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## THE BIG PRESENT Romans 12:1

The Christmas season is upon us, and we all know that means it's gift giving season. Yes, there certainly is some commercialization of Christmas, but I view thing a little differently. I love the gift giving of the Christmas season. I have two reasons for doing so. The first is that giving gifts speaks directly to the real meaning of the season. Christmas started with a God so full of love and mercy and grace that he gave the gift of eternal life at a cost to himself that is beyond human calculation. We give gifts as a reminder that God gave us the most precious gifts one could ever receive. The second reason I love giving gifts is simply that it gives me the opportunity to express my love to those I care about most. It gives me an excuse to be kind of extravagant in loving them. As a kid of course Christmas was all about the presence you would get. But as a grown up I find I enjoy getting gifts but I get a far greater joy out of giving them. I always feel pressure at this time of year but the pressure isn't that I have to meet some great expectation from any of the people that I love. The pressure is I want so badly to give them a gift that will blow them away and communicate to them how deeply I love them.

Laurie and I were talking recently about memorable Christmas gifts we've received. Specifically we were thinking of the worst. The best I've ever gotten was when I was in college and my parents surprised me with a car. The worst was toilet paper. I like toilet paper. In fact I shudder to even consider not having it. However, what does that say when someone gives you toilet paper for Christmas? I can't say it made me feel loved and appreciated. I'm pretty sure I can do better for Laurie than toilet paper and I know I'm not going to give her a car, but really hope to give her something that has the impact and message closer to the car than the toilet paper. Unfortunately I've already gone through plan A and plan B, neither of which will work, so I'm on plan C, and I don't know what that is. This means I am forced to get creative in order to find a good gift for her. One possibility I considered is a 7 foot tall model of Robbie the robot from the classic sci-fi movie *Forbidden Planet*. Someone has created this large model of the robot featured in that movie. It sells for a very reasonable \$32,000! Maybe I should pass on that one. Since the new Star Wars movie is going to come out in less than two weeks I thought perhaps something Star Wars themed might be appropriate for her. I'm sure you've noticed that there are Star Wars products and merchandise pretty much everywhere

you look these days. One that caught my eye as a toy put out by Hasbro. It is a Mr. Potato Head that looks like Darth Vader. It's called Darth Tater.

Maybe that won't do either. Have to keep looking. However we all face a greater challenge than buying a gift for Laurie. God started the giving at Christmas. Doesn't it make sense that we ought to give him a gift as well? But talk about the problem of getting a gift for the man who has everything, what are we supposed to give God? Psalm 24:1 says, "the earth is the Lord's, and everything in it." God has everything because everything on the earth already belongs to him.

The next three Sundays I invite you to take a look along with me at God's Christmas list. We're going to look at some verses from the Bible that talk about what God would like us to give him. In our family usually we gave several smaller gifts, but each person got one big gift. This is the big gift that God wants from us. Everything else comes from it. The first of those verses is Romans 12:1.

#### GOD'S MERCY IS THE STARTING POINT

Paul opens this chapter with the words, "therefore, I urge you brothers and sisters, in view of the mercy of God." Right off we take note of the word therefore. That immediately tells us that Paul is referring to something he has written before this chapter. He is drawing a conclusion based on what he is written in the previous 11 chapters.

The Greek word that is translated "in view of" could also be translated "because of," and that's how I think it should be translated here. Paul is about to tell us something that God wants us to give him. But before he does that he gives us one last reminder of why we should do it.

How important is it that we understand what Paul is talking about when he refers to the mercy of God? Consider this. In Paul's day writing materials were extravagantly expensive. You couldn't just go down to Office Depot and buy yourself a ream of paper for a few dollars. I gag every time I have to buy ink for our printer. I find myself thinking what's the deal here? Is this stuff made of gold or something? How is it that I'm faced with the choice of either paying my mortgage this month or buying an ink cartridge, because they cost about the same? However the price of ink Paul's day would have made those absurdly priced ink cartridges look like a Black Friday bargain.

I bring this up because prior to writing the words that we are considering today Paul had written 11 chapters describing the mercy of God. This was not a Cliff

Notes version of God's mercy. When you consider how much ancient papyrus and ink Paul burned through to write down that description, what do you conclude? I would conclude that he considered that particular topic to be supremely important. Yes it was extraordinarily expensive to write as long a description of God's mercy as he did, but he considered it worth it because of how crucially important it was that we understand the mercy of God before we ever attempt to obey the command that he's about to give.

