

SACRED SACRIFICE by Pastor George Spencer
Presented at CrossRoad Church, Jacksonville Florida
Memorial Day Sunday, May 30, 2010

Video: "Blood Sacrifice"

An atheist is spending a quiet day fishing in Scotland when suddenly his boat is attacked by the Loch Ness monster. The beast tosses him and his boat high in the air, and opens its mouth, waiting for man and boat to fall.

As the man starts falling towards the open jaws of the monster, he screams out, "God! Help me!"

Suddenly, everything freezes in place. The atheist is hanging in midair, and a booming voice comes out of the clouds and says:

"I thought you didn't believe in Me!"

The atheist says: "God, come on, give me a break! Just seconds ago I didn't believe in the Loch Ness monster either!"

God says: "Well, now that you're a believer, I have to tell you that I do work miracles, but it's got to work for everyone involved, and it takes a changed heart, and I can certainly change hearts. What would you have me do?"

The atheist thinks for a minute and then says:

"OK, God, I believe in you, and if you can change hearts, then please have the Loch Ness Monster believe in You too."

God says: "So be it."

The scene starts in motion again, and the atheist is still falling towards the open jaws of the monster.

The atheist yells: "God bless me!" At which point the Loch Ness Monster says:

"Lord, bless this food which I am about to receive!"

As we see in the video "Blood Sacrifice", and in that joke, it seems that worship and sacrifice is built into our spiritual DNA, but what matters is WHO we worship and HOW we worship and WHY we worship.

People have worshipped things like totem poles and asherah poles, temples and obelisks and pyramids, animals of all kinds, and even people as gods.

But the Bible tells us that God does NOT demand the sacrifice of babies or children or women or men. The Bible also tells us, that as long as there are people, there will always be wars among us. And that means they will demand of us – and of those we love – a sacrifice to preserve life and liberty on earth.

In the book of 2 Samuel, Chapter 23, we see David at a time when he was a soldier. This is a flashback, a memory at the end of a list of King David's accomplishments, among which was becoming king by God's favor. David was a great king, but certainly not a perfect man. This is a memory from the time before he became the king. In this hodgepodge of events and people, there is a list of soldiers.

David has commanded armies of thousands of warriors, and among these are his thirty chief men, and among the 30 are a group called the Three Mighty Men.

Each has a different father and mother, yet these men are brothers-in-arms. Each is from a different tribe, yet they fight as one man. Each has a distinguished record as a brave warrior, proven in battle. And each is absolutely loyal to their commanding officer, David.

You remember David – this is the same David who killed the lion and the bear while he was just a boy guarding his father's livestock;

the same David who faced Goliath the giant without fear, of him or any man, because the only fear David knows is the fear of God;

the same David who God raised up to become the king of his people;

the same David who had his lover's husband killed so he could have the woman of his dreams, which turned out to be his biggest nightmare of his life;

the same David who made mistakes again and again, and yet, each time he had the humility to face his own pride and repent of his sins, and each time, he went on to honor God with his work and his life, until the day he died.

David is in one of his hideouts, the cave of Adullam, in order to escape from his enemies, the Philistines, who are hunting for him mercilessly. The Philistine army has even taken over his hometown of Bethlehem, where he grew from a boy to a man as the shepherd of the family, and the fertile valley filled with crops has been taken over, right at harvest time.

David is the original Robin Hood, and King Saul is the original King John. King Saul is hunting for David because the people love David for being their warrior hero who saved their nation, but the king is a jealous king, and he has declared David an outlaw.

So here's David hiding out from his enemies and his own king, and they want him dead.

David is hanging out in this cave, with his Three Merry Men – not Little John, Will Scarlet and Friar Tuck, but Josheb, Eleazar and Shammah. He's there with his 30 chiefs, and along with them, over 400 fighting men.

They're from different tribes with different customs and different ways of doing things, they speak different languages. They're dirty and they're bloody from fighting. There's no toilets, no hot running water, and they're there for who knows how long, in a cave.

Now this must be a huge cave, like Carlsbad Caverns in NM, or Luray Caverns in VA, Mammoth Cave in KY, or Meramec Caverns in MO – a huge cavern big enough to hold over 400 soldiers.

