

## Series: Marks of a Transformed Life

VBC  
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Romans 12:1  
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### “Worship that Pleases God”

#### **Introduction: Greet and Welcome**

We will continue in our series: Marks of a Transformed Life, and specifically one that authentically worships God.

Now when I say the word worship, even in this room we probably have a variety of different views or understandings of what worship is. Try explaining what worship is to a friend, it's hard to do. I bet the majority of us in here would start with something related to music or a song.

I believe we have this tendency to confine or limit our worship of God to be something that is only done here in this building on Saturday night or Sunday morning. Even worse, some in our American Christian culture have confined worshipping God to music, or the songs that we sing. Now I believe worship through song is an integral part to the life of the church today and it is an awesome and powerful way we can worship God, but the key question here: Is worship limited to just song?

Even in how we speak of worship, I wonder if we really understand what we are saying. Every once in a while I will be in a conversation with someone after the service and they will say, “I loved the worship tonight; we need to have more worship opportunities like this.” This could be intended as a positive comment, but my concern is that they are limiting worship opportunities to just music. Sometimes I have heard people say “I couldn't really engage in the worship today, the songs weren't really the songs that I like.” There is definitely something wrong with this statement and a richer understanding of worship will shed light on this.

#### **SIGNIFICANCE**

Worshipping God seems to be an essential piece to what it truly means to be a follower of Christ. As a church we believe that we were created to worship, and throughout Scriptures we are commanded to worship, because the heart of worship is pleasing our God, bringing honor and glory to Him. Therefore, it is vital that we know what pleases Him...and worship is so much greater than these things that we confine it to.

So tonight we are going to spend some time diving into how we can please God with our worship today. During this time some of you might be challenged, others encouraged, but

my goal here is for us to be a church unleashed to worship God with all that we have. My hope is that God will speak to us and change us to become greater worshipers of Him.

Let me pray before I open the Scriptures.

## **PRAYER**

(Read Out Loud)

I am going to read this: Therefore, I urge you brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God – this is your spiritual act of worship.

I want to walk through this verse phrase by phrase. In doing this, I believe the apostle Paul will teach us vital aspects of worship that pleases God.

### **- Therefore, I urge you brothers, in view of God's mercy -**

The very first word, "Therefore", implies there is something before this we need to know about. Therefore, means "as a result of" and we know it has to do with something of God's mercy; it is in light of God's mercy. So I want to give us some background for this letter to the Romans, and what is happening before chapter 12.

## **BACKGROUND**

At this time in the 1<sup>st</sup> century, Rome was the center of the world. The gospel of Christ has spread to the city and there was gathering of both Jewish and Gentile believers of Christ. The Jewish believers claimed that they had more rights than the Gentile believers and because of their entitlement; conflict was growing in this early church. Paul hearing of this conflict writes this letter to the church in Rome, and as you read through this book you can see the theme of equality between the Jew and the Greek jump out.

- Chapters 1 and 2, Paul teaches that all of humanity rebelled
- Chapter 3 – no one is right before God, and all have sinned,

Now listen in the following chapters how the mercy of God and His saving work is highlighted.

- Ch 4 – Salvation is for ALL people who have faith in Christ
- Ch 5 – Life through Christ is for ALL people
- Ch 6 – Sin's power is broken for ALL people
- Ch 8 – There is victory for all people in Christ
- Ch 9 - God's mercy is on both Jew and Gentiles
- Ch 11 – Gentiles are welcomed into the family of God

Now we arrive at Ch 12, and Paul says, because of all this, in light of God's mercy... worship God. Paul has spent the previous chapters teaching this young church how God has revealed Himself to the world, His graciousness, His love, His redeeming works, and because of all this things you must worship God.

So what does this first tells us about worship?

Paul shows us here that **Worship is a response to God – is it a response to who God is, what He has done, and what He will do.** Paul, in his letter to the Roman believers, has shown them the character of God; he has told them what God has done for them, and what He will do. He then calls them to worship in response to these things.