What is the mercy of God? Romans 3:20 says, "no one will be declared righteous in God's sight by works of the law." Though at first glance you probably wouldn't think it that verse addresses the fundamental issue of life for human beings. The issue is how can we be declared righteous? I know you're thinking only a pastor would think that being declared righteous is the fundamental issue of life. You are probably thinking that might well be the dumbest thing you've ever heard. Most people would say that maybe that's something that really religious people seem to care about, but it doesn't even make their top 100 list of life's biggest concerns.

My response to that is that they're wrong. They don't understand what it means to be declared righteous. That verse that I quoted is addressing the issue of being approved. That's what it means to be declared righteous. It is getting the stamp of approval. And that is something that every human being is desperate to receive. It is a motive that drives us every single day and is present in almost everything we do. If you don't get that approval you are being told that you are a reject, you are a waste of DNA, you are worthless. How do you think that would feel?

Every human being, without exception, is striving every day of his or her life to try to somehow prove that he or she is worthy. In other words all of us in many varied ways are striving to be declared righteous. Most of the time we are confused about how we get that stamp of approval and who gives it to us. We usually think that we get it from other people. But the effort to be declared righteous or approved by other people has some significant flaws. The first one is that trying to impress other people and get their approval is exhausting and frustrating. It can literally drive us insane. But another flaw with it is no matter how much approval we get it's never quite enough. You can get all the approval in the world and somehow you will find that there's something missing. You still feel like you need approval from someone else. That means if you go the approval from other people route you are going to spend your entire life sprinting on a treadmill getting nowhere and never reaching the desired destination.

On Thanksgiving day we went to the home of Michelle and Luke Hitchcock, our niece and her husband. When we arrived their two young children were watching the classic television show Rudolph the red nosed reindeer. It occurred to me that that show speaks to the human condition. There is a theme that shows up in several places in the show. Poor Rudolph, with his glowing red nose he simply did not fit in. They didn't let him join in any reindeer games. Can you relate? Most of us feel some kinship with Rudolph. Rudolph teams up with an Elf named Hermie. He doesn't fit in with elves because he doesn't want to make toys, which is what elves do. He wants to be a dentist. Eventually in their travels they land on the island of misfit toys. Here they encounter a whole community of reject toys that don't measure up. There's a toy cowboy who rides an ostrich instead of a horse. Who wants that? There's a jack-in-the-box who is named Charlie. Who wants a Charlie-in-the-box? There's a toy train that doesn't move because it has square wheels.

Do you get any message from all of that? Everybody in this story is a misfit. When we try to find approval from other people we are always going to end up feeling like all those characters in Rudolph. Everybody feels like a misfit. If everyone feels left out who is included? No one! We feel that sense of having been excluded, left out because for whatever reason we were not given stamp of approval. If you try to find that stamp of approval, in other words try to find some way to be declared righteous, through the approval of people that will be the inevitable outcome.

What we long for is to be declared righteous, to be approved, by someone clearly with the authority to grant such approval. But who is that person? Is it a parent? Is it a coach or a teacher? Is it some celebrity? Is it the president of the United States? No, you can get the approval of any of those people and you will find you have the same problem. It's not the final approval that you're looking for. Something will still be missing. The approval you are looking for is from God. God is the ultimate authority. He created us and he rules over everything so only he has the ultimate right to declare who was righteous and who is not in his eyes. In the end, his approval is the only one that really matters. It matters for our own sense of peace right now, and it matters for our eternal destiny.

Unfortunately that's where we encounter the problem identified in Romans 3:20. That verse tells us that no one will be declared righteous by God through works of the law. Without going into all of the theology behind that statement let me just sum up what the phrase "works of the law" means. Works of the law means gaining approval the old-fashioned way, by earning it.

That's how we typically think we're going to get God's approval. People know that their lives are going to be graded. They try to get away from that idea but somehow they know that it is going to happen. Will they meet the standard that gains in the stamp of approval and says they were indeed worthy, that they are declared righteous? Typically that comes down to a sort of crude calculation of does my good outweigh my bad?

Romans 3:20 is really bad news for people. It answers that question with a resounding no. No your good does not outweigh your bad, and if you're trying to earn approval that way you're going to fail miserably. How do we know that? Paul went on to write in Romans 3:23, "all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." Oh, so there's the standard. It's the glory of God. What does that mean? Again without going into all the theology let's just sum it up by saying that means you have to be as good as God is. Well how good is God? He is absolutely 100% pure good. He has never had and never will have even a slightly off thought. He has never done anything wrong and never will. There is no hint of evil in him, there is nothing but pure true good. That's the standard. How do you measure up?

