

THE SACRIFICES OF GOD

“O Lord, open my lips, and my mouth will declare your praise. You do not delight in sacrifice, or I would bring it; you do not take pleasure in burnt offerings. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.” (Ps 51:15-17)

Almost everyone knows someone who is suicidal. We are brought to such hopelessness by a wide variety of circumstances. One man was suicidal because his wife had left him for another man. Another friend chose to die by asphyxiation because he thought he was dying of cancer. During the Great Depression many chose death because they could not face financial disaster. Alexander the Great, it was said, took his life because there were no more worlds to conquer. The verses before us place a broken heart in a much different light. This passage teaches that our broken hearts can actually be given to God as a sacrifice. Rather than selfishly keep control of our lives with the ultimate act of egotism, let us offer our brokenness to God as the ultimate act of submission.

The scholars tell us that David composed this Psalm after Nathan rebuked him for committing adultery and murder. Lesser men would have killed the messenger and maintained control over their lives to the bitter end. This, as you know, is what many did with Jesus. David, by contrast, humbled himself before God in an exemplary way. He not only confessed his sin to God, he repented so completely that he never committed adultery again.

The passage before us taps into a rich vein of Biblical truth. The sacrificial system was never intended to be an end in itself, it was a means to an end. Loving parents often legislate some form of discipline for a disobedient child. We tell them, for example, to stand in the corner, or to write “I will not lie” a thousand times. Common sense compels us to acknowledge that these assignments were not the ultimate aim of loving parents. They were merely tools employed to achieve a much more noble goal. This is precisely why God gave commandments to His children. Paul states it succinctly: “The goal of the commandment is love . . .” (1 Tim. 1:5).

David, as you know, was himself a prophet (Acts 2:30). Other prophets said the same thing regarding the sacrificial system.

- **“For I desire mercy, not sacrifice, and acknowledgment of God rather than burnt offerings.” (Hosea 6:6)**
- **“With what shall I come before the LORD and bow down before the exalted God? Shall I come before him with burnt offerings, with calves a year old? Will the LORD be pleased with thousands of rams, with ten thousand rivers of oil? Shall I offer my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul? He has showed you, O man, what is good. And what does the LORD require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.” (Micah 6:6-8)**
- **“I have more than enough of burnt offerings, of rams and the fat of fattened animals; I have no pleasure in the blood of bulls and lambs and goats.” (Isa 1:11) “This is the one I esteem: he who is humble and contrite in spirit, and trembles at my word.” (Isa 66:2)**
- **Jesus said: “Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You give a tenth of your spices-- mint, dill and cummin. But you have neglected the more important matters of the law-- justice, mercy and faithfulness. You should have practiced the latter, without neglecting the former.” (Matt 23:23)**

But now let us face reality in our own lives! There are two totally different directions we can go when our hearts are broken and our lives are shattered by circumstances totally beyond our control. We can follow in the footsteps of Judas who lived a selfish life, and who died a selfish death. Or we can follow in the footsteps of godly men like Abraham, Joseph, Moses, David, Peter, and a host of others whose names are in the book of life. Please give your broken heart to God. This is the sacrifice He wants more than anything else!