This is consistent with the rest of Scriptures regarding worship.

- We see in the Exodus story, that God acts by saving his people from Egypt through the Red Sea, and the people respond in worship
- Even the Psalmist in 92, 111, look at the work of God's hand and respond to him with praise and adoration. They look at creation and are in awe of his deeds.
- Over and Over again, God reveals himself, through his character, His works, or His promises and worship follows, it is the response to what God has done.

#### EXAMPLE

- Isn't this true in our own lives as well. When we see God act in our lives, or when we are reminded of His character, his grace, don't we want to respond by worshiping Him, by pleasing Him?
- or maybe you see His working your life, restoring a relationship, and because of what He has done, you respond in praise to Him.

#### PERSONAL EXAMPLE

For me the most recent and clear time of responding to His work in my life is when I received the news that my beautiful wife is pregnant. I will fall short of expressing how excited I was when I found out. I was filled with joy, and amazement. And even now, being several weeks of processing this I am still amazed at how God works. That there is this little human being growing inside of my wife. I am overwhelmed at the creative nature of our God and because of that I respond to Him in thanksgiving and adoration and worship of who God is.

Worship of God springs from gratitude for God's undeserved love and grace, it is the response to what who is and What he has done..

#### URGE

But here's the thing... as much as we would like to think that worship is a natural response, to God revelation... it isn't. Here Paul has to urge the believers in Rome to worship God. This word, urge, is to plead with them, to exhort them to worship God. It is something that they had to be reminded of, and Paul is pointing them back to what they should do because of what God has done. In the same way we have to be reminded to worship God.

Think about this... isn't this true... I mentioned before when you are driving down the road and you see a sunset... but there are many times when my friends who are not followers of Christ can be driving down the same road see the same sunset, and choose not to give thanks. So with my example of having a child, we do not naturally worship God, we have to willfully choose, we have to take heed to Paul's urging.

It is not something that comes easy or natural to us, but it is something that we willfully choose to do, in response to what God has done for us.

Paul goes on to tell us of the response he wants us to take.

Let move forward in this text.

He says,

**- to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God -**

Now, I don't know about you, but I grew up hearing this passage whether it was in Sunday School or Youth Group as the reason for not smoking, or drinking. It was the verse that was used for being sexually pure, and doing right behavior with your physical body. And although some of those things are true, I think Paul is calling us to something far greater than just physical purity.

Let's walk through this phrase.

Paul is calling us to offer our bodies.

## **BODIES**

When Paul uses the word body, he is not just speaking about the physical body, or the physical stuff that we are made up of. His use of this word body is better understood as person. Paul knows we are more than just physical beings, we are more than just our arms and legs and our organs. The physical is included, but we also are talking about one's heart or desires, mind or thoughts, and one's whole personality. So when Paul uses this word body, he is talking about all that you are as a human being. This is what Paul is calling us to offer, all that we are.

And most of us know this inherently, that there is more to us than just this flesh and blood.

We are to offer our whole person as a living sacrifice.

## **LIVING SACRIFICES**

What in the world does that mean to be living sacrifice? At first glance this phrase can be kind of alarming and confusing. We have to remember that Paul was speaking to both Jewish and Greek people who were both familiar with animal sacrifices. With the Jews this speaks directly to the form of worship in how they offered animals to God. But here's the thing, the Greeks were also into offering animals as a part of their worship. In fact the early Christians were looked at strangely both by the Jews and the Greeks for not offering animals and even some accused the Christians as being atheist because of their refusal to offer sacrifices and other things. But for the follower of Christ, there is no need to offer an animal sacrifices for worship, because Christ is the ultimate and final sacrifice. Therefore

Paul is calling us, our whole persons to live as worship as we interact in this world, this is what it be a living sacrifice.

As we offer our whole person as living sacrifice, it is to be Holy

## **HOLY**

Here is where I think people stress the blameless aspect of Holy to talk about the physical purity. But I believe holy is better understood as set apart for a purpose. Other places we are called to be blameless, but here Paul is calling us to be set apart. We are to be set apart from the rest of the world

And it is to be pleasing.