Well, yes, it can, because I Samuel 22 tells us that the 400 men who joined David there were in distress or in debt or discontented. And then to make it even more worse, David's relatives show up!

Does your life look and feel like this sometimes? Just when you think you can't take another thing, something worse happens.

David is with his loyal soldiers on this day, and maybe they're talking about home and maybe they're remembering back to the good old days, when things were different. When things were simple and uncomplicated and free.

And David says: "Oh, what I wouldn't give for a taste of the water from the well at Bethlehem."

Now do you think he was being serious? He was probably serious about wanting to be out of the situation he was in. But you know how we do that sometimes. We look back on our life, and we say: Oh, what I wouldn't give to go back to (name the place).

Oh, I remember when I was a kid and things were so simple then...

Or you say to your wife or husband:

"Hey honey, remember that little apartment we had when we got married, and things were so simple, and we were happy;"

"remember that little 2 bedroom house that we lived in, where our babies were born, and things seemed so simple."

"remember when our kids were little and how much fun they were, and they weren't teenagers...and they didn't know how to mess up their lives yet..."

"remember when we didn't have to deal with mortgages and credit cards and loans and all the stuff we think we need and have to pay for now just to keep up the image, cause we're afraid of looking like losers to our friends...."

Or remember when the times when you were working so hard in hot weather and you're so thirsty, you said: Man, what I wouldn't give for a cold Coke or Dr Pepper right now..."

So David is with his men, and he says something like: 'Oh, what I wouldn't give for some of that water from the well in Bethlehem. That was the best water in the world!'

The three mighty men are listening to him talking, and they're loyal soldiers. You can almost see them look at each other, nod to each other, shrug their shoulders, get up and head out.

And they're probably thinking: Anything to get me out of this cave!

Now imagine them silently sneaking out of the cave, under the cover of darkness, and sifting down through the trees and the brush, down the mountain into the valley where the Philistines are camped.

The Bible says they break through the enemy lines. They get to the well of Bethlehem, which is near the busiest part of town, the gate of the city.

Can you see them lowering the bucket, bringing it back up, and pouring the water into the wineskin they brought with them. They take the water and they make their way back through the enemy lines, up the mountain, through the trees and the brush, and into the cave, where with great ceremony, they present the water to David their leader.

And what does David do with the water he's been longing for? The Bible says "...he refused to drink it; instead, he poured it out..."

Now I'm thinking: WHAT! What is he DOING?

What is he THINKING?

And what does he say to his men?

"Uh, well, thanks guys, but I prefer a mocha latte!"

"Oh, thanks guys, but I need to replace my electrolytes, so I really need the Gatorade Frost Riptide Rush."

Do you remember when you gave your ALL for somebody? You worked your hardest to get the water, poured it into your best canteen, and gave it as a gift to someone you loved or respected, and they dumped it out.

You poured your whole being into that relationship, into that man or that woman, and they just dumped you out.

You poured yourself into that job, or into that project or into that person or into that group or into that school or into that church or into that marriage.... For 2 years or 10 years or 30 years – and they dumped you out. They didn't even appreciate your sacrifice – or you.

All the time you spent and the effort and the money and the blood, toil, tears and sweat, and the hard work, and the long hours, for days or weeks or years...and for what? What a waste!

My husband, my son, my daughter, my father, my mother, my grandfather, my uncle, my cousin went off to war, and for what?

That's what I'm thinking as I'm reading this, because most of us want to give our very best for someTHING and to someONE who is worth giving our best for.

But then, there's this little phrase tacked onto the end of the sentence.

"But David refused to drink it, instead....he poured it out....BEFORE THE LORD. Another translation says: He poured it out TO THE LORD!

David pours out the water of Bethlehem as a worship offering to God. And then he says out loud, so that all his men can hear:

¹⁷ "Far be it from me, O LORD, to do this! Is this not the blood of men who went at the risk of their lives?" Another translation says: "Shall I drink the blood of the men who went in jeopardy of their lives?" And the Bible says again: "And David would not drink it." He gave it up to the Lord.