If we think that we can earn approval from God by just trying harder for an end up on the island of misfit toys. We to will be worthless rejects cast aside in a tragic land. That's where the mercy of God comes in. Romans 3:22 says that God has provided a righteousness through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. In other words, God looked at us and saw that we were hopelessly failing to meet the standard. On our own we were not righteous and we never would be. Instead of just declaring us worthless and throwing us on the scrapheap, which is what we deserve, God has made a way for us to be declared righteous. We gain that incredible gift through doing something that is possible for us, and that is to simply believe that in Jesus Christ he has done for us what we could not do on our own.

That is what Paul meant when he referred to the mercy of God. It is absolutely essential that we remember the mercy of God. We are thinking about what God wants us to give him. What does he want us to do? The reason that we seek to give him what he asks is because of the mercy of God. In other words the motivation for obeying the command that were about to look at is simply because we long to thank God for what he is already done for us. We don't do this to meet the standard. We don't do it to try to get him to like us or to keep liking us. That issue has already been decided by his mercy and nothing can change it.

Why do I make the effort to try to come up with some gift for my wife? Is it because I want to try to get her to love me? Is it because I know if I don't she will

be angry with me and will make life miserable for me? Is it because it's what I have to do to earn her acceptance? No it's not for any of those reasons. She has been and continues to be the greatest blessing I have ever had in this life. She loves me continually in a way that I simply do not deserve. I want to give her a gift because I simply want to respond to her love and to let her know how thankful I am and how much I love her. I give gifts to her because of her mercy given to me. That's why Darth Tater just won't do. And that is why we seek to give to God the gift that he desires from us.

If we ever lose sight of the fact that our only motivation is to respond to the mercy of God, to love God back because he has loved us first, to thank him for his grace that he is given to us, then we will find ourselves inevitably back on that treadmill trying somehow to earn approval. And it will kill our souls.

### BEING A SACRIFICE IS THE GOAL

What, then, is the gift that God wants us to give him? Paul tells us that what God desires from us is that we would present our bodies to him as living sacrifices. A couple of words leap out at me when I read that statement. The first is sacrifice. That was a concept that was very familiar to ancient people, especially to ancient Jewish people like Paul. At that time bringing sacrifices to God was a central feature of the Jewish religion. But sacrifices were not exclusive to Judaism. They were common in the religions of many cultures of that day.

So Paul and his readers were quite familiar with what happened to a sacrifice. That animal, be it a lamb, a goat, a bull or a dove, and a life. Perhaps it had dreams or plan for its life. When it became a sacrifice all of that came to an end. No more dreams, no more plans, and no more life. I think about our recent Thanksgiving feast. We had a salad, green bean casserole, mashed potatoes and gravy, stuffing, and some delicious rolls. That means some lettuce plants gave up some of their leaves for our salad. Some green bean plants gave up their beans for our casserole. Some wheat plants gave up some of their stocks to produce flour that became our rolls. But we also had turkey. That turkey did not give up a few things, it gave up everything. It didn't contribute. It sacrificed so that we could have our feast. Many of us think what God wants is for us to contribute. He wants us to sacrifice, and not just some things, but our very lives.

In our minds the most common use of the term sacrifice is that someone gives up a few things and works hard to sacrifice in order to accomplish some goal for himself or herself. That is not the kind of sacrifice that Paul was referring to. A living sacrifice to God gives up everything. A living sacrifice says, "I have no

more plans of my own. I have no more independent dreams of my own. I have no more independent life of my own. I now live only for God's plans and God's dreams. My life belongs to him."

The second word that jumped out at me was the work bodies. Why did Paul tell us that God wants us to offer our bodies to him as living sacrifices? I think Paul wanted to make his instruction very real to us. He wanted us to understand that he was talking about being a living sacrifice in the real world. He wanted us to sacrifice intangible and physical ways. This is not just some theoretical exercise, it has to do with how we live every day of our lives.

What do you do without your body? I can dream and think and imagine things. No, you can't. In order to think and to dream you must employ your brain, and that's a part of your body. That means that it too including how you think and how you dream, is to be offered to God as a living sacrifice.

