

The Brazen Altar of the Tabernacle

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- [0 : 0 0] Welcome to our service, and as we come together in an act of worship, let us seek the Lord's blessing to be upon our worship. Let us pray.
- Eternal and ever-blessed Lord, as we draw near to Thee, may we be mindful of who Thou art, that Thou art the High and Lofty One, that Thou art the One that inhabiteth eternity.
- And let us be mindful of who we are, that we are the works of Thine own hands, that we are the ones who have rebelled against Thee, that we are sinners.
- And so grant to us that we would take that place that belongs to us, at Thine own footstool, confessing your sins.
- But we give Thee thanks, O Lord, for that revelation which Thou hast made of Thyself, as a God of all grace, as a God who delighteth in mercy, and for whom judgment is a strange work.
- [1 : 2 5] And so we come before Thee, O Lord, at this evening hour, and we seek that it may please Thee to grant unto us mercy, and to grant to us the grace to enable us, O Lord, to come and to worship Thee in an acceptable way.
- For without Thee, O Lord, to come and to worship Thee, O Lord, to come and to worship Thee, we will do so in humility of mind, of heart, and of spirit.
- And so we give thanks that we have one who is at Thy right hand, as our intercessor, as the one who ministers on behalf of his people, as those who are given to us, as those who are given to him by Thee in the covenant of redemption, and whom he has purchased through his own blood, those whom he has redeemed for himself.
- And we pray, O Lord, that we would receive that assurance, that we are of that number, whom he has redeemed. O that we indeed would respond to the voice of the shepherd, who calls us in the gospel, and who cries out to us, Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.
- And we pray that we may have that assurance today, that we have drawn to Thee by faith, that we have been as those who have been effectually called, as those who have been justified and adopted into the family of God, as those in whom the Spirit is working, that sanctifying work, which will ultimately give way to glorification, when we shall be made into the image of the Son.
- [3 : 5 2] O Lord, we give Thee thanks for the work of Thy grace in the hearts of sinners such as we are. And to that end, we pray, O Lord, that the gospel would go forth tonight in the power and demonstration of Thy Spirit, in convicting and converting, in the building of Thy own church here on earth, that we would see a people drawn to Thee, a people coming to lean upon Thee by faith, putting their hope in Thee.
- For without Thee there is no hope. O Lord, we pray that Thou would bless the gospel to the ends of the earth.
- Bless all Thy servants who have gone forth with the gospel. May they have the unction of Thy own Spirit upon them. We pray, O Lord, that Thou would bless our homes and our families, our young people and our children, those who mourn and those who are ill.

O Lord, that Thou would meet with each one of us at our point of need. We pray, O Lord, that Thou would bless our Queen and the royal household, bless those who are in leadership over us.

O may they come to understand that righteousness alone exalteth a nation. We pray, O Lord, that Thou would bless our communities, bless the gospel to us, we pray.

[5 : 33] They give to us the hearing ear and the understanding heart. We pray, O Lord, that Thou would prepare ourselves as a congregation, as we hope to meet next Lord's Day morning here in the church.

We pray, O Lord, that Thy Spirit would be upon us, that Thou would, O Lord, protect us as we come together in an act of worship and fellowship one with another.

And as we have come to the last month of this year, and as we reflect upon the months that have passed, O Lord, while we give Thee thanks for Thy own protection over us, yet, O Lord, we cannot but humble ourselves and acknowledge that the year has been a strange year.

Nevertheless, we know that it has been a year under Thine own hand, that Thou art the sovereign God, and that Thou art working out Thy purpose, maybe to us in unusual ways.

Nevertheless, to Thee it is not confusing, but Thou art working out all things to the glory of Thine own name. And so we come and we bow down before Thee, acknowledge Thine own sovereignty over us, and seeking, O Lord, that we may learn.

