

## PRAYER AND THE WILL OF MAN:

### Part 4

#### *The Embodiment of Sacrifice*



Since April we have been talking about prayer and the will of man. In a somewhat unusual manner from the way that many ministers teach about prayer, we looked at our own divided natures, which can cause so many ripple effects when it comes to our service before God. We looked at the devastating effects this division has on nations and churches. We looked at our own divided perceptions of the Godhead and the effect that can have in every aspect of our lives. We then looked at the nature of sacrifice, which is worship, which is what prayer is (once you get past the petition level), which is praise, which eventually

encompasses everything that we do for God, as He requests. We looked at the reality that God desires food burned by fire (Americans, beware, Burger King does not cut it!). Briefly last month we talked about trial, rejection and persecution being a fire that can be used of the Lord to reproduce Christ in our surroundings. This month I felt led to discuss what embodies our sacrifice. In a nutshell it's the Word. The beverage company that makes the sports drink Gatorade runs advertisements of athletes in the heat of exertion. They paint a picture of the blue or orange or red Gatorade drink coming out of the pores of these athletes as they work out. Under the picture the slogan reads, "Is it in you?" In other words, if you are drinking their blue colored Gatorade, when you work out, it will come out of you. Everyone will be able to see the blue Gatorade running down your face. So often in my travels over the years as I've been in a worship service or listening to people pray or function in some other aspect of ministry, it will be hard sometimes for me to perceive that the word of God is what is coming out of them. Getting a sense of the embodiment of the word of God as it is poured out is not what hits you first. Not always, but on some occasions what I have heard resonates as hollow. Over the years I've felt that this 'hollowness' is evidence that the word of God has not been sacrificed within us and we have not been sacrificed for it. Let me explain what I mean.

I often ask myself a question. Why was it that as long as the twelve disciples (and Paul) were alive---those who had watched

Jesus walk the earth for three and a half years---as long as they were alive, the tendency toward a divided nature was kept in check in the church? It wasn't because they always understood their own transitions. When God called them to transition from Jerusalem to the uttermost parts of the earth, He had to send persecution (Acts 8:1). It wasn't because God never challenged them with new theological ideas. When God did so He used Paul to challenge every aspect of who they were. Yes, this caused them to lift their vision higher, and yes, this did cause some trouble---even to the point of Paul rebuking Peter in front of all the leaders present (Galatians 2:14). But they never ganged up on Paul, in an effort to excommunicate him so he would be forced to start a new church down the road. Instead they were willing to change. Yes, the change was hard, but they sacrificed who they thought Paul was, for who God said Paul was. They were always willing to be persecuted and suffer shame so that the resident word of God would be exalted. Why? It wasn't only the fact that they watched their Lord sacrifice Himself for the word of God. It was the reality that Jesus knew what the very word was, chose to embody every aspect of it, and then willingly offer Himself as the embodiment of that word. Willingly offer Himself to be misunderstood, resented, scorned and rejected, all to fulfill the word of God for His specific life. It's one thing to sacrifice for the word of God. In other words, I go out of my way to do what His word tells me to do. Some examples of this can be working in a church or visiting the sick or

imprisoned, going out on the mission field and ultimately, even giving your very life's blood for the cause of Christ. Jesus gave us those examples. But that was only one aspect of His sacrifice. The disciples experienced the other.

While Jesus was alive He embodied the Word. The word of the Lord that a virgin would conceive and bare a son was fulfilled in Jesus. Growing up as a youth, you can't tell me that Jesus' earthly father, Joseph, and Jesus' brothers and sisters understood this 'virgin's son' thing. I can imagine that the concept of their mother being a virgin and giving birth to Jesus challenged them. In order for them to understand their brother, they would have to be willing to believe Isaiah's word in its entirety. They would have to receive that word and allow it to embody their thoughts concerning Jesus. Eventually God would allow them to be tested to see if they really believed Jesus was who He said He was. We see the difficulty in the process that they went through in the gospel story. When his brothers tell Jesus to go to Jerusalem to make known His deeds, (John 7:1-5) it's almost a taunting remark. Something like, if you really are who you say you are, prove it! Of course, this was satan's goad when he tempted Jesus in the desert. (Luke 4:1-13) Eventually after Jesus' resurrection they are willing to not only embody this word, but sacrifice to it. At this point they are willing to suffer rejection and persecution because of what they know to be the impossibility of a virgin conceiving and bearing a son.

