

A Sermon for DaySpring Baptist Church

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In the Old Testament there are all these various kinds of offerings to God. We just take the one offering on Sunday—the money offering. I suppose you could parse that a bit into the check offering and the cash offering and the coin offering. Some churches have a debit card offering. The ancient Israelites had five major offerings that the people sacrificed to God described in Leviticus: the burnt, meat, peace, sin, trespass. But there were others.

In Numbers there's this description of an offering where you take fine, pure wine in a pitcher. This is the good stuff. Remember, they didn't sacrifice the leftovers. No, no, when you made a sacrifice, you gave the best you had to give. The first-born, the best of the crop. You gave your very best to God. And either watched the priests consume it or watched it go up in smoke.

So one of these offerings was the drink offering. It was for the wine. You take your best, pure wine, not watered down. The kind of stuff Jesus made when He turned water into wine and the steward of the wedding said, "This is the best stuff. You saved the best for last." So you take this precious wine and turn the pitcher up and pour it in the dirt.

In the Old Testament that's the drink offering. It's a sacrifice to God. Giving up something precious to you. In the New Testament there is sort of drink offering too. Jesus.

Jesus, who was equal with God, didn't cling to the glory and power of divinity, but made Himself nothing, emptied Himself. The Bible word here for the emptying Jesus did is *Kenosis*. It means to be emptied out, like a pitcher of fine wine poured on the ground. *Kenosis* is an intentional word. It doesn't mean to be spilled or sloshed or that a crack came in the pitcher and some leaked out. It means to be poured out by an intentional act. Jesus did this. He poured Himself out.

You could say that He poured Himself out when He became human. It's a long way from being God to being human. And people have often wondered about this move by the Second Person of the Trinity. To become human meant to accept limitations that are obvious—you can only be in one place at one time, you can only stretch out the length of your arm, you will die. But what else—God knows the future, but humans don't. Did Jesus? God knows our thoughts. Humans often don't. Did Jesus? All sorts of questions about this pouring out at the incarnation. But the *kenosis*, the pouring out, is not just a metaphysical discussion. We can see Jesus pouring Himself out throughout His ministry—into the lives of people who needed Him.

He poured Himself out through His teaching. Time after time, even when He was exhausted and worn out, He would teach the vast crowds about the kingdom of God. He told them how you can't worship two masters, both God and money. He told them to trust God to provide. He talked about how the law is really about what is happening in

your hearts, not just in your actions. And people flocked to see Him with their own agendas and needs and questions and demands and sicknesses. And time after time Jesus taught and healed and answered and told stories.

There's this one time when He had a room full of people that He was teaching and suddenly a hole literally opened in the flat roof. Dust and debris must have fallen on Him below. They look up blinking into the sun now pouring into the packed room. And they see the dark silhouettes of four men lowering a mat on ropes down to the floor below. Their friend was on the mat—lame—and they wanted him healed. Jesus healed him.

There's this other time by the shore when the crowds pressed in on Him so much that He had to get in a boat and push off the shore, and He stood up in the boat so He could be seen and heard and not be crushed by the crowds.

Then there are the stories He told: like the Samaritan who was walking along the road and saw a Jew, the old nemesis of the Samaritans, beaten on the side of the road. And the Samaritan stopped to help him and took him down the mountain and paid for his recovery. That Samaritan was good.

There's this other story about a young man who goes off cursing his father, taking his inheritance and then blows it all and crawls his way back home begging to be let back on the estate as a servant. But his father, with great joy and humility, welcomes him back home as a son. He told great stories.

He poured Himself out by healing people. Lame people walked, blind people saw, deaf people heard, demon-possessed people were healed. All kinds of people had their lives changed by Him.

He poured Himself out through His teaching, His healing, His stories, and by speaking subversive truth to dangerous power. There were people around who did not benefit from Jesus' growing popularity. They were scared of Him; they didn't trust Him. They wanted Him gone. Eventually, they wanted Him dead. He didn't run from those people. He didn't mince words. Jesus wasn't the kind of person who went looking for trouble, but He didn't avoid it just to save Himself either. And He always seemed to know that trouble would come to Him and that it would cost Him dearly. And not just Him.

About halfway through Jesus' ministry, He warned His followers that His way was the way of *kenosis*—of pouring out. He told them. He said, "If anyone would come after Me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow Me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake and the gospel's will save it. For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world and forfeit his life?" (mk 8.34)

Jesus was talking about the kind of lives His followers will experience. There's this irony in the Christian life. It is an irony as deep as suffering leading to peace and death leading to life, as deep as blessed are the poor in spirit, blessed are those who hunger and thirst. The Christian life is about being full and fulfilled. Jesus Himself said, "I have come that you may have life and have it to the full." Some call this the path to *theosis*—to being full of God. And the Christian life is about experiencing this gift of life to the fullest the

way God intended for it to be lived. And so we worship and are filled. And we read scripture and are filled. And we learn from teachers and are blessed by friends, and in all these ways, we are filled. But this is the irony: If that is all we pursue as Christians, we are empty. If your life as a Christian is only characterized by what you put in your life, by things you get, you aren't getting it yet. It is at least as much about what you are giving, how you are pouring yourself out. It's about the cross you bear, the sacrifice you make, the service you render. Where are you serving today? How is *kenosis* happening in you? Where is the place in your life where you have to humbly empty yourself in service, to take the form of a servant, even to die to yourself?

