

Series Recap: Altered by an Altar

Pastor has been talking to us about being Altered by an Altar. (He would spell it for you, but I have never been that great at spelling, so let me just expound.) To be altered—changed or transformed—by an encounter with an altar—a place of sacrifice and surrender. I thought we would look at that idea one more time this morning.

We have looked at various kinds of altars; from the ancient altars of the Old Testament where sacrifices were made as burnt offerings; to the Mourners' Benches—the altars where we offer ourselves to the Lord in repentance; to the Table of the Lord from which we take communion—that symbolic meal that helps us remember and celebrate the death and resurrection of Jesus on our behalf. All of these “altars” have some similarities. They all carry the idea of sacrifice—they are places of encounter, places of worship, places of remembrance and mercy.

This morning I want to talk about what happens after your encounter at an altar. What happens after you have been altered by an altar? The main text that I want to use this morning is what Pastor Jeff read to you a few minutes ago, **Romans 12:1-16** (Don't worry, I'm not going to read it again). It was really that first part of that first verse that caught my attention for this morning as I thought about the altar.

And so, dear brothers and sisters, I plead with you to give your bodies to God because of all he has done for you. Let them be a living and holy sacrifice—the kind he will find acceptable... -Romans 12:1

In this passage I think Paul is doing what Pastor Phil has been doing with this series for the past few weeks. Paul is urging the Roman Christians to find ways to lay down their lives for Jesus—and he does this by talking about “sacrifices” and “altars”. He says: “Let your life be a living and holy

sacrifice...” this is using the language and imagery of the OT to describe—what is for Paul and the Christians in Rome—a very new idea.

Let’s be clear—Paul is not talking about human sacrifice here. Paul is not suggesting that the churches in Rome build altars where some unlucky churchgoer will be sacrificed in order to satisfy God’s anger or thirst for vengeance. Paul is using the language of altars and sacrifice to talk about a very different kind of worship. Paul is not talking about dying for God...Paul is talking about living for God!

Because Jesus is the once and for all sacrifice offered for our sins on the cross, we no longer need a physical altar where the blood of sheep or bulls is spilled. Now we come and symbolically place ourselves on the altar by continually choosing to live in worship, obedience and service to God.

But the problem with “living sacrifices” is that they are always trying to crawl off the altar. If we are going to live in light of the altar—if we are going to be truly altered—truly changed and transformed—by our encounter with God at this pace of sacrifice, remembrance and worship, it will require the diligence to keep coming back—and not just on Sundays, but every moment of every day. So what does it look like to be altered by an altar in everyday terms?

This morning I suggest to you that a life surrendered to Jesus is a life of **worship**, a **transformed** life, and a life of **love**.

I. A life surrendered to Jesus is **A Life of Worship**

A. A story:

1. A long time ago I was a youth pastor, and one of the things that youth pastors do is go to youth camp. One year at youth camp I met a youth pastor who was new to the district. The first thing he asked me was “Are you radical!?” I think he was pretty disappointed with my answer when I told him “Not really.” I’m pretty sure he wanted me to say something

like “You bet dude! I’m so radical I make the 12 disciples look like atheists! Now let’s go set things on fire for Jesus!” Anyway, he wasn’t back to youth camp the next year...I guess we were not radical enough for him.

2. When I told one of my far less radical friends about this encounter, he had had a wise reply. He said “I’m not radical, I’m reasonable.” This is a reference to what we read in the Romans chapter 12...
 - a. *¹And so, dear brothers and sisters, I plead with you to give your bodies to God because of all he has done for you. Let them be a living and holy sacrifice—the kind he will find acceptable. This is truly the way to worship him. (the King James Bible translates this bit as “which is your reasonable service) –Romans 12:1*
 - b. Ever since then I think of this verse when I think about what it means to worship God. Since God has been so merciful to me...since God has so selflessly and wildly loved me... since God had taken such good care of me...it is reasonable for me to simply live all of my life as a sacrificial offering to God in a constant act of ongoing worship.
- B. For our purposes today we are going to think of worship in these terms—Worship is giving honor to God because of how worthy He is.
 1. A lot of time we tie “worship” directly to the singing that we do at the start of a church service—and that is worship, but worship isn’t only that.
 2. I suggest to you that you can live a life of worship by living your life in such a way as to intentionally please God because you are aware that He is watching you—rooting for you—and deeply invested in the outcome of your life!
 3. Worship should not be a forced thing.
 - a. We should not feel like we *HAVE* to honor God with our lives. We should feel like we *GET* to honor God with our lives!
 - b. God is not up in Heaven with a fragile and bruised ego, in need of constant support and reassurance through the worship of people! (That is actually a pagan ideal of the gods.)
 - c. God does NOT need you to worship Him, but God does want you to worship Him!