Sometimes I think we're a little like Jesus' natural siblings. The word God gives us is too incredible to believe. Like Sarah we may scoff at the possibility of it. Over time though, God allows this word to creep into our hearts. Maybe we rejected it because we didn't like the messenger. Maybe we initially rejected it because it spoke something about who we were that we didn't want to acknowledge. Maybe it was a deeper pride issue. Maybe we masked this pride issue by making our problem about the messenger. After all, if the messenger is 'wrong' the message is wrong and we are RIGHT! This is evidenced by the reaction of the Jewish leaders during Jesus' time. There was an ancient Jewish belief that when Messiah came He would perform four types of miracles. They are called the Messiah miracles. They are raising someone from the dead after 4 days in the tomb, healing someone born blind, healing someone with leprosy and casting out a demon of dumbness. The leaders send emissaries to go behind the scenes to watch what it is that Jesus does in an effort to verify these miracles. Were they confused by what they saw? Not at all. In fact it was so easy to understand that when they ask the soldiers who were sent to capture Jesus why they didn't take Him alive, the soldiers respond, never a man spoke like this man (John 7:46). What was the leaders' response? I'll paraphrase but they say, so you're fooled by this guy too? Their own desire for control and the need to be right about how 'wrong' Jesus was became a stronghold stumbling block. Instead of receiving their own, they tossed Him to the dogs. Does Jesus ever go

back to them and say, "Look guys, you got it all wrong. We're supposed to be in relationship. Here, let me show you the word of God and let me help you to realize who it is that has sent me and what He said I was to do." Could Jesus have done that throughout His life? Knowing all things, couldn't He have fixed this problem before it ever festered to the point of death? The reason why He did not is our best example of the embodiment of the Word of God. Satan will do anything He can to try to get someone who has this kind of resident word within them from sacrificing themselves as God has called them to---and I stress the phrase, "AS GOD has called them to." I do not mean to imply suicide or the need to cause strife or constant chaos in a situation (See the article archive for February 2003).

One year the Lord surprised me when I took one of my white minister friends into a culturally different ethnic Christian service. I was so accustomed to worshiping and praying for hours before the preaching began, that I forgot how different this is for many Americans. In fact, spending 5 to 8 hours in a church service is not that unusual. So the first time I took a minister friend to such a service, it was a real eye opener for both of us. I was invited to preach and minister that day, so I came into the service an hour later than everyone else. Intercessory prayer was still going on and worship had not yet started, so I felt as if I was right on time. As worship began my friend, who had been there from the beginning, looked at me in exhaustion and said, "That wasn't worship?" I said, "No,

that was just prayer. We'll go into worship in a minute." I could see an exasperated look on this saint's face. Immediately I realized that this was going to be a different experience for my friend. Worship went up and God came down. Two hours later we took the offering. I shared the word for about 45 minutes and then God just showed out and decided to show Himself strong. For about another two hours ministry to the saints was what we did. Some time later my friend turned to another saint that had come with our group and asked what time it was. Neither could believe that they had been in church for over 6 hours. As they shared with each other and me, one theme became apparent. Both of these saints were Godly people who ministered and sacrificed for Jesus. But both of them also realized that at some point in the service they were in the flesh. For one it took about two hours and for the other it was about three hours later that something broke in them and they entered into true worship. Both these individuals were full of praise at all times, so that when it was time to worship, they entered in quickly in their home church environments. Before this experience both of them would have told you that it didn't take them long to enter into the presence of the Lord. Frankly, I would have agreed with both of them, since I had worshiped with them almost every Sunday for a number of years. The shock of the reality for them was that once they went to the point of exhaustion in their flesh, was the point where God came to them in a whole different experience. They both commented that our habit in our churches of one hour of

worship is just not enough time to loose us from ourselves. For my part, I was surprised to hear them share this, since I would have bet with a certainty that my friends had had this experience before. Both these saints regularly attended 3 to 4 hour services. In fact, both worked in busy ministries all day long. But I began to realize that it was the intensity and fire of this service that they were not prepared for. It was the constant expression of word going up and glory coming down that surprised them (See Psalm 29).

My friends could have denied that God was dealing with them. They could have denied much of the word of God that was resident in this church. But if they had done that, they never would have seen a different aspect of themselves and they never would have seen God take them to a new level of worship. I thank God that they received this particular church and me as the gift of God that we were to them. During Jesus' time, many leaders denied the sacrificial gift that Jesus was. The disciples and the early church were also treated this way. Joseph was viewed this way by his brothers initially. David was viewed this way by Saul. Moses was considered the black sheep of his adopted Egyptian family, as well as not always being popular with the Hebrews (Exodus 32:1). Every single Old Testament prophet was either hated by many or murdered by all. I believe one and only one of the many reasons this takes place is because the 'God-word' in us is so unique to us and the situation we are called to deliver that it is not easily recognizable.

Oh, but when we do recognize and receive what God is saying and we are willing to sacrifice to it and allow that word to be sacrificed in us, an amazing thing takes place. We embody the word. When we speak that word and move in that word, it is God speaking and moving through us. It is this embodiment of the word, as we wrap ourselves around that word, eat, drink and live the expression of it to our communities that causes the fire of persecution and/or the fire of His glory to manifest. And it is that fire that consumes our flesh. Jesus had no flesh to consume, yet He had to manifest the resident word from the Father, "You are My Son, the Beloved! In You I am well pleased and find delight!" (See Amplified Version of Luke 3: 22) A more accurate translation could read, "You are My Son, the Chosen, today I have brought you forth." This harkens back to Psalm 2:7 and Isaiah 42:1. The understanding here is from the Hebrew Scriptures of God's son as Israel's king. But the reference in Psalm 2:7 has more to do with God bringing forth as the Father His deliverer, the Messiah, as Isaiah 42:1 refers to Him: ". . . my chosen, in whom my soul delights; I have put my Spirit upon Him, He will bring forth justice to the nations." At Jesus' baptism He is presented to the people with a resident word from God the Father and God, the Holy Spirit that empowers Him for service. Everything that Jesus experienced from then on in the world, by the hands of the religious, the secular and even His own family tried to tell Him that He was not who this word said He was.