## **PLEASING**

As we offer our whole person, it is supposed to bring pleasure to God.

Now how does this bring pleasure to God? How will offering our whole person be pleasing to God? What does this look like? In order to answer these questions, we must look to what God intended us to be at creation, for that is what pleases Him.

## **IMAGE OF GOD**

So we turn to the creation account in Genesis and we see this great and glorious God, creating, bringing life and light into existence, bringing order out of chaos, and beauty and goodness into existence.... He creates, the sun and moon, trees, and all the living things.

But then we arrive in vs. 26 and God says "Let us make man in our image, in our likeness." In this phrase we see that humanity is specifically set apart from the rest of creation. It is uniquely different from all that was created before is created in God's image. But what does it mean to be created in the image of God? Obviously it doesn't mean we are exactly like God in that we are all powerful, or all knowing.

There is a lot of discussion about what exactly the image of God is, but it seems this passage helps us understand this as we look at the rest of the verse. God sets apart humanity, creating them in His image to rules over, or to care for the rest of creation. Just as an image reflects or represents the object that it is imaging, God is placing humanity as His reflection to the world. As God's image-bearers, humanity is to make visible, the invisible characteristics of God.

God intended humanity to a lesser degree, to be like Him - to be creative, to bring order out of chaos, to bring beauty and goodness around them, to relate, and love, and think, like Him. Therefore to image God, is to make His invisible characteristics, known to the rest of creation. That as humans lived here on the earth they were to reflect and reveal his presence in the very way they interacted with the rest of creation.

## **MIRROR STORY**

I am going to tell the story again in light of this.

(Covered mirror on right that represents humanity as God's image bearers)

## **CREATION**

In the beginning, the invisible God, the one that is supreme, creates... He brings beauty and light into existence. He creates the world, all that is in it... the trees and the hills, the living things in the air, sea, and land.

(Uncover mirror)

Then God, this invisible being, creates humanity to reflect his image into the world. Now, this image is nothing, compared to Him, but he has set humanity apart, making them holy, in order that they would reflect his invisible characteristics to the world. That as they lived, and interacted with each other and the rest of creation, their whole person all that they were, would make Him known. He commanded them to be fruitful and multiply, that they would make more image-bearers, and that they would fill the earth making His presence known throughout all of his creation. And God saw this, and He said "It was good." He was pleased, with what He has made. His creation, especially humanity, brought him pleasure.

## **STORY OF SIN**

As the story goes on... what happens to humanity. For some reason, something that is so hard to fathom, humanity rebels against God... and sin enters into creation. (break mirror) What God intended for humanity is broken.... They are no longer able to fully reflect Him to creation; they are broken beings... no longer set apart for Him... and no longer bring pleasure to Him.

(Move to left, where Christ mirror is covered)

## **STORY OF CHRIST**

Fast forward thousands of years and we arrive at a unique time.

- John the Apostle tells us that the Word, who was God, became flesh and dwelt among us. God came down in the form of man – John 1
- Paul tells us, that this Christ, is the image of the invisible God – Col 1
- The writer of Hebrews teaches that – the Son is the exact representation of God's being – Hebrews 1

(Uncover Christ Mirror)

Christ came in as the exact representation of God, the new image bearer of God, not broken but perfect. There is one on the earth now, who can make visible to the invisible characteristics of God and make His presence known to creation.

## **CONFORMING US**

After His resurrection, Christ then invites and enables us to be like Him, to become new.

- He is calling all who follow him to be born again – John 3
- Paul teaches that all who are in Christ are a new creation - Gal

Those who follow Him although they are broken, are being restored into His image, back to what God originally intended.

- Paul teaches the Corinthians that we are being transformed into His image
- Paul commands us to put on the new self which is the image of the Creator (Col 3)

And even in Romans 8:29 – Paul teaches that He predestined us to be conformed to the image of His Son. God planned to Restore us back to being image bearers of Him in Genesis 1.

