

Title: A Wasted Sacrifice
Text: 1 Corinthians 13.3
Theme: Love is the true measure of sacrifice
Series: I Corinthians #67
Prop Stmt

Read Text:

Adam Meyerson is the president of the Philanthropy Roundtable and in a recent interview was asked about the temptations of being a generous donor. He said, "One danger is pride, especially self-congratulation about one's good intentions. He went on to say, that there is another great danger that he calls philanthropist's disease. That is when everyone laughs at your jokes (not because you are funny, but because you think you are funny, and everyone wants to keep up the illusion because you have the money.) Everyone tells you how brilliant you, even though they really don't believe it. People can use generosity and even sacrifice as a means to gain attention, and affirmation and to pretend to have a relationship. But, isn't it sad if it is only a game, a play, or a charade for both?"

These first three verses have 5 "if clauses" that taken together show a list of gifts or actions that have an ascending value to them. Consistently Paul has shown that even though he speaks in tongues more than anyone, this is the least of the gifts as far as he is concerned. He points out that the person who has this gift, but uses this gift for self-promotion is nothing more than an empty, hollow, irritatingly, clanging piece of metal. Rather than being of any benefit at all, this person is so offensive you are quite relieved when the conversation or event is over.

The gift of prophecy is extremely beneficial along with the ability to fathom deep mysteries and organize and grasp large amounts of knowledge. While the person speaking in tongues may simply be an irritant because he thinks he is so spiritual, and no one really has any clue as to what he is saying, the person described in verse 2; that is the one who is so intelligent and knowledgeable and is able to bring illumination to a cloudy topic and help people grasp confusing matters seems to be extremely beneficial and desirable to the church. Even beyond that is the person who has the gift of faith and is able to take these truths and act upon them and in so doing sets a wonderful example for others to follow. But, even as impressive as these gifts are, (and they are) without love, this person instead of being held in such high esteem, is in reality – nothing.

This chapter has three parts to it:

- 1) The Priority of Love - vs. 1-3
- 2) The Proofs of Love – vs. 4-7
- 3) The Permanence of Love – vs. 8-13

These first three verses have been quite the bubble popper, since Paul is describing so many of the qualities that we so deeply admire in people. And here in the final verse of this opening section he takes us to what appears to be the pinnacle of sacrifice. Here Paul

says what if I give all I possess to the poor? What if, in one sweeping movement, I sell all of my possessions and fund a homeless shelter for a year? That has got to count for something – doesn't it? This clearly is

1. Sacrifice that hurts.

“If I give all I possess to the poor”

We like charity. This nation gives an enormous amount of money to charitable causes year after year and the Detroit area has historically been known to be a very generous area. Charity is a big deal to us. The fact is, charity is big business. If you want to do business with certain people, it is well known that you have to donate to their charitable causes, and then they will recognize you. If you want to move up in certain companies you have to be a fund-raiser for certain things. We have huge fund-raising events, t-shirts, runs, dinners, golf-outings, auctions, and of course the charity preview event at the auto show. Last year's Super Bowl event was held in Detroit and it was an interesting event. On the one hand, there was an enormous amount of money that was raised for local charities, while the homeless were all moved out of the city's center so the people coming down town did not have to be bothered with the inconveniences of panhandlers.

We are used to giving from a distance. In order to raise money for the poor, you have to wine and dine the wealthy and take pictures, and produce press releases, and put their names in programs and give them awards. Recognize them, bring in celebrities they can meet and be impressed with. I'll do things for you if you will do things for me.

A few years ago a man brought his brand new car by the church to see if his pastor would bless it. It was a very high-end vehicle with a sticker price close to \$100,000. The pastor told the man he would bless the car on the condition that the man gave the church a gift for the same amount that he paid for the car. According to my friend who lives near that church, the man said ok, took out his checkbook and wrote out a check on the spot. I don't know what to do with that – do you? But we are tempted to think, wow – that sure was quick thinking on the part of that pastor, or that was a generous gift on the part of that person. And we could tell story after story of large gifts, endowments and foundations that have been established all for the purpose of helping the poor or needy.

