and even is preparing a place for you to be with Him that is better than anything you could ever have on this earth.

Yes, He has done that and is doing that for you even now. He wants you to be with Him as well as all people. He wants that but you know you have free will as do other people and yet only a few will enter through the narrow gate as they prefer this world which we know is not paradise and will never be.

Paul in the lesson for today is finishing up his letter to the Philippians. It is thought he was writing this letter as he was in prison in Rome. How does he start this text, he says: don't be anxious about anything. Don't be anxious? Isn't he anxious about what is going to happen to him now that he is in prison? Maybe he doesn't want them to be anxious for him? Could he actually see his situation as normal?

We have a hard time thinking that we would be OK with our being in prison but what about those who would be concerned for our imprisonment? How would we write to them to encourage them especially as they were having to deal with others who tried to tell them they were there to help them but really were trying to imprison them again in the old ways, not looking to Christ who has given them freedom to live out their lives, not constrained by continuous sacrifices and rules that no longer apply as they are now looking to Christ, the Messiah who they should have trusted in, even before He entered the world.

They were to look to Him as the promised Messiah, the one who was promised to Adam, Eve and the Serpent in the garden even before the law was given but the promise was there throughout history to the day He showed up on the scene and has now gone to the cross, died and rose again to ascend to heaven bodily promising that they too would rise from their graves on the last day, bodily to be with Him forever.

Paul is writing to encourage them to stay true to what they had learned from him. Paul is giving thanks for them for all the help they have been giving him as he traveled around, preaching the Gospel to others. He makes mention of their help even though he didn't ask for it. They didn't just give one gift but kept giving as Paul kept proclaiming the Gospel everywhere he went. Even now, in prison, they haven't forgotten Paul but are sending support. How does Paul see the gift that they are sending? He acknowledges their gift but what he is most thankful for is the fact that they wanted to give, even though he didn't ask for it. They were wanting to give to show their thankfulness to him and to the Lord for what he and the Lord has done for them.

Paul then points to the fact that not only is he thankful but the Lord sees their sacrifice and God will continue to supply every need of theirs, especially the riches they have in Christ Jesus. What an appropriate ending to his letter.

Paul was giving thanks as those were showing their thanks for what he had done for them. He is giving thanks even though he knows he doesn't deserve it. Yes, he has gone through a lot. Here is what he wrote in another letter to the Corinthian churches who had false apostles trying to lead them back to the old way, prior to the coming of Christ: *2 Corinthians 11:21-27 But whatever anyone else dares to boast of—I am speaking as a fool—I also dare to boast of that. Are they Hebrews? So am I. Are they Israelites? So am I. Are they offspring of Abraham? So am I. Are they servants of Christ? I am a better one—I am talking like a madman—with far greater labors, far more imprisonments, with countless beatings, and often near death. Five times I received at the hands of the Jews the forty lashes less one. Three times I was beaten with rods. Once I was stoned. Three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I was adrift at sea; on frequent journeys, in danger from rivers, danger from robbers, danger from my own people, danger from Gentiles, danger in the city, danger in the wilderness, danger at sea, danger from false brothers; in toil and hardship, through many a sleepless night, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure.*

Paul endured all this in his travels as he knew what he **deserved** from the Lord. He knew he had been one who has persecuted Christians and wanted the Lord to save all his fellow Hebrews even though he was willing to go to hell instead of them. The thing of it is, do we know what we deserve? Oh, we can say we haven't done what Paul did, but are we as guilty as Paul or even more so as we have known of Christ and His sacrifices for us our whole lives, most of us?

We are as guilty as Paul. He was under a false belief that Jesus was someone who was going against God. He was following that assumption when he was on the road to Damascus when he was brought to his knees by the bright light of Jesus. Jesus confronted him with the truth and from that time on, he was committed to the Lord, no matter what he had to go through.

As I said, we are guilty as well. We may say we haven't broken the commandment and had people murdered, killed and yet what is worse? To die or to die and live out eternity in hell? Have we always lived as a Christian? Yes, we have tried but we have also failed to live up to who we should be. We should remember what breaking the commandments looks like. How does Luther put it in his small catechism about murder? He writes, We should fear and love God so that we do not hurt or harm our neighbor in his body, but help and support him in every physical need.

I know you have gotten all sorts of appeals for help. If your mailbox is anything like ours, you throw out all sorts of letters asking for help with the physical needs of others. Where do most of those letters go? File 13. Yes, there are so many needs out there that we finally have to decide who is our neighbor? If we were to see all these as our neighbors, we would be broke, unable to take care even of our families or ourselves we might say. Yes, we could spend it all, much like those after Jesus left for heaven who sold property to give to the poor, to the neighbor.

If we did give it all away, would the Lord take care of you? Yes. Many throughout the world would say you have so much. They are looking for their next meal and your cupboards are full. You might even have an extra freezer what has items buried that you might finally have to throw out as it has freezer burn. We have more than we need but as we plan for the future might our possessions be a reason to give thanks and might we take stock of what we have and need and what we could just as well do with out?

Are you able to accept what you have been given in the right way? Jesus went to the cross even for those sins which you don't know if you sinned or not. We owe so much to Him and His work on that cross for us. We can never repay and He wouldn't want us to. When you do give, we pray that it is as Paul saw the offering of the Philippians as a fragrant offering, a sacrifice acceptable and pleasing to God. No, it can't be a perfect gift for all our works are tainted by sin but acceptable, yes, they can

be that because they are covered by the shed blood of Jesus' perfect sacrificial gift on our behalf.

Today is a time for Thanksgiving. Yes, we have much because of the blessings of God. We give thanks for that but no matter what we have, we know that there is that greater Thanksgiving, that of Jesus, our Savior who gave us life, eternal life because He was thankful for creating us even if it cost Him His life. He willingly, gladly went to that cross for you and me. He did it all because He loved and continues to love you so much that he came to this sin filled world to die for you and would have even if you were the only one.

As you sit down with those you love, remember that and consider what you would do for them, those you love as you enjoy the bounty He has provided for you and yours. Give thanks to Him and to our God and Father be glory forever more. Amen.