(BACK TO PULPIT)

So coming back to the verse at hand in Romans 12,

Could it be that Paul is implying that our worship response to God's mercy is that we offer our whole person as living sacrifices, to be revealers of God, just like what He intended at creation.

Could it be that Paul is calling us here, to be like Christ, who came and in his whole person, revealed the character of God as He lived and interacted with the world?

It seems to me Paul is saying **that our worship reveals God.**

In this passage Paul is calling us to respond to God's mercy.

- We do this through offering our whole selves, all that we are as humans, to be revealers of God like in Genesis.
- We do this as living sacrifices, that we move outside of what we have confined worship to, and reveal God as we interact with the world.
- And this is holy, because we are set apart just as it was in the beginning.
- And this is pleasing because this is what God intended in the first place.

And this is done because of God's mercy.

So what does this look like on a practical level, in real life...

Well let's move on in the text.

Here is the last phrase

**- this is your spiritual act of worship -**

First the word spiritual

SPIRITUAL

- Paul is simply saying that this is the kind of worship that is truly spiritual,
- This type of worship is reasonable
- This is the kind of worship that simply makes sense.

And lastly, we focus on the word worship.

## WORSHIP

The Bible uses two main words when speaking about worship. The most prominent word that is used, in the Greek translation of the Old Testament it is proskuneo. We get our English word, prostrate from this. It means to bow down, in reverence, or in humility. It is a word that describes a dog that kisses the hand of the master. This word conveys the idea of bowing down prostrate, lowering one self before the other. Over and over again, it is used throughout the Old Testament.

As we move forward into the New Testament, the Gospel writers continued to use this word, proskuneo. This is the most prominent word used for worship, throughout each of the Gospels.

## (DISAPPEARS)

But here's the interesting thing... after the gospels, this word, proskuneo to bow down, virtually disappears and doesn't show up again until Revelation. The most prominent word that is used for worship in the Old Testament and the Gospels disappears from the teachings of the apostles. It is gone. What in the world is this about? Why is the main word for worship, throughout the Old Testament, and in the Gospels, gone when we arrive at the birth of the church and during the church age? Then it reappears in Revelation,

Now this word, proskuneo, to bow down, is closely tied with the presence of God. In the Old Testament, the presence of God was present throughout the Wilderness and in the Tabernacle, and ultimately in the Temple. That is where the people worshiped... they bowed down before the presence of God. In the Gospel, the presence of God is the presence of Christ, and the people bowed down before him in worship. At the end of the Gospels Christ ascends to heaven, only to return in Revelation, where Christ comes back, and people bow down in worship of Him.

## WORSHIP SHIFT

In the time between his Ascension and Return, the focus of worship shifts. The most prominent word, proskuneo takes a back seat and a new word comes to prominence. It is the Greek word, latreuo or latreia. This word means to serve, or to minister for God. It is found in the Greek translation of the Old Testament and it associated with the priest ministering, working, and serving the people or God.

The significance of this is that during the time of the church, the time that we are in now, the focus of worship shifts to the act of serving one another. This is huge! The primary way that the apostles view worship is to serve others. The primary way that we should view worship is to serve.

## SERVE

Here in Romans 12:1 this is the word used for worship, to serve. Paul and the rest of the apostles are calling us to worship God by serving others.

Therefore **we** are to **worship God by serving others**

To Paul the focus of worship is to serve. The focus isn't singing, it is serving. Why serving? Serving is the greatest way to image God. God's invisible characteristics are reflected, they are made most tangible through service. Your service brings order out of chaos, it brings beauty out of destruction, it brings goodness where there is need.

Think about this... if Paul is calling us to offer our bodies, our whole person, to image God to the world, to make God known to the rest of creation... that our worship is to reveal God, then how is God revealed in a person's life?

Or another way to ask this is: What is a practical way of being the image of God, reflecting God to another person?

It is through serving them. Through your service, they can see the character of God. Through your service, you display the love and grace of God. Through your service, they see God.