- i. God wants to reveal Himself to you. God wants to draw near to you. God wants to transform you into the person He always intended you to be—a person far better than you ever thought you could be!
 - 4. Because of who God is and how much God loves us, it is reasonable—it makes perfect sense—for us to live our lives with a constant awareness that God wants us to succeed and to live in such a way that we are actively partnering with God to live His way! This is worship!
- C. But why should I intentionally live my life in such a way that it pleases God? Why not live to please me, or my family, or my friends or any one of the countless other voices that call for my attention and loyalty?
- D. **We worship God because He is shiny!**
 - 1. Over and over in the Bible when people see God or Jesus in full-God form, what they see is shiny.
 - a. People are always covering their eyes or falling over like they are dead or being blinded.
 - b. They always fall down terrified because what they see is too much—too beautiful—too powerful—too real for them to handle.
 - c. They see God...and God is shiny!
 - 2. You are not shiny! I am not shiny! We are not shiny!
 - a. We are small and dirty and weak. We are broken and twisted and tangled.
 - b. Worship is the natural reaction of something not shiny when it encounters something that is shiny!
 - i. God is good and we are not good.
 - ii. God is big and we are small.
 - iii. God is eternal and we are just a vapor.
 - iv. God is wise and true and right and we are foolish and confused and lost!
 - c. We worship God—we live our lives with the opinion of God in mind because God is shiny and we are not!

E. We worship God because He loves us.

1. We purposefully live our lives in a way that pleases God because we know that God loves us and He is on our side!
2. God really loves you (in every sense of that word).
 - a. God actually loves you—He really does love you.
 - b. God loves you an astonishing amount—God REALLY loves you!
 - c. At your very worst moment, Jesus loved you enough to die for you!

F. We worship God because He cares for us.

1. That is, He takes care of us! God provides for us, guides us, protects us and helps us.
2. You can afford to intentionally live your life in such a way that it pleases God because you know God will take care of you when you do!
3. ³¹ *“So don’t worry about these things, saying, ‘What will we eat? What will we drink? What will we wear?’* ³² *These things dominate the thoughts of unbelievers, but your heavenly Father already knows all your needs.* ³³ *Seek the Kingdom of God above all else, and live righteously, and he will give you everything you need.* —**Matthew 6:31-33**

G. We worship by honoring God with our thoughts, words and choices.

1. Every time you choose to live God’s way instead of any other way you are worshipping God!
2. When you live out the choice of “God I will honor and obey you because I trust that your way is best” you are intentionally living your life in such a way that it pleases God.
3. **Praise Performance**—this is offering yourself as a living sacrifice to God—and it is your reasonable act of worship.

II. A life surrendered to Jesus is **A Transformed Life.**

- A. Paul goes on to tell the Christians in Rome:
- B. *Don’t copy the behavior and customs of this world, but let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think. Then you will learn to know God’s will for you, which is good and pleasing and perfect.* -**Romans 12:2**

- C. When you offer yourself as a living sacrifice on the altar of God, He gets to work transforming you from the inside out.
1. God is not satisfied to leave us the way He found us. He immediately sets to work cleaning us up, fixing us up and changing our thoughts and attitudes.
 2. God wants to transform us into a new people—into the people we were always meant to be.
 - a. God wants to set us free from all the brokenness and chaos of sin.
 - b. He wants to heal us from the hurts and fears that devastate our lives.
 - c. He wants to undo and unwind all the destruction and deception that we have fallen prey to.
 - d. When we surrender our lives to Jesus, He starts the process of transforming us...and as we stay surrendered to Jesus, He continues to transform us more and more.
 - e. He transforms us so that we can live His way—so that we can follow and honor God with all of our choices.
 3. But life is really complicated, and it happens so fast. How am I supposed to know how to honor God with all my choices?
 - a. I think that is what Paul means when he tells us that God will change the way you think, so you can know His will for you.
 - b. One commentary put it this way: God gives us “the capacity of forming the correct Christian ethical judgment at each given moment” (Dunn 714)
 - c. When you continually offer yourself as a living sacrifice to God, He will change the way that you think so that you will know how to honor God with all of your choices!
- D. Because of the Altar you can be transformed!
1. You don’t have to live that way any longer!
 - a. It doesn’t matter if you can’t remember ever being different...
 - b. It doesn’t matter if your family has always been that way...
 - c. It doesn’t matter if you have tried to change before...

