What Would You Give to Jesus?

Are You Willing to Make "Sacrifices" to Honor Christ?

It was truly an honor to work alongside New Life Community Church as we held a vacation Bible school at our facility. Over forty adults and teens volunteered to make the vision from God come to life. I was amazed by the sacrifices made by so many in their desire to bring great honor to Jesus. Many worked long hours to put together a fabulous week of vacation Bible school. I was astounded to find out that the VBS director, Paul sent out emails to all the volunteers at 3 AM with his insights into how to improve as a team. 3 AM! Not only that, he noted that other volunteers were also awake at that time emailing back and forth with ideas of how to make the last few days even better. I am always stunned by the faithfulness of believers who make great sacrifices for God's Kingdom willingly out of love for Jesus. Sacrifices aren't unusual by any means. How many women have sacrificed their careers to stay home with their kids? Haven't dads sacrificed their own careers by choosing not to move for the sake of their kids? Grandparents sacrifice a relaxing day in order to take care of their grandkids. Do teens make sacrifices to help out their parents? What about police officers who lose their lives to protect a victim of spousal abuse or a fireman who makes the ultimate sacrifice to rescue a family trapped in a burning apartment? We do see sacrifices made by plenty of people yet what sort of sacrifice would you be willing to make to bring Christ honor and joy? Our big idea for today is one with profound implications. The best life is one that gives sacrificially out of love for Jesus.

In John 12, after Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead, Jesus and His disciples stayed at a home in Bethany and ate dinner with His friends. Mary stunned everyone there by her outrageous generosity and act of devotion to Jesus. **Then Mary took about a pint of pure nard, an expensive perfume; she poured it on Jesus' feet and wiped his feet with her hair. And the house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume.** (John 12: 3 NIV) What motivated Mary, to as Judas put it, waste all this perfume, perfume that was worth a year's wages, on Jesus' feet? Gratitude for Jesus raising Lazarus from the dead? Maybe. Perhaps it was just out of the overflow of her heart and tremendous love she had for Jesus, even if He never brought back Lazarus. Regardless, clearly Mary poured out the perfume on Jesus' feet because she loved Him and no sacrifice was too great for her to show Him how much she loved Him. Love, when it is real love, pauses when most would think primarily of themselves, and gives sacrificially to bless and uplift. As 1 Corinthians 13 reminds us, "Love…is not self-seeking". It is giving.

Great sacrifices are not uncommon in the Bible, but it is astounding what many gave to God out of love for Him. Perhaps the most famous one in the Old Testament is the determination Abraham made when He somehow heard God command him to sacrifice his son Isaac on Mt. Moriah. The Bible tells us that Abraham was not only willing but went to work to immediately give up his beloved and long awaited son on an altar of sacrifice. **Early the next morning Abraham got up and saddled his donkey. He took with him two of his servants and his son Isaac. When he had cut enough wood for the burnt offering, he set out for the place God had told him about.** (Genesis 22: 3 NIV) Why did he do this? It is because the Lord meant everything to him. How many Christians today have that much love for God? You may say that what Abraham did was over the top extreme and of course it would have been stunning if God held him to the pledge, but it reveals the great lengths this man of faith would go to be loyal to the Lord. Love is not self-seeking. It is giving.

I am thoroughly awed and perhaps you are too by the great devotion of Ruth to God. We may say that it was her affection for her mother-in-law Naomi that led to her prodigious sacrifice but ultimately it was her relationship with God that pushed it along. She decided out of her own free will to leave behind her family, her culture, her language and yes, whatever religion she had previously practiced to go on with the Lord as her God. When Naomi decided to leave Moab and go back to Israel, Ruth made it clear that she too was going. **But Ruth replied, "Don't urge me to leave you or to turn back from you. Where you go I will go, and where you stay I will stay. Your people will be my people and your God my God.** (Ruth 1: 16 NIV) Yes, she was wanting to stay with Naomi, but she also was determined to be devoted to the God Noami had shared with her. And that meant sacrifice. That meant giving away everything that built her life and upon which she was grounded. It is clear that for Ruth love was not self-seeking. It was giving.

The celebrated pledge Zacchaeus, the tax collector made to give half of all he had to the poor and pay back anyone he had cheated four times what he owed them was totally the result of his devotion to Jesus. **But Zacchaeus stood up and said to the Lord, "Look, Lord! Here and now I give half of my possessions to the poor, and if I have**

cheated anybody out of anything, I will pay back four times the amount." (Luke 19: 8 NIV) Such an exorbitant response to Jesus going to lunch with him shows just how deeply rooted salvation was in Zacchaeus. It is impossible to hold back such a torrent of love and Zacchaeus didn't even try. Zacchaeus, as a result of Jesus coming into his life was transformed from being a taker to becoming a giver. That is because love is not self-seeking. It is giving.

The prophet Haggai almost three thousand years ago felt compelled by God to lead in the effort to restore the ancient Temple of the Lord that had been destroyed by the Babylonians. But the people weren't at all inclined to make sacrifices to see the work get done so the Lord confronted them. **This is what the Lord Almighty says: "These people say, 'The time has not yet come for the Lord's house to be built.'" Then the word of the Lord came through the prophet Haggai: "Is it a time for you yourselves to be living in your paneled houses, while this house remains a ruin?"** (Haggai 1: 2-4 NIV) I have often observed Christians, when they buy some new piece of furniture, give what they felt was too old or damaged for themselves to the church. It was not important to these people to give sacrificially to see that God was honored and His name respected by helping build a new place of worship. Is that the attitude of those who are grateful for their salvation, who have their sins forgiven and a home prepared in heaven for them? It does cost us, and sometimes dearly if we are to express our gratitude to Jesus for what He has done for us. David, after he brought God's judgment upon Israel for pridefully taking a census of the people to prop up his reputation as a world leader, repented when God struck the people with a great plague. The Lord told David that the judgment would end if he built an altar on the property of someone named Araunah and make a sacrifice there for repentance. Araunah generously offered to cover the cost of everything. **Araunah said to David, "Let my lord the king take whatever pleases him and offer it up. Here are oxen for the burnt offering, and here are threshing sledges and ox yokes for the wood. O king, Araunah gives all this to the king." Araunah also said to him, "May the Lord your God accept you."** (2 Samuel 24: 22-23 NIV) But David refused to accept from Araunah anything. **But the king replied to Araunah, "No, I insist on paying you for it. I will not sacrifice to the Lord my God burnt offerings that cost me nothing."** (2 Samuel 24: 24 NIV)

Paul established the theological, or more properly the fundamental basis of all giving to Jesus. **You are not your own; you were bought at a price.** (1 Corinthians 6:19c-20a NIV) You will never outgive Jesus as not only did He put you into existence, but He has given you a life that will only get better and better forever. Givers have a special place in God's heart and are especially treasured by Him. **Each man should give what he has decided in his heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.** (2 Corinthians 9: 7 NIV) The happiest people in the world are givers and if the truth be known, they are probably the healthiest both psychologically and spiritually. Proverbs puts it succinctly! **Happy is the generous man…**(Proverbs 22: 9a TLB) Paul reminds us that perhaps the most important skill we can develop is giving. **…see that you also excel in this grace of giving.** (2 Corinthians 8: 7d NIV) What could you give to Jesus that would make Him smile and bring you great happiness? Love is never self-seeking, especially when it comes to your relationship with Jesus. Love is giving. Our big idea is one to hold dear. The best life is the one that gives sacrificially out of love for Jesus.