

SACRIFICES THAT ARE PLEASING TO GOD
Hebrews 13:15-16

Hebrews 13:15-16

I think we all understand the concept of sacrifices that are offered to God or, in the case of pagan worshipers, are offered to gods.

The 1933 film classic **King Kong** will forever be imbedded in our minds due in part to its excellent portrayal of the beautiful Ann Darrow (played by Fay Ray) being **offered as a sacrifice** to the frightening giant gorilla Kong. Kong had been offered other female sacrifices in the past but none had ever garnered his attention the way that this last sacrifice had. As noted in the film, it was a classic case of Beauty and the Beast.

But the sacrifice of Ann Darrow was really **no sacrifice** on the part of the natives of Skull Island. For it **cost them nothing**. Had they again offered up one of their own young girls, that would have been a sacrifice. But to offer up the white strangely clothed female that had quite suddenly shown up on their island cost them nothing.

For a sacrifice, to truly be a sacrifice, must cost us something.

Please turn to 2 Samuel chapter 23...

2 Samuel chapter 23 includes a record of David's 30 mighty men – his courageous warriors who fought at his side or in his stead. For today I would have us read a story about three of these 30 mighty men, beginning with verse 13...

2 Samuel 23:13-17

Here, when these faithful, loyal men risked their very lives to bring David exactly what he had voiced he longed for, David took the water that they brought back to him and poured it out. As he put it, "Shall I drink the blood of the men who went at the risk of their lives?" The point is that David saw that while bringing that water to him had potentially cost his loyal men their very lives, it had required NOTHING from him. There was no sacrifice on his part. Or, as it might be put today, "David had no skin in the game."

One more story from the life of David...please turn to 2 Samuel chapter 24...

Here, in this story from the very end of David's life we learn that David ordered that a census be taken of the people to determine just how many fighting men he had. The text is clear that this was not a good idea (as it inferred that the strength of the nation was in its number of fighting men, as opposed to its strength being in the power of the Lord regardless of how many men there were). But David went ahead with it anyway and in so doing incurred the wrath of God – that wrath being seen in the angel of the Lord bringing death to the people of Israel. To stop the angel of the Lord from bringing greater and greater death to the nation David decided it best to offer a sacrifice to God. And with that we pick up the narrative in verse 18...

2 Samuel 24:18-25

Verse 24 is key with its words, "I will not offer burnt offerings to the LORD my God **that cost me nothing.**"

For if the offering cost the owner nothing, then it was not a sacrifice. **For a sacrifice, to be a sacrifice, has to cost us something.**

Well, this morning we want to, from Hebrews 13, talk about sacrifices that are pleasing to God.

1. The first sacrifice that is pleasing to God is A SACRIFICE OF PRAISE to God. This is mentioned in verse 15. It is there further defined as "the fruit of lips that acknowledge his name."

Now on the one hand, this hardly seems like any big sacrifice. I mean we just sang for 20 minutes or more, and what kind of sacrifice was that? Other than it costing us a small amount of time it cost us nothing. It certainly didn't cost us anything in the sense of costing us money. So where was the sacrifice?

In today's world right here in Lancaster County, Pennsylvania there likely was not any great sacrifice. But imagine if we were meeting in Sri Lanka this morning? There, or in North Korea, or Afghanistan or Pakistan or Saudi Arabia, or Yemen...indeed, in **quite a few countries** on earth, to meet and sing about Jesus could be VERY COSTLY...a tremendous SACRIFICE...even to the point of death. And what is true in some parts of the world today **was true** back when the book of Hebrews was written, depending upon where one lived.

For we know from the book of Acts that in the days of the early church, people like Saul were making HAVOK of the church by barging into such church meetings and arresting the Christians that were found there.

And the offense has always been specific to the naming of Jesus' name (which is what is being inferred here in Hebrews 13:15 when the writer writes about "the fruit of lips that acknowledge HIS NAME.") It is the name of Jesus that is always the problem...always the challenge.

One may talk about God... and it is not a big problem.
Or reference God's Son...and it is still not a big problem.
But mention the name JESUS...and you'll be in for trouble. That is the case today just as it was the case in the time of the early church.

Please turn to Acts chapter 3...

Acts 3:1-10

Acts 4:1-22

Acts 4:29-30

Acts 5:40-42

It is all about the name of Jesus.

This is ONE of the reasons that I have become **VERY BOTHERED** (far more than just a little bothered) by the prayers that I am hearing more and more come from the mouths of church leaders... pastors even. These who know better will pray and when they come down to the end of their prayer

they will simply say, "Amen." Unlike how they were taught to pray (ending prayers by saying "We ask this in Jesus' name...Amen") **they will skip the name of Jesus.** Others will do better – ending their prayers, "And we ask this in your name. Amen" – but they still seem to be avoiding the name of Jesus.

Folks, we need to be clear. We need to offer God "the fruit of our lips that acknowledge HIS NAME." **So let's not be silent about THE NAME** of the One who saved us, who died for us, who redeemed us, who shed his blood for us, and in whose name all prayers are to be made! Amen? It is the name of Jesus. Amen? Amen!

And if that costs us something, then so be it!