2. You can have an encounter at the altar and be transformed forever!
 - a. It may take some time...
 - b. It may take several trips to the altar...
 - c. It may even be unpleasant at times...
 - d. But a life that is surrendered to Jesus is a transformed life, so if you are in need of transformation, then offer yourself to God as a living sacrifice and let Him transform you from the inside out!

III. A life surrendered to Jesus is **A Life of Love**

- A. In the last part of the passage we read this morning, Paul goes on to give some very practical instructions and directions to the Christians in Rome.
 1. I think this section could be summed up with the instructions—Love each other!
 2. And I think that love is lived out in 2 primary ways:
 - a. Fully engage in the mission of God
 - b. Wholeheartedly serve one another.
- B. **Fully engaged in the mission of God!**
 1. Paul instructs the believers to soberly and carefully evaluate where they fit in the ongoing mission of God to bring the life-changing good news of Jesus into the world so that people can be rescued and transformed.
 2. Paul asks: Where do you fit? What are you gifted at? How are you taking part in the mission?
 - a. Don't compare yourself to others—that only leads to jealousy and division. Just do what God called you to and do it with all your heart!
 - i. Can you prophesy? Then muster your faith and tell us what God is saying!
 - ii. Is your gift serving others? Then serve them well.
 - iii. Are you an encourager? Then be encouraging!
 - iv. Are you a leader? Then take that responsibility seriously and lead the way!

b. This is by no means an exhaustive list—there are countless ways that God gifts people for His mission to save the world!

3. So, if you want to live a life surrendered to Jesus, then the questions are still the same:

- a. Where do you fit?
- b. What are you gifted at?
- c. How are you taking part in the mission?

C. **Wholeheartedly serve one another**

1. I love what Paul says in verse 9... *Don't just pretend to love others. Really love them...*-

Romans 12:9

2. We should not be surprised that a life surrendered to Jesus will be characterized by love for others because the life of Jesus was so dominated by love for others.

3. I don't have time to really dig down into this, but when we offer ourselves as living sacrifices—when we live a life surrendered to Jesus—we can expect these kinds of things:

- a. We will hate what is wrong (9)
- b. We will delight in honoring each other (10)
- c. We will serve the Lord enthusiastically (11)
- d. We will be patient in trouble (12)
- e. We will be happy with those who are happy and we will weep with those who weep (15)
- f. We will live in harmony with each other and we will not think of ourselves as good to just share our lives with anyone (16)
- g. And we won't pretend that we know it all! (16)

4. That is just a partial list and I already have a lot to work on.

- a. So what do I do? I come to the altar and I lay my life down. I decide again that I will be a living sacrifice and I recommit myself to living a life surrendered to Jesus.

Conclusion (PJ)

So how are you doing at being a living sacrifice?

- If you have never surrendered your life to Jesus, I can't think of a better time to make that commitment than right now.
- A life surrendered to Jesus is a life of Worship:
 - Because of who God is and how much God loves us, it is reasonable—it makes perfect sense—for us to live our lives with a constant awareness that God wants us to succeed and to live in such a way that we are actively partnering with God to live His way!
 - Are you living a life of worship?
- A life surrendered to Jesus is a Transformed Life:
 - God is not satisfied to leave us the way He found us. He immediately sets to work cleaning us up, fixing us up and changing our thoughts and attitudes.
 - If you are in need of transformation, then offer yourself to God as a living sacrifice and let Him transform you from the inside out!
- A life surrendered to Jesus is a life of Love:
 - Are you fully engaged in the mission of God?
 - Find your place and serve God and His people!
 - Are you wholeheartedly serving others?
 - Is your life characterized with the same kind of love for others that we find in the life of Jesus?

Pray