Don't you wish somebody would appreciate your sacrifice like that? Don't you wish somebody would have recognized you like that? Don't you wish somebody would honor you for what you did?

Well, somebody does. God does. It's not wasted when you offer it to the Lord your God as a worship offering.

God invites you to:

1. OFFER YOUR BEST TO GOD AS A SACRIFICE TO HONOR GOD.
(2 Samuel 23:13 – 17)

Now there are three difficulties with this. If you're new in your faith, this is hard because God is invisible, so we don't get a big ceremony where God presents us with a framed certificate of appreciation, and tells us in a booming voice how grateful He is!

The second may be our doubts raised by the question: Will God REALLY honor my sacrifice? I tried and tried, and after all I've done, and it seems like it was all for nothing. Look around! Who cares? Who really cares? And then we stop caring too, because a little piece of our heart and our soul dies, when we're not appreciated for who we are and the sacrifice we've made.

And the third is that we may not even believe that what we do makes any difference anyway. But it does. It makes a difference to God. And it makes a difference in the world.

But a lot depends on your attitude towards God and towards life.

What God promises is what He says in **I Samuel 2:30** – "...Those who honor me, I will honor."

God will honor you when you....

2. OFFER YOUR WORK TO GOD, BECAUSE GOD IS YOUR BOSS. (Colossians 3:23-24)

Paul writes in **Colossians 3:23-24**: **“Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, AS WORKING FOR THE LORD, not for men, since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving.”**

Colonel Roger Wujek of the 932nd Medical Group at Scott AFB in Illinois wrote this article called Building the Cathedral. He writes a variation of a time-honored story of a man who was observing three stone masons who working on a church. They were working chipping chunks of granite from large blocks.

“The first seemed unhappy at his job, chipping away and frequently looking at his watch. When the man asked what it was that he was doing, the first mason responded, rather curtly: “I’m hammering this stupid rock, and I can’t wait ‘til 5 when I can go home.”

A second mason, seemingly more interested in his work, was hammering diligently and when asked what it was that he was doing, answered, “Well, I’m molding this block of rock so that it can be used with others to construct a wall. It’s not bad work, but I’ll sure be glad when it’s done.”

A third mason was hammering at his block fervently, taking time to stand back and admire his work. He chipped off small pieces until he was satisfied that it was the best he could do.

When he was questioned about his work he stopped, gazed skyward and proudly proclaimed, “I...am building a cathedral.”

Three men, three different attitudes, all doing the same job. Col. Wujek goes on to say: I realized that when I come to Scott AFB, sometimes I come to sign papers and clear out my never-ending email box.

Sometimes when I come here, I talk to people and do my job as a group commander flying this desk. But every so often, I have to step back, take a breath, look at the big picture, reflect on my role in our Air Force, and proclaim that I am defending freedom.

I may not be the one in the front line; I may not be the one firing the guns or plotting the war plan. But, much the same as the masons working on the granite, I am a vital and integral part of the National Strategic Agenda, to spread freedom where it does not exist and to defend it where it does...

...Defending freedom is what keeps me coming back and keeps me energized to do the very best that I can.

When I look at my role in this process, it is clear that I am not the designer of such an edifice, or the planner of its execution, but without me, and more importantly, without each and every one of you, our fundamental right to freedom would not be possible.

Peace is not the absence of war, but rather the freedom to do what we want, when we want and worship in the manner we choose (or not at all)--freedom to come and go, and live and love, without fear."

In the Bible, God honors His faithful people and fulfills us, as we work for the Lord, sometimes it's visible, sometimes invisible; sometimes on earth, sometimes in heaven. God blesses us in the invisible ways with healing, with peace of mind, the opportunity for a new job or a new life, with escaping from being killed or escaping a tragedy, and with the assurance of salvation, so that we aren't afraid to die.

With David, it's loyal friends, escape from harm, and being raised up by God to become king to protect God's people, and to lead them into prosperous times.

And sometimes it really is a literal inheritance. God tells David that David will not build the temple so that people can worship, but his son Solomon will build the temple.

Thirdly, you....