[7 : 09] O give us teachable spirits, teachable hearts, teachable minds. And, O Lord, we pray that through Thy Spirit, that we may be taught to lean more and more upon our God, to look unto Him more and more, not unto ourselves, not unto our own works, but unto Thee, O Lord, alone.

We pray, O Lord, that Thou will continue with us now for the moments that we are together in this manner, at this evening hour. And all that we ask with the forgiveness of our many sins is in Jesus' name, and for His sake.

Amen. Now let us read the Word of God as we find it in the New Testament in the First Epistle General of John, in chapter 1.

That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled of the word of life. For the life was manifested, and we have seen it, and bear witness, and show unto you that eternal life, which was with the Father, and was manifested unto us.

That which we have seen and heard, declare we unto you, that He also may have fellowship with us. And truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with the Son, Jesus Christ.

[8 : 39] And these things write we unto you, that your joy may be full. This then is the message, which we have heard of Him, and declare unto you, that God is light, and in Him is no darkness at all.

If we say that we have fellowship with Him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth. But if we walk in the light, as He is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ, His Son, cleanseth us from all sin.

If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just, to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us. May the Lord bless unto us, the reading of that portion of His word.

And now seeking the Lord's blessing, let us turn to the Old Testament, and to the book of Exodus, and chapter 27. And we shall read from the beginning.

- [9 : 48] And thou shalt make an altar of shut and wood, five cubits long, and five cubits broad. The altar shall be four square, and the height thereof shall be three cubits.
- And thou shalt make the horns of it upon the four corners thereof. His horn shall be of the same, and thou shalt overlay it with brass. And thou shalt make his pans to receive his ashes, and his shovels, and his basins, and his flesh hooks, and his five pans.
- All the vessels thereof thou shalt make of brass, and thou shalt make for it a great network of brass. And upon the net shalt thou make four brazen rings, and the four corners thereof.
- And thou shalt put it under the compass of the altar beneath, that the net may be even to the midst of the altar. And thou shalt make staves of the altar, staves of wooden wood, and overlay them with brass.
- And the stave shall be put into the rings, and the stave shall be upon the two sides of the altar, to bear it. Hollow with boards shalt thou make it, as it was shew thee in the mount, so shall they make it.
- [10 : 59] Now as we have already noted, there were seven pieces of furniture for the tabernacle. There was the ark, the mercy seat, the altar of incense, the table of showbread, the candlestick, the laver of brass, and the altar of brass.
- There is a very striking feature about the blueprints for building the tabernacle. The instructions for the articles of furniture are given first. Now, this is not the way that things are commonly done.
- The choosing of the furniture is usually reserved until the interior of the building is finished. But another striking feature is that the plan began with the instructions for the ark that was to be placed in the Holy of Holies.
- And the plan moved out to the altar found in the outer court. And you may ask, is there any significance to be attached to that altar?
- Well, I think there is. In the instructions given to Moses, we find that it is God moving out to the sinner. God was in the Holy of Holies, but the sinner stood without and would have remained there forever shut out unless God brought the sinner to himself.
- [12 : 24] The Bible always lays emphasis on this point, that it is God that comes to the sinner. It is God who seeks out the sinner. It is not necessary for me to go through an array of biblical texts tonight to bring that truth to you.
- Jesus himself said, as recorded in the Gospel of John, chapter 6, No man can come to me except the Father which hath sent me to draw him.
- And as we already meditated upon this morning, the shepherd goes out to find the lost sheep. In the Garden of Eden, when man sinned, it was God that came to seek out the man.
- It was not man that went out to seek God. In fact, man tried to hide from God. In the book of Revelation, we are given an incredibly sad image where Christ is apparently out of the church and is standing outside knocking for entrance.
- And what happened to the Laodicean church can happen to any church in our own day. But God in his grace still knocks at the door of the Laodicean church. And that is true of individual hearts tonight as well.
- [13 : 41] The Lord Jesus Christ standing outside individual hearts and knocks, seeking entrance. The sinner must be brought to God for salvation.
- But first God comes to the sinner. And he comes to us tonight in the Gospel of salvation. The ark that was in the Holy of Holies symbolised all that the tabernacle stood for in the midst of the children of Israel.