The Word became flesh and dwelt among us (See John 1:1-18, KJV). This is always the purpose for the embodiment of the word of God. Every time God gives a leader or a saint in the body of Christ a resident word, the enemy will fight you tooth and nail to see that word aborted in you. Why? Because he knows as you offer yourself to God to be presented with the word and as you sow in faith and obedience to all that that word encompasses, you are presenting yourself as a living sacrifice. God will only alight on what is holy and clean as a sacrifice and only His Word in His people is what opens the door to the indwelling Holy Spirit. Isn't that what happened when you first believed in Jesus? You believed the word that Jesus died was buried and rose again because of your sin. You believed the word that when you received Him and believed with your heart and confessed with your mouth that Jesus is the Christ, you were saved. The Holy Spirit bore witness in your life that this was so. God now had an open door to come and sup with you and habitat in your environment. Christ is birthed afresh and anew on earth, in you. As you grow up in the knowledge of who God made you, you take back territory that was stolen by the enemy. When God Almighty alights on the sacrifice it is holy habitation. This is why we cannot pray what we want to pray. What we want is not always the word of God. But when God shows up and tells you what to pray, He alights on the sacrifice of prayer that you just presented and moves in that specific situation. When we offer a sacrifice of praise based upon who God is, not upon what the enemy or circumstances have done

to us, but based upon what God has done, is doing and what He is coming to do, He alights on that sacrifice. It is obedient faith. New Testament sacrifice is based on obedient faith in Jesus Christ, the Word. Nothing else qualifies. This is why we cannot sing songs or run a service the way we want to, but the way the Holy Spirit says to.

Why was it that David was able to recover all when destruction was always nipping at his heels? He believed the word that God gave him and by obedient faith, sowed or sacrificed to it. (1 Samuel 22:5, 10; 23:2, 4-6, 10-13) David is ready to give up when the Amalekite raiders take his wives and children, his men's wives and children and all that they have. In fact, his men were about ready to stone him (1 Samuel 30:1-6). But what does David do? He sacrifices to the Lord by refusing to give up. He gets a word from God and then sacrifices in obedience by going after this troop, though two hundred of his men are so exhausted that they have to stay behind (1 Samuel 30:6-10). Why is Satan so fierce in destroying David? Sacrifice is the love equation within the heartbeat of God. When God calls David a man after His own heart (1 Samuel 13:14; Acts 13:22), it is not only because David will fulfill all that is in God's heart for Israel, but because David was able to listen to God's heartbeat of loving sacrifice for His people. By faith David held onto things that pointed toward the sacrifice of Christ long before Jesus walked the earth. He took hold of the word of God by faith and obediently sowed and sacrificed to it

and was even willing to sacrifice himself and the promise God had given him to be king (See 1 Samuel 16:1-13; 1 Samuel 24; 1 Samuel 26:5-25). Satan knew the deliverer had to come from someone's lineage. When he sees David as someone who desires to embody a resident word of king and priest, sacrificing worshipper and sacrificing shepherd, Satan knows he is in trouble. Maybe, just maybe God will use this man to bring about the prophecy (See Genesis 3:15). At that point in time the enemy would do anything to prevent that from happening.

Let me say this to those of you reading this article: Maybe, just maybe all the hell and turmoil and difficulty you have been experiencing is because your enemy and my enemy, the devil, sees some awesome truth of freedom that is resident in you because of the word of God. The enemy sees that you are willing to or have already sacrificed to it and for it. Now all that remains is for God to alight on the sacrifice. It's at this point that the devil wants you to quit. It's at this point that he tries to unleash events and people around you to discourage what God has called you to be. He does this because he knows when you get free, you are going to take someone else with you. It's those of us in the body of Christ that realize that we are all in this together that the devil is the most afraid of. What word of God has been with you from the beginning that fills you with the passion of God and yet has brought you great sorrow and pain because over the course of time you have given things up for it and been willing to lay it down to see God exalted? This is what your enemy and my

enemy is fighting us over. I have good news for you. David overcame; Joseph was sacrificed and overcame. Abraham sacrificed Isaac and overcame. Jesus sacrificed all and gave us the ability to overcome (See Revelation 12:11). Stand firm, for God will not forsake you. He did not forsake David. He did not forsake Joseph. He never forsook Israel, Abraham's seed, no matter how ornery they were at times. Certainly we all know that God did not forsake His Son. Jesus will rescue you. If you need agreement in prayer, please let us pray for you. For those of you that have contacted us, we pray for God's destiny call on your life to be fulfilled. Log on next month for more.



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