Let's suppose that on my next day off I offer my body as a living sacrifice to my wife. What would that look like? Well, I would start the day by saying to her, "today I will do whatever you want me to do. I exist today only to fulfill whatever wished you have for me." She might say, "oh this is great! Let's start with you cooking French toast for breakfast for me and then cleaning up all the dishes after we have eaten." No problem, I get right on it and make the French toast. This is something of a minor sacrifice for me because if we're going to have something in the French toast category for breakfast I would prefer waffles or pancakes. But that doesn't matter because I'm a living sacrifice to my wife. Then she might say, "I would like you to vacuum the house and when you're done I want to go shopping. I would like you to buy for me whatever clothes and jewelry I like. I would like you to cheerfully sit by as I try on 43 different outfits. When asked, offer a thoughtful opinion." Because I offer my body as a sacrifice that means I involve all of it, including my thoughts and emotions, so that I am to cheerfully participate in the clothes shopping. She might tell me that she would like me to watch exactly 0 sports on television. And when we got home in the evening after I had taken her out to a romantic dinner as she requested, she might say that she wants me to watch the latest Hallmark Christmas movie with her. Even though from my perspective this might put me in jeopardy of having my man card revoked I willingly and cheerfully watch that show with her. That's what it means to be a living sacrifice to my wife.

If I ever did that because I felt obligated to do it, that would be one arduous and long day as I trudge through those duties. But if I am more thankful to her than I

can express, if I love her so much I am thrilled to have a chance to express it, then it becomes one joyful opportunity after another to serve the woman I love.

To be a living sacrifice to God means much the same thing. It means that when I get up in the morning I have one thing to do, and that is to do what ever God tells me to do. I have no other plans, no other agenda and no other dreams, because I exist to do only what he says.

Jesus best exemplified what it means to live as a living sacrifice. In Philippians 2:7-8 Paul wrote, “he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant and being made in human likeness. Being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.” Jesus sacrificed more than we can possibly imagine. Just living as a human being was a sacrifice so large that is beyond our ability to comprehend. But he didn’t stop there, he even went to the extreme of dying on the cross because it was the father’s will. In John 8:28 Jesus said, “I do nothing on my own but speak just what the father has taught me.” At the end of verse 29 he said, “I always do what pleases him.”

I find it interesting to consider what this produced in Jesus life. He continually mystified people because he almost never did or said what they expected. In his book, *The Rest Of God*, Mark Buchanan wrote, “he lived with the clearest and highest purpose. Yet he veered and strayed from one interruption to the next, with no apparent plan in hand other than his single, overarching one: get to Jerusalem and die... Jesus wasn’t available, or not, according to some oblique logic all his own. He had it in her ear for the father’s whispers.”

One moment Jesus seems as though the lack of wine at the wedding was not any of his concern, and the next he’s miraculously turning water into wine. He refuses to turn stones into bread, but later he happily turns a kid’s happy meal into enough food to feed thousands of people. At one moment he’s not going to go to Jerusalem for the feast, and shortly thereafter he decides to go. At one point at the request of someone who had a loved one near death Jesus instantly traveled with him to heal the person, and yet when one of his best friends was at death’s door he waited for days before going to visit when it was too late. Or at least it seemed to be too late. Jesus lived moment by moment following the father’s direction.

## THERE IS REASON TO SACRIFICE

We are called to give up control of our lives. This command lays before us the challenge of no longer doing that which seems irresistible to all human beings, and



that is to live for ourselves. We don't like the idea that we should live for someone else. Yet this verse calls us to give up self totally and live for God. Why should we do this? There are two reasons.

Romans 12:1 says, "this is your true and proper worship." Previous translations said things like, "this is your spiritual service of worship." But the Greek word that Paul used it is translated in our NIV Bible "true and proper" was the word *logikos*. It is the root of our word logical, and that's pretty much what it meant. This is your logical response to the mercy of God. This is what makes sense. How is it logical?

Suppose for sake of illustration that you have made some horribly bad decisions. Imagine that you thought that you could make yourself independently wealthy by buying and selling real estate. You ended up getting yourself desperately over leveraged. You build a real estate portfolio that suddenly turns out to be an anchor tied to your feet when you're trying to swim in deep water. It's going to pull you under and you're going to lose everything. In desperation you follow some poor decisions with a much worse one. You decide to try to take the cash you have and turn it into enough money to dig you out of your hole by gambling. Instead you lose it all. In fact you don't just lose it all you now find yourself in debt to an unsavory bookie who threatens you with bodily harm. And now you double down on those horrific decisions by coming up with a scheme to embezzle money from the company that you work for in order to pay off the bookie.