God in their midst. In our study of the tabernacle furniture, we are going to reverse the order.

We are going to begin with the altar that was in the outer coat and move towards the ark. And in taking this order, we have the sinner moving towards God.

The specification for constructing the altar are found in Exodus 27, verse 1-8 that we have read. The altar was made of shit and wood. It is a hard, durable and close-grained wood.

[14 : 54] Some Bible dictionaries tell us that it was used for shipbuilding in Egypt. It grew in the wilderness, through which Israel travelled, and it furnished all the wood for the tabernacle.

The altar was five cubits long and five cubits wide and three cubits high. Just how long the cubit was is not easily ascertained.

It is impossible to be dogmatic about the length of the cubit. But the most common measurement is that it was 18 inches. And if we accept that measurement, that the altar was seven feet six inches for its length and breadth and four feet six inches for its height.

It was the largest of all the furniture connected with the tabernacle. On each corner of the altar there was to be placed a horn. It is to these that the psalmist refers to when he speaks of binding the sacrifice with cords even unto the horns of the altar.

There were different vessels also connected with the service of this altar. There were shovels for gathering up the ashes and pans in which they were carried away and basins for receiving the blood and flesh hooks for handling the pieces and fire pans in which the fire was carried and kept alive as they went downwards in their journey through the wilderness.

[16 : 16] And there were to make a great of network of brass and put upon the net shall they make four brazen rings and the four corners thereof and they shall put it under the compass of the altar beneath that the net may be even to the midst of the altar.

This was a grating which stretched across the whole interior of the altar. It was not level with the top of the altar but was placed further down below the top and on this grating the fire was kept burning.

There are those and they do present a good case for their opinion who would put the grating on the outside like a ledge that would serve as a platform for the priest standing on when offering up sacrifices.

I do not want to spend too much of our time on that point because I do not think that it is the most important or prominent point regarding the altar. I am going to keep to my opinion what he expressed upon that point.

Staves were made of wood and rings were placed on the two sides of the altar to allow the altar to be carried. The wood for the altar and the horns and the grating in the midst of the altar and rings on the two sides and the stays were carrying the altar they were all to be overlaid with brass.

[17 : 36] Now some translations like the New King James and the ESV has bronze instead of brass and they are probably right because in ancient Israel there is no such thing known as brass.

The term that we have translated as brass would either be perhaps pure copper or an alloy of copper and tin. One of the names by which this altar is designated is simply the altar.

But in some texts of the Old Testament it is also designated as the altar of Bontofri. Now our word Bontofri hardly expresses the meaning of the original which signifies ascending so that it is a very appropriate name for the altar because all that was consumed upon it ascended towards God.

This particularly brings before us the Godward aspect of all that took place at this altar. We often lay emphasis upon this that the work of the cross of Jesus Christ was first of all Godward before it was manward just as it is through of what took place at this altar.

The other designation for this altar is the altar by the door of the tabernacle. This does not necessarily imply that the altar was close to the door of the tabernacle. In fact, another piece of furniture was much closer to the door.

[19 : 05] But it points out to us that there could be no approach into the presence of God without first passing this altar. the significance of its position is that it was the basis of approach to God and the ground of meeting with him.

This was the first object that confronted the sinner at the entrance to the tabernacle for it was placed in the outer court. It was not hidden but accessible to all who would come to it.

the smoke from the altar went up every day and could be visible to all reminded people that a sacrifice was being offered and that the sinner might be forgiven for his sins.

As you drew near to the altar one could fix their eyes upon the blood that streamed down from it as the pledge that blood had been poured and shed for without the shedding of blood there is no remission.

The altar was in the words of Richard Newton was like the root to the tree like the foundation to the building like the fountain to the stream like the mainspring to the watch like the heart to the body.