Sometimes there are names for this place of giving in our lives. For some of you the name of that place is Gospel Café, or Ridgecrest, or the local jail, or Mission Waco, or sweeping floors at DS. It is the place in your life that requires from you a sacrifice and an emptying of your pride, your time, sometimes your wallet. It's where the rubber of faith meets the road of reality. And you give a lot.

Sometimes there aren't names for this place in our lives. It's taking care of ailing parents and busy kids at the same time. It's having patience with your neighbor. It's standing up for what is right in your school rather than going along with the crowd, with your friends. It's struggling with the inward sin and denying its hold on you for one more day. *Kenosis* takes many shapes and forms as the pitcher tips over. St. Francis put it like this: "It is in giving that we receive, it is in pardoning that we are pardoned, it is in dying that we are born to eternal life." The funny thing is that from time to time, you think to yourself, "I get more from this than I could ever give."

It is no small thing to observe the difference between the two major seas in Israel—into one sea the Jordan River flows and then flows out. Life springs around it, a web of communities live on its shores, fish and plants are abundant. The other sea is a different story. The water flows in, but nothing flows out. It tries to hold all that it receives, but it can't even do that as it evaporates away. And there's no life in this sea. No fish. No plants. No people live there. Travelers would go out of their way to avoid it. It's called the Dead Sea. And it's the lowest place on earth. Paul in Philippians tells us that to have the mind of Christ, *theosis* happens through *kenosis*.

Take up your cross, lose yourself, find yourself, lose your life, find your life. Take up your cross and follow me.

That didn't make much sense to them—those disciples—this talk about taking up a cross and denying yourself. They wanted to be like Jesus. They wanted to know God the way Jesus knew God. They wanted to gain all the knowledge and spiritual power that He possessed. That's why they followed Him. That's why disciples followed rabbis—to learn, emulate, copy, replicate, extend the words and work of the rabbi. These disciples of Jesus wanted more of the same and wanted more and more of Jesus. They wanted *theosis*.

So they were pretty happy the day they came to Jerusalem and found the crowds lining the streets singing three cheers for Jesus. This was a ticker-tape parade for God, and they were with the grand marshal. With the clippity-clop of Jesus' donkey on the

cobblestone streets, and the cheers of the crowds and the swishing of the waving palm branches, any unpleasant thoughts about taking up a cross and denying themselves seemed comically removed. They must have been relieved to see that Jesus was wrong.

“If you want to follow Me, take up your cross, deny yourself.” Well, He was just being a pessimist. Look, the people love us, I mean, love Him. This is the way it’s supposed to be. Maybe they had a good laugh about it out of Jesus’ earshot. After all, what could He hear with all the “Hosannas!! Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord” ringing through the streets. Clip-clop. Clip-clop. Ha, “If you want to follow me, take up your banner and reward yourself!” Look at this, we, I mean, He is getting what He deserves. This is the way it’s supposed to be.

Just think John might have said James: “Years from now people will remember this day and wave palm branches to remember the day we, I mean Jesus, came into glory. The day everything changed.” Clip-clop. Really, James? Who’s going to do that? Oh, I don’t know people will get together on Sunday mornings, people who’ve got it all together, you know good people like us, and they’ll celebrate us. They’ll tell stories about faithful James and his brother John, the writer—you almost finished with that book by the way? Clip-clop, clip-clop.

I just wonder which of us is going to be remembered as the greatest of all—the most godly, the most like Jesus—the one who reads scripture the most—I guess you’ve got that one since you are writing it, John. Maybe the one who prays the most. Maybe the one who gets the most syllables into “Jesus.” Doesn’t really matter I guess, as long as it’s not Peter. No way they’d build a church on that rock-head. Anyway, isn’t this great today? Clip-clop, clip-clop. I’ve been working on a little poem about Jesus and glory. I’ll think I’ll call it Palm Sunday in honor of today. Maybe someone could use it someday in a book. Wanna hear it: here goes, my poem, Palm Sunday:

“Christ did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but poured Himself out, being made in the likeness of men. Therefore God has highly exalted Him and bestowed on Him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow in heaven and on earth and under the earth and every tongue confess that Jesus is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”

Clip clop clip clop. Well, that’s pretty good, but why did you use *Kenosis* there—poured Himself out?

I don’t know. I heard Him talking about it. But don’t worry about that. I think it’s just theology. I think this is great today, something that people will remember and want for their lives. They’ll want more of this, more of the praise and power of being a follower of Jesus, more of the reward and honor. Clip-clop. But it still seems like something’s missing. Something in the middle of this poem. Like there’s a line missing. Something’s incomplete. As great as this is, something in Palm Sunday is still unfinished.