

Practice of Sacrifice



Relevant Passages

- Luke 4:1-13
- 1 Cor 6:12
- Luke 21:2-4
- Luke 18:18-30
- Matt 6: 16-18;19-21
- Luke 12:14-21
- Isaiah 58
- Luke 9:25 - What good is it for a man to gain the whole world, and yet lose or forfeit his very self?

Sacrifice and Jesus

- The idea of 40 days of prayer and fasting relates strongly to Jesus experience of 40 days in the wilderness, which served as an important preparation for his public ministry (Luke 4:1-13). As shown in his three temptations, Jesus was tempted to:
 - Use his power for his own ends; to provide food for himself (v3-4)
 - Take the easy route to his goal; to short-cut struggle and difficulty (v5-7)
 - Try to force God's hand; to pursue fame and the dramatic (v9-11)
- As a result, we understand the priority:
 - To rely completely on the provision of God. To understand that the life that comes from him, from his Word, is more important even than food. That He is the one that clothes the lilies of the fields and so will provide, as we seek first the kingdom.
 - To trust that God's ways and God's timing is more important than the end result. That the worship and primary place of God should never be given over to the things we want Him to do. That suffering and struggle are not evidence that God is not around or not at work.
 - To trust that God will work out his purposes, and that he will work out his purposes in his time. That to try and force God's hand, to test Him may well be a sign of a lack of trust in Him.
- The Practice of Sacrifice, and the practice of fasting in particular, can help us to learn these things
- We live in this bombarded world, a world that places demands constantly upon us – buy this, spend here, have now pay later, Get bigger and better, Produce. Drive to succeed, push to make your life important and worthwhile. We are caught up with consumerism – the endless buy and sell, need and get. But Jesus ways are distinctly different, not least in His words: "Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it." [Matt 10:39].
- Here we have the basis for the practice of sacrifice. Noting of course that it is possible to turn even this into a commodity – we sacrifice for God, he gives to us. The same old consumerist transaction – spend what you have to, with the least amount possible, get the best bargain, to get what you want. But God doesn't necessarily want to give us what we want. He doesn't want the things / payments we want to give him. He wants us – our hearts, our lives – more and more oriented toward him. Trusting in him, centred on him. So that His life his resurrection life might be released in us, in His church, in His world.

- The practice of sacrifice then is about re-orientation, re-prioritising life, in the way of Jesus. From self to God, from needing stuff to needing God, from having to giving,

Thoughts from “Celebration of Disciples” - Richard Foster

- “God questioned the people in Zechariah’s day, “when you fasted ... did you at all fast unto me, even to me?” [Zech 7:5]. If our fasting is not unto God, we have failed. Physical benefits, success in prayer, the enduing with power, spiritual insights – these must never replace God as the centre of our fasting. John Wesley declared: “first, let it [fasting] be done unto the Lord with our eye singly fixed on Him. Let our intention herein be this, and this alone, to glorify our Father which is in heaven...” that is the only way we will be saved from loving the blessing more than the Blesser” [p48]
- “more than any other single discipline, fasting reveals the things that control us.” [p48]
- “how quickly we crave things we do not need until we are enslaved by them. Paul wrote “all things are lawful for me but I will not be enslaved by anything” [1 Cor 6:12]
- Fasting is a physical reminder that Man does not live on bread alone but every word that comes from the mouth of God.
- “the discipline of sacrifice is one in which we forsake the security of meeting our needs with what is in our hands” [p175]
- “Sacrificial Giving” - the poor widow of Luke 21:2-4 abandoned herself to God’s care as she gave sacrificially. She gave more to God with her two pennies than all the rich gentlemen writing out their large tax deductible check around her” [p175]

Attitudes

- Isaiah 58, particularly in The Message, demonstrates how it is possible to sacrifice and fast, but completely miss the point of gaining the heart of God towards people.
- What does it mean to be a “cheerful giver” [2 Cor 9:7]? What does it mean to practice sacrifice without looking sombre [Matt 6:16-18]?
- To practice sacrifice begrudgingly with a grumpy attitude, particularly in a way that causes us to treat others badly seems to provide no spiritual benefit!

Practices

- Have you ever had anyone come to you and tempt you with an offer that was hard to refuse?
- Fast from TV for a week.
- Do a treasure check of your life. Are there things that you prize too much? If you cannot freely give the treasure away, maybe it possesses you more than you possess it. Give it away and experience the freedom that come when you relinquish a treasure.
- Review your financial giving. Is there a way that God is challenging you to reflect his generosity more? Are you tithing?
- Consider how you might ‘fast’ from bad attitudes towards others [for example at work]. Make a choice in the morning to put aside the need to be right!
- Go on a media fast for 24 hours, and consider how the bombardment of information affects you.
- Fast food for one day this week [24 hours is meal-time to meal-time]. If that is not a challenge, fast for two days.