I saw this past week an article about actress Nicole Kidman. The article suggested that she has been taking a lot of ribbing, ridiculing and being joked about because she has been attending church with her children. Her husband, Keith Urban, the article noted, has been attending church with her. But the article also went on to note that she is unabashed because of the ridicule believing that what she is doing is the right thing to do. Well, good for you, Nicole Kidman.

Folks, are YOU ashamed of Jesus? Are you ashamed of His name? I hope not. And if not, then speak his name!

2. (Secondly, in verse 16) **DOING GOOD is mentioned as being a pleasing sacrifice to God.**

Is doing good a sacrifice?

Well it certainly can be.

In this morning's church bulletin I have an article entitled "Go Beyond...Again." It is about our annual week of service to our community, May 6-11. There the article mentions a variety of things that we can each get involved in, that week, to "do good" to our community. But, as noted in that article, any of us can also do NOTHING...the natural DEFAULT SETTING for every human being.

- Do nothing.
- Don't get involved.
- Don't give of ourselves.
- Don't extend ourselves.
- Don't expend ourselves.

Yeah, it's not HARD to do nothing. That takes NO EFFORT.

So **"doing good" requires something of us.** There is a **sacrifice of time and energy.** If you come out on one of the nights (from 6:00-8:00) you may miss a favorite television show. Oh...I know it is SO HARD.

And collecting roadside trash...why if you do that you will need to BEND OVER. And you might even get a little dirty. And if it is raining, it can be downright miserable. Such a sacrifice...hardly at all!

But doing good can include a LOT of things. Let me make a list...

- Writing a letter to a missionary
- Sending a card to someone on their birthday
- Going door to door inviting people to church
- Giving blood
- Visiting someone in prison
- Leading a Bible study
- Working in the nursery
- Teaching children in Sunday School
- Serving as an usher
- Visiting someone in the hospital
- Visiting someone in a nursing home
- Volunteering at Water Street Mission
- Offering a bed to someone in need
- Taking a first-time church visitor out to lunch
- Being a greeter at the entrance to the church building
- Serving on a board
- Going on a short-term mission trip
- Cleaning the church building
- Giving someone a ride

These and a hundred other things are all things that we may or may not get involved in. Every one of them will "cost us" in some way: an expenditure of time, or money, or both. But these are the kind of "sacrifices" that are pleasing to God.

3. (Lastly, from verse 16 we find that) "SHARING WHAT YOU HAVE" is also a sacrifice that is pleasing to God.

Now in some cultures THAT is a real sacrifice.

Many years ago Ruth and I befriended two Australian couples that were both in the U.S. so that the husbands might attend Westminster Theological Seminary. At the time, these couples became quite close to us. But I remember, during our many hours that we spent with these couples their comment on the differences in GIVING between American Christians and Australian Christians. They said that in America, they found that Christians were quite giving with their money, but not so much with their time. Whereas in Australia, the Christians were very giving with their time, but were tight as could be with their money.

Well, when we hear the words "sharing what we have" we tend to think in terms of money more than we do thinking about time.

And to your praise, and to the praise of other believers here in Lancaster County, we live in an area where the sacrifice of "sharing what we have" is among the highest found anywhere on earth.

This fact was driven home to me some 30 years ago when I saw a chart comparing the annual per capita giving of the residents of Lancaster County compared to other counties around the U.S. I don't recall the exact numbers, but if (for example) the per capita giving to charitable

causes was .37 cents, per person, per day in Dade County, Florida (and, again, I'm just making this up), the average giving per capita, per day, in Lancaster County was \$1.48. It wasn't that the people of Lancaster were giving more than other counties around the U.S. It was that the people of Lancaster County were giving WAY MORE than those living in other parts of the county. And what was true 30 years ago is still true today.

It is because of this fact that a number of Christian mission organizations have offices located in our general area.

Burning Hearts exists because of your willingness to give, so thank you!

Now what is SACRIFICIAL GIVING? Just HOW MUCH are we to give? Or to put it another way, at what point do we cross the line in our giving whereby the giving has become a "sacrifice that is pleasing to God"?

Luke 21:1-4

C.S. Lewis, a man who gained some wealth because of his success as a writer, had this to say about sacrificial giving...

"I do not believe one can settle how much we ought to give. I am afraid the only safe rule is to give more than we can spare. In other words, if our expenditure on comforts, luxuries, amusements, etc, is up to the standard common among those with the same income as our own, we are probably giving away too little. If our charities do not at all pinch or hamper us, I should say that they are too small. There ought to be things we should like to do and cannot do because our charitable expenditure excludes them."

Regardless of your age or health, you, like the rest of us, are barreling ahead at breakneck speed, heading to the day of your death. You may not sense this, but come the day of your death you will look back and marvel at how quickly your life has passed. And come that day you will then face God in judgment. And then, like every other person who ever lived, you will give an account of what you have done to that great "Judge of all the earth." How will you fare? Will he judge your deeds as "pleasing"?

I hope so.

I hope so for your sake. And what I hope for you I hope for myself as well. These sacrifices of ours **will not determine our eternal destiny**. What Jesus did for us on the cross has already settled that issue. But the Bible speaks much about eternal rewards, and it is quite clear that if we understand anything about eternity that we should be more than a little interested in those rewards.

So do well, my friends. Offer to God pleasing sacrifices of praise, doing good and sharing what you have.