3. OFFER YOUR WORK TO GOD, TO MINISTER TO GOD'S PEOPLE. (Hebrews 6:10)

Hebrews 6:10 says: "God is not unjust; He will not forget your work and the love you have shown Him as you have helped His people and continue to help them."

There's the often told story which came from the writings of Loren Eiseley who was a scientist and a poet. He tells the story of a man who often went to the ocean to do his writing.

Every morning he walked on the beach before he began his work. One day he was walking along and far down the beach, he saw a human figure moving like a dancer.

As he got closer, he saw that it was a young man and he wasn't dancing. He was reaching down, picking up something from the beach, and very gently throwing it into the ocean.

As the writer got closer, he called out: "Good morning! What are you doing?"

The young man looked up and said: "I'm throwing starfish into the ocean."

"Why are you throwing starfish into the ocean?"

The young man said: "The sun is up and the tide is going out. And if I don't throw them in, they'll die."

"But don't you realize that there are miles and miles of beach and starfish all along it. You can't possibly make a difference!"

Without a word, the young man bent down, picked up another starfish and threw it into the sea, past the breaking waves.

He turned to the writer and said: "It made a difference for that one!"

The writer didn't know what to say, so he turned away and walked back to the cottage to begin writing.

All day long as he wrote, the young man on the beach came to mind. He tried to ignore it, but the vision coming back.

That night he went to bed troubled and restless. But when morning came, he knew he had to do something. He got up, put on his clothes, and raced down the beach.

The young man was there, and with that young man, he spent the rest of the morning throwing starfish into the ocean.

What he realized is that the young man had made a decision not to just be an observer in the universe but to do something to make a difference.

God has given you and me the ability to be starfish throwers, only with people.

Each one of us has been gifted with the ability to make a difference in the world, just by being who we are, with the talents God gives us, and offering them in worship, working as to the Lord, when we make Jesus Christ the Lord of our life.

Each one of us has been gifted with the ability to make a difference in the world. And if we can, whether we're younger or older, you can grab onto God's vision and do something to make a difference, even in one person's life.

Yes, it's a sacrifice. It's a sacrifice of our selfish wants and our selfish desires, for something far more fulfilling - the vision that God promises to give you.

God says in Joel 2: "I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your old men will dream dreams, your young men will see visions. Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days."

That's your challenge and my challenge. It's to find our well of Bethlehem. It's to find our starfish on the beach.

Finally, that's why God invites you to....

4. OFFER YOUR BEST TO GOD, BECAUSE YOUR SACRIFICE MAKES YOUR LIFE SACRED. (John 12:1-8)

In John chapter 12, we're told that:

¹Six days before the Passover, Jesus arrived at Bethany, where Lazarus lived, whom Jesus had raised from the dead. ²Here a dinner was given in Jesus' honor. Martha served, while Lazarus was among those reclining at the table with him. ³Then Mary took about a pint^f of pure nard, an

expensive perfume; she poured it on Jesus' feet and wiped his feet with her hair. And the house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume.

⁴But one of his disciples, Judas Iscariot, who was later to betray him, objected, ⁵"Why wasn't this perfume sold and the money given to the poor? It was worth a year's wages." ⁶He did not say this because he cared about the poor but because he was a thief; as keeper of the money bag, he used to help himself to what was put into it.

⁷"Leave her alone," Jesus replied. " It was intended that she should save this perfume for the day of my burial. ⁸You will always have the poor among you, but you will not always have me."

When you and I are willing to pour out our self, our work, and our life as an offering to God, God will take the years of your wasted life, and restore you and restore your life IF you will offer your heart, your soul, your work, your marriage, your family, your relationships, and your wasted years - God promises to take your sacrifice and make it sacred and restore you.

God promises to because you're working AT your job, not FOR your job, because ultimately, you're working FOR God, FOR your family, FOR your loved ones, and for God's Kingdom to come on earth, because God is your real boss. So you do your work as working for the Lord – you do it with God's peace, with God's strength, with God's joy, until God makes it clear that it's time for you to go, because you're working for God.