Now in this disastrous scenario let's imagine that your boss discovers what you have done. You are kicking yourself because now you realize that you are very likely going to end up in prison. Instead your boss does something unfathomable. He refuses to press charges against you, and instead he pays back on your behalf all the money that you have embezzled, he pays off your gambling debts, and he gives you enough money to get out of the real estate hole that you have dug for yourself.

You are astounded. You cannot believe that your boss would go to such lengths to save you from your own folly when you absolutely did not deserve it. What would you want to do in response to his amazing grace? Would you take him to McDonald's and buy him a big Mac to say thank you? I suspect you would do a lot more than that. I would imagine that you would give him your undying loyalty and service for the rest of your life. What would be your attitude if he said, "I hate to do this to you, but just this week could you come in on Saturday to do this extra project?" Would you say in a curt and grumpy tone, "No way, dude, you're not paying me enough to work on Saturday?" I certainly hope not. You'd gladly do

anything for him. What God has done for us is more costly and more astounding by far than what the boss in that story did. It is only logical that we would respond by giving him our undying loyalty and service.

But there is also a second reason why we should be living sacrifices. Romans 12:2 says that if we are living sacrifices to God we should not be conformed to the world and if we do that we will be able to test and approve what God's will is, then describes his will as is good, pleasing and perfect will. So Paul claims that God's will is not only good, it is pleasing and is perfect. In other words if we do God's will we will discover that is a pleasing thing for us.

In other words do God's will because it's good for you. Uh oh. When somebody tells you to do it because it's good for you, what do you expect? I'm not gonna like it. Nobody has to say you should eat a jelly donut because it's good for you. I realize doughnuts aren't good for you, but the bigger point is that you don't have to be talked into eating a jelly donut. They taste good. When they tell you to do something because it's good for you that inevitably means it's hard, painful or it tastes bad. So when we read you should be a living sacrifice because you will do God's will and it's good for you is it that kind of thing?

Let's remember that God loves us like a father. Imagine that my children had come to me when they were young and said, "oh daddy, we love you so much. We see how much you care about us, and so we will happily do whatever you think we should do." Do you suppose that I would gleefully rub my hands and say, "Great, I have been waiting for this, so now you really going to get it?" I can absolutely guarantee you that is not what my reaction would have been. My heart would've been warmed and I would've said to my children, "I am going to do everything I can to make sure that you have the most blessed life possible." I would only have one to do good for them and everything that I told him to do would have been because I knew it was what would bring about the best possible life for them.

Don't you think that God loves us at least as much as I love my children? He loves us infinitely more than I love my children. So what that means is by offering ourselves to him as a living sacrifice we are choosing that bring about our best. We will find his will which is indeed good and pleasing and perfect.

#### APPLICATION

#### VIEW EVERYTHING THROUGH THE LENS OF GOD'S MERCY

The word sacrifice according to Webster means "the surrender of something prized or desirable for the sake of something...having a higher or even more pressing

claim.” This verse calls on us to give ourselves as a sacrifice. We are the highly prized thing we are surrendering, and we are to do it for God’s sake. We are to give up ourselves.

Whenever you sacrifice, give up something, for someone else it will always be for one of 3 reasons: You are trying to use that person or get something from him or her. Or you are trying to appease that person who might otherwise be angry with you or do you harm. Or you are full of gratitude and love for that person, so full that you cannot stop yourself from serving them. You would do anything or give up anything for them.

Many Christians look at commands like “be a living sacrifice” and they think in terms of one of those first two motivations. Either I’m going to convince God to give me something or I’m afraid if I don’t do this he’ll hurt me. Which of those motives is the strongest? In the short run it can be one of the first 2. That’s why you may see feverish activity from Jehovah’s Witnesses who are operating out of those motivations. But in the long run it is that last one. And that last one is the only one that is actually love. The first two are self-service, and therefore are part of the system that has produced all the evil in the world. What God desires is that we operate always out of that last motivation. That’s why he leads always with giving to us and loving us. That’s why he leads with “the mercies of God.” That is why we must always make that the foundation of all that we are and all that we do.