This verse describes what appears to us to be almost the highest act of charity. What if I gave all I possessed to the poor? Then you would be poor.

You can feed the poor, you can even become poor, but that doesn't mean that you love the poor. Fact is, you can use the poor and their obvious need as an opportunity to advance your own image or attempt to deal with your own guilt. Giving away all that you have to feed the poor is a huge act of sacrifice, but if this act, as large as it is, is not done with love, you have not gained a thing. In fact, you have wasted your sacrifice.

The person who gave away everything at least can live with the respectful nods, and whispering approvals of others. But, the person who dies in the flames? That person

does not even get to hear the applause. The final “if” clause (the if is in the original and is understood in our language) speaks of what appears to be the ultimate act of self-denial. This is a...

2. **Sacrifice that dies.**

“and surrender my body to the flames”

There is a body of literature known as the apocrypha that gives some Jewish history of the time between the Testaments. In one of the books known as 2 Maccabees there is a story of 7 brothers who gave themselves up to a fiery death rather than compromise their faith. Their courage is similar to the story of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego in Daniel 3. In the Maccabean account, one of the 7 brothers said to his torturer, “You do not have a fire hot enough to make me play the coward.” Stories like that build the fabric and backbone of a nation. This is the give me liberty or give me death type of stuff that we heard in our elementary classrooms. But, today, people sacrifice like this all of the time.

In the Gaza strip where the Islamic groups of Hamas and Fallah are fighting for control, thousands of people live in abject poverty. Some of the boys are easily recruited into groups where they are told how evil the USA and the Jews are. All of the world’s ills, including their own poverty are blamed on the American and the Jew. If only these groups were destroyed, if only Allah’s land would be purified from their presence, then glory would return to the followers of Islam. This diet of war-mongering, hate-mongering talk is fed to them on a regular basis. Then the promise of eternal life, eternal glory and eternal sensual pleasure is dangled before those who will die for Allah. All that is left is for these now young men to wrap themselves in a bomb-laden vest and to make their way into the most crowded area that they can find where someone using a remote control detonates the bombs. That is a sacrifice that dies. That is also a sacrifice that does not bring blessing, but instead, it brings judgment.

We are not ones who are going to wrap ourselves in explosives, drive trucks loaded with bombs into crowded markets or pour gasoline on our bodies and set ourselves on fire in order to protest an act of Congress. But, we are people who are familiar with the concept of sacrifice. Some of you have given up promotions because it compromises your values. Some of you have given up evenings to help out others who are in need. Some of you have committed yourself year in and year out to ministry. It is to us, people of the church that this text is written and this point is extremely clear. What if you made the ultimate sacrifice? Would they name a charity, a building, a scholarship after you? Would there be a movie, a song? Perhaps your story would be told in sermons & books.

3. **Sacrifice without Love is Wasted.**

Don’t waste your sacrifice.

This is difficult for us and this is difficult for me. We are people who love the church. We love the “ministry.” Many of you serve as a teacher and mentor for our children, or our students. Many of you serve as greeters, ushers, leaders and helpers in your Adult Groups or in the music area. Some of you help out cutting the grass and other labor intensive type projects. You understand a little of what this word sacrifice means. You set aside certain comforts and at times certain needs in order to meet a need that the church family has here. You go above and beyond and when you do, you incur risk. Have you ever done something that you thought went unnoticed or unappreciated? The risk of a servant and the risk of sacrifice is bitterness. There are moments when we do things for the purpose of giving joy and help to the ones we serve. There are other times when we are overlooked or taken advantage of, that we can become bitter. What is really dangerous is when we do things only for the purpose of being recognized. Then we are in deep weeds, since that desire is never satisfied. How much recognition is enough? How many thanks does one have to give before the original giver is content?

Moms, you are often overlooked at home. The same thing can be true for dads, or for the players that practice really hard but don't get the playing time as the stars. It can be true for the coaches who are always second-guessed and ridiculed by the parents, or the teacher who never measures up in the eyes of others. If you/we sacrifice for the approval of others, we set ourselves up for some serious heartache. If we only serve in order to be appreciated, and affirmed, then we will never be content, because no one can appreciate or affirm you enough.