Even when the relationship ended, the marriage failed, the job evaporated, the one who served faithfully died suddenly – and it seems it was all for nothing – God promises to be faithful.

God says to his disciples in the book of Joel 2: 25–27

"I will repay you for the years the locusts have eaten—another translation says: "...I will restore to you the years that the locust has eaten... You will have plenty to eat, until you are full, and you will praise the name of the LORD your God, who has worked wonders for you; never again will my people be shamed. ...Then you will know that I am in Israel, that I am the LORD your God, and that there is no other; never again will my people be shamed. And afterward, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your old men will dream dreams, your young men will see visions. Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days....And everyone who calls on the name of the LORD will be saved..."

What ultimately happens is that God will honor your faithfulness, as God honored David's faith, David's worship, David's offering of his life to fight for his country, David's offering of the water from the well of Bethlehem, David's offering of repentance of his many sins, and David's offering of his life to serve God.

That's how much God loved David, and how much God loves you.

God loves our soldiers, sailors, airmen, Marines, Coast Guard, National Guard, and all other special and armed forces who guard us and other nations yearning to be free.

But it's not just heroic actions in times of war that God honors.

It's the sacrifice that you make in everyday life that makes who you are – and what you do – sacred.

The single mom who sang God's praises in 2 languages last Sunday at the Global Day of Prayer, with the voice of an angel, so that all the people there would know that God is faithful.

The loving wife who was looking forward to travelling when she and her husband retired, but a stroke and other medical issues makes her life a life of caring for the man she loves, which she carries out with dignity and godly faith.

The man who is dodging IED's and suicide bombers, working with the government of Afghanistan to create a tax system based on our American one, which is not perfect but is still the most honest and fair system in the world, and who has increased revenues by 50% because of his hard work training people in the financial values set up by our Christian forefathers, and by building those godly values in a Muslim country.

Another man who is also in Afghanistan working in an ordinary job for a civilian contractor, to provide for his family, and by so doing, he is supporting our troops who are doing the fighting, so that we and other nations may kept free from terrorism.

There are men whose wives have died, and yet, they visit the graves, and they volunteer here at church or at a hospital or at a seniors home, still trusting in God to be with them, until one day they will see their beloved brides in heaven.

The pastor and his wife who offered their marriage to God to provide an adoptive child with a home and a family.

The young woman who not only donated a kidney, but donated life so that her brother could live.

And the husband and wife, the single mom, the single dad, and the grandparents raising their grandchildren, who work at it every day, some having given up their own dreams, so that their children or grandchildren may have their dreams, and that in a world filled with pleasure-oriented selfishness, our children and grandchildren may know the meaning of true, godly, self-sacrificing, unconditional, giving love.

By now you may have guessed that these people I'm talking about belong to God and they're your spiritual brothers and sisters here at CrossRoad. They belong to God, and so do you.

When you're willing to offer your heart and soul, and the sacrifice of your work and your life to God, God makes you and your life sacred. And you will be blessed and you will be a blessing, when you offer your work and your life as a sacrifice of praise to God.

Thank you for honoring God in the ways that you have.

Thank you for honoring the dead and their sacrifice of life and love and family, so that we could live and love and worship today in freedom.

Today God invites you to make a commitment to pour out your work and your wasted years to God, as a sacrifice of praise so that God can honor you and restore you, with salvation and new

life, and a new you, redeemed and renewed by the power of God's Holy Spirit, through our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

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Many of you requested the name and author of the poem read during the Memorial Day prayer, so it is printed below.

The history of this poem can be found at arlingtoncemetery.net/flanders.htm

In Flanders Fields

By: Lieutenant Colonel John McCrae, MD (1872-1918)
Canadian Army

In Flanders Fields the poppies blow
Between the crosses row on row,
That mark our place; and in the sky
The larks, still bravely singing, fly
Scarce heard amid the guns below.

We are the Dead. Short days ago
We lived, felt dawn, saw sunset glow,
Loved and were loved, and now we lie
In Flanders fields.

Take up our quarrel with the foe:
To you from failing hands we throw
The torch; be yours to hold it high.
If ye break faith with us who die
We shall not sleep, though poppies grow
In Flanders fields.