### GIVE THE GIFT OF YOU

The natural state of the human heart is to evaluate every situation at some bottom line level with the question, “what’s in it for me?” We are called by this command to have a radical and revolutionary approach to life. Now the only question for us is “what does God want me to do?” That’s what we choose to do regardless of how it might affect us.

As we rise in the morning the one thing we will hope to do that day is serve God, to do and to be whatever he wants us to do. Interruptions won't bother us because God has allowed them, calmly we simply ask God how he wants us to deal with them and how we can honor him in them. If we find that some cherished goal is not going to happen we embrace that loss with cheerfulness, knowing that God has something else for us to do, and serving him is what we really care about. When someone disappoints us or even hurts us our only desire is to respond however he would want us to respond.

One evening years ago Laurie and I were on vacation staying at a Marriott Hotel on Maui. We were walking along the sidewalk in front of our hotel when we encountered a security guard driving a golf cart making his rounds. He stopped and we began chatting with him. It turned out that his name was Frank and he was a former New York City police officer. He had first come to Maui for his brother's wedding years before. He said he didn't really like it much, but his brother loved it. Sadly his brother was killed on 9/11. His brother's widow wanted to bring his ashes to Maui and so Frank went along for a memorial service there. And it was on that trip that he realized what a beautiful place it is. A couple of years later he was offered the opportunity to retire from the police department with a pension. He jumped at the chance and moved to Maui. He has enough income to live on but he works part time as a security guard to give him something to do. His job supplements his income a little, but mostly he lives the easy life in the tropics.

I was a little envious. He's living the dream. Most of us have dreamed of being able to just chuck it all and go live the good life in the islands. He's doing it. But as we talked I noticed that while he insisted that he was loving life, there was almost an air of desperation about him. It was obvious his life was empty of meaning. He was trying to fill it with something, but in the end it was just empty.

Frank had arrived at the place that we will all get to when we just live ourselves. God's will is good, pleasing and perfect. It produces a life that is full and has meaning. So present yourself to him as a living sacrifice. What God wants most of all is your undivided love. He wants you to love him with all your heart and all your soul all your mind and all your strength. So give it all to him and tell him that each and every day your one priority is to do whatever he says. Curiously when we give up serving ourselves and live as sacrifices for God we get what we've wanted all along. We have acceptance not because of our service but because of his mercy and we have a life that is meaningful in everything thing we do and is full.

### KEEP ON GIVING

At some point in our lives we have to make the decision about what we're going to live for. What will our lives be about? Will we live for ourselves or will we be the living sacrifice that God has asked us to be? Hopefully we will make the right decision and give ourselves to him. Unfortunately we can make that decision one moment and take it back the next.

On another occasion when Laurie and I were on vacation we went to a church that had a few difficulties. The bass player in the worship team kept having all kinds of problems with the sound system and after a couple of songs he finally gave up, set

his guitar down and just walked away. The worship leader kept rambling between songs and seemed to have no idea what he was trying to say. At one point he confirmed that. After he had been talking for several minutes he said I don't know exactly what I'm trying to say here. Well duh. We figured that out a long time ago. Then the pastor got up and gave a long sermon that had something to do with forgiving others, I think. Honestly his talk was awfully disjointed and I kept trying to figure out what he was trying to say with very little success. He finally got to the end of the sermon and announced that he was going to close in prayer. I thought that was a good idea. So he began praying. He prayed for a good 15 minutes. And then he paused in his prayer and asked if we were willing to commit ourselves to obeying the call God had just given in the sermon. The only problem for me was I had no idea what the point of the sermon was. He was asking me to commit to something but I didn't know exactly what and he didn't tell us. So Laurie and I just sat there looking like rebellious heathen as people all around us stood up. He had announced that no one would be looking around to see who stood up but I knew that wasn't true because I was looking around. As I sat there looking at all those people unsure what they were committing to, it hit me that whatever it was their decision to stand there that morning actually didn't count for very much. If they were serious about obeying God they were going to be tested. They would have to choose in the heat of battle whether to stick to their commitment. That's true of any commitment we make to God.

My point here is you can decide this morning that you are going to be a living sacrifice and that's good. If you do I'm going to ask you to stand. Just kidding. If you decide that or if you have already decided it in your life which I suspect you have, I guarantee you that your commitment to do that will be tested within the first hour after church in some way.

That is a choice we will have to make over and over many times every day. But I will remind you of this, it is worth it. For if you will make that choice you will find that the will of God is good, pleasing and perfect.