An incident a couple of summers ago in San Antonio, Texas, illustrates what I'm talking about. It was a hot, 99-degree August day when a ten-month-old baby girl was accidentally locked in a parked car by her aunt. Frantically the mother and the aunt ran around the auto in near hysteria, while a neighbor attempted to unlock the car with a clothes hanger. The infant was bawling at the top of its lungs, beginning to turn purple and foam from the mouth, a combination of anxiety and the intense heat inside the car.

It had quickly become a life-and-death situation when Fred Arriola, a tow-truck driver, arrived on the scene. He grabbed a hammer from his truck and smashed the back side window of the car to free the baby. Was he heralded a hero? Not so. According to an article in the San Antonio Tribune, he is quoted as saying, "The lady was mad at me because I broke the window. I just thought, 'What's more important -- a baby or a window?'"

Setting your heart's goal on being appreciated, is like drinking salt water. The more you get, the thirstier you will be. That is why I think this text is for us. In fact it is at once a warning and a blessing. It is a warning in the sense that we are being cautioned that if we do all of these things and make all of these sacrifices, but have not love, then we have wasted all that sacrifice. But, on the other hand this text is a blessing in the sense that if we heed its admonition, then it protects us from the discouragement and even bitterness that comes when we make all of those sacrifices and they are not appreciated or they are taken for granted. Sacrifice is great, noble, and can be Christ-like, if we do it for the purpose of being of benefit and help to others.

Jimmy was in the 3rd grade and was a little slower than the other kids in his class and as a result he tended to be somewhat of a loner. His mom, Linda did what she could to protect him from being hurt by the cruel comments of others, but she could not live with him all day long. It was February, and Jimmy announced to his mom that he wanted to make Valentines for every kid in the class. Linda's heart sank. She knew that Jimmy was just setting himself up for disappointment. He would probably not get any Valentines in return, and in fact, some of his might not even be accepted. The big day came and Linda dreaded it, but Jimmy was really excited. That afternoon when he came home, her fears were confirmed as she heard him saying, "not one, not one." Immediately she knew, he hadn't received a single Valentine. But, when she saw him, he wasn't discouraged, but instead happily announced, "Mom, not one, I didn't miss anyone, I gave a Valentine to every kid." And he was thrilled. Why? Jimmy's goal was not anchored to how others responded to him, but his goal was to give and was thrilled that he had accomplished his goal.

Many of you were raised in a church tradition where every image of Christ was sad and sorrowful. It is true that Christ went through intense sorrow when he died. But that is not the entire story. Keep this in mind: Hebrews 12 says that Jesus went to and through the cross for the joy that was set before Him. He looked beyond the cross to the joy that was on the other side. His sorrow was real. His suffering was real. But they were temporary on his way to joy. What was that joy? It was the joy of the Father's glory and the joy of us being forgiven and restored to an eternal relationship with Him. Would we accuse Christ of having ulterior motives when He died on the cross? No, of course not! But his love brought Him joy. He found great joy in the glory of the Father and in the rescue of us. Some of you are wasting your life because your duty and your honor and your sense of right and commitment as important as that is, is being done without love – and it shows, because you have no joy. You sacrifice, you work hard, you are committed, and you wake up every day with a burden. You breathe deep and try to tackle the day's jobs with determination. Brother, sister, there is something that is even more important. I am speaking of a cross-centered, Christ-exalting, Spirit-infusing, soul-satisfying, heart-refreshing, smile-producing joy.

When you love the glory of God, meaning, when you set the affections of your heart upon God receiving the honor and fame that He is due, when you hitch your happiness wagon to God's fame, your happy cup is going to get full. When you hook your happiness to loving God and being faithful to and enjoying God and therefore, simply being a blessing and a benefit to others, you can die happy and rich beyond money, no matter what your age. When the glory of God and the joy of His people is motivating your actions, you are protected from bitterness. But if I give all I possess to the poor and surrender my body to the flames, but have not love, I gain nothing.

Don't waste your sacrifice.