This is why Christ says, in Mathew 5:16, "Let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds, your service, and praise your Father in heaven." Throughout the New Testament, we are commanded to take care of the poor, to take care of those who are in need, to minister to one another, for this is worship that pleases Him. In doing these things we reveal God to the world, we image Him to world.

Let me give you an example of this...

#### **Ex – Lebanon –**

For me most recently I had the opportunity a couple weeks ago to go with the team to Lebanon. One of the things we did was serve Iraqi refugees who are living in Lebanon. These families are fleeing from the war that is happening in the home land... they left everything they owned there and now have nothing. They are unable to have legal jobs, so they are looking for any way to make money to feed their families and survive. We partnered with an organization, and served them by giving them food and basic supplies. This organization is seeking to reveal God to them by their service. Here is a chaotic situation, and they are striving to bring order. This organization is trying to bring in goodness, where there seems to only be devastation. These Iraqi refugees will say their lives have been destroyed, yet because they are being served, they see beauty amongst their destruction. We had the opportunity for a short time to reveal God to them by our service to them.

Now you don't have to go around the world to worship God by serving others. And there are people here at Village who are doing this.

- Think about New Orleans, or Vernonia, and the flood in Iowa. Both places of chaos and destruction, but because of people who worshiped God by serving others, they are bring in order, beauty, and goodness, showing the love of God, to people who need it.
- Maybe its going to the Rescue Mission, or Giving Blood

- Maybe you see someone in need, and you serve them through, baking them something, giving them something, teaching them something,
- Maybe you just see someone hurting, maybe you serve them by just listening to them, by caring for them, and through this you are revealing Christ to them.
- Maybe there is someone on your street who is elderly, or sick, who can't do their yard work, maybe you serve them by cutting the lawn.
- The point is that there are so many ways to do what Paul is calling us to do in the passage... But the key is that we understand and do it as worship to God. There are so many ways to worship God by serving others and thus revealing Him to the world.

This is the worship pleases Him.

### **RECAP**

So let me just retrace out steps a little bit and come back to what Paul is teaching in this passage.

- **Our worship is a response to who God is, what He has done and what He will do.**
- **To offer our whole selves in worship is to image Him, to reveal God to others**
- **Lastly, we worship God by serving others.**

Please don't misunderstand me as not valuing our worship that happens here. There is great value in what we do in this place. For we gather as a community here. It is the place where we are reminded of God's mercy, of who He is and what He has done for us.

- Our songs declare His character, and tell of what He had done. Worship through song reminds us of His love and grace, and we humble ourselves before Him
- By partaking of the Lord's Supper, Paul teaches that we are proclaiming His death, we are rehearsing the story of redemption and celebrating Christ.
- When we open His word, and are being challenged to be more like Him.
- Even In this place, we have so many opportunities to worship God by serving one another, by caring for each other, by displaying God's grace to one another. When
- What we do in this place is very important; it is vital to us as a community, and vital to us as individuals.

But we must not, and can not neglect what God is calling us to do outside of this place, to worship Him with all that we are, thus revealing Him to the world.

Our worship in this place, should fuel, should enhance, and strengthen, our worship outside of this place.

Understanding this and living it out, is a mark of a transformed life.

### **INTERVIEW**

Instead of hearing more from me, I want to ask a Villager to come up and share his journey of how he has learned to worship God through service.

### **ASSESSMENT**

Every week Pastor John leaves us with some questions that help assess how we are doing in these specific areas.

Go ahead and take out the insert for notes, and on the back is this assessment form. Here are some questions that you can write down that might help your process this more.

#### Assessment Questions

- Is your worship a response to God's mercy?
- The point of this question is really hitting at, is your worship God focused, or self focused? If it is self focus, a good place to start is to be reminded of God's mercy.
- Are you intentional about revealing God through all that you are as a human?
- Do you seek to worship God by serving others?

### **RESOURCES**

- The Character of the Christian – NavPress
- Serving Others – NavPress
- The Purpose Driven Life – Day 34, "Thinking Like a Servant," Rick Warren