[20 : 18] It was that on which every other part of the structure depended and from it derived all its value. The tabernacle itself could not be entered nor any part of its furniture be made use of till it had been sprinkled with the blood of the victim offered upon this altar.

Take away the altar upon offering and every part of the tabernacle however splendid would have been useless. This altar must be first approached for there is no access into the blessings of salvation but by way of this altar.

This altar was the place of sacrifice. From the very beginning God revealed to man that in the garden of Eden there was only through sacrifice and the shedding of blood that sinful man could approach God.

The revelation of God to Adam and the woman in the garden of Eden is central to God's message of salvation. In Genesis chapter 3 verse 21 we see how God dealt with the problem of sin as we saw last week and then we read and to Adam also unto his wife did the Lord God make coats of skins and clothed them.

the first animal sacrifice is ever delivered the first shedding of blood as that reminder to them and to us that without the shedding of blood there is no remission without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness the skins been put on at him and the woman taught him how their nakedness was to be covered with the righteousness of the seed of the woman the Lamb of God Jesus Christ and this is still and must be the central message of salvation Peter said to the Sanhedrin be it known unto you all and to the people of Israel but by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth whom ye crucified whom God raised from the dead even by him that this man stand here before you whole this is the stone which was set at naught of you builders which has become the head of the corner and then he says neither is there salvation in any other for there is none other name unto heaven given among men whereby we must be saved to all testifies for the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness but unto us which are saved it is the power of

[23 : 06] God for the Old Testament church the altar was a place of sacrifice as the cross is for the New Testament church at the altar sin was dealt in a ceremonial way until it was actually and finally dealt with at the cross of Golgotha and the sacrifice of Jesus Christ the Lamb of God now we believe that Adam taught his family to sacrifice and throughout the book of Genesis we find altars and sacrifices being offered to God God was teaching them that this was the only way back into our relationship with them was through the shedding of blood God met with sinners through these divine appointed ways however at best they were only shadows but through faith the Old Testament believers were able to see and trust in the reality or the substance of these shadows the seed of the woman the

Lamb of God Jesus Christ now there were five principal sacrifice in the Levitical ritual there was the bount offering then the meat offering the peace offering the sin offering and trespass offering and all these were made on this altar there is no pardon there is no renewal no acceptance no righteousness no peace no grace no blessing no salvation to any of Adam's children but to the sacrifice that this altar represents the sacrifice of the Lamb of God on the cross of Golgotha Jesus said I am the way the truth and the life no man cometh unto the Father but by me now along with the altar being the place of sacrifice it was also the place of substitution every

Lamb that was sacrificed as that was sacrificed was sacrificed as a substitute for a sinning Israelite or sinning Israel this was done during the period of the tabernacle and every sacrifice that was done in this manner was offered on this altar it was the unique place of sacrifice and substitution the sacrifice was a substitute for the sinner and it was the unique place of sacrifice and substitution which finds a perfect fulfillment in the work of Jesus Christ upon the cross because the death of Jesus was substitution we read there of Jesus that he was holy harmless and undefiled and separate for sinners he was a spotless lamb of God he stood before a woman taken in adultery whence all but he had fled because he was the only one without sin he that was without sin cast the first stone and they all went but him because he was the only one without sin he demanded of those who knew him in the days of his flesh which are you convicted me of sin on another occasion he said for the prince of this world cometh and hath nothing in me

Jesus was the only person in human nature against whom law and justice either of heaven or earth had no claim how then can we account for the sufferings and death of Jesus Christ on the cross of Golgotha they can only be accounted on and no other principle than that which Daniel chapter 9 testifies to us that the Messiah be cut off but not for himself the substitutionary sacrifice of Jesus on the cross of Golgotha means that the sins of his people are set to his account and so imputed to him that he endures the punishment of them in the place of his people he stands in lodges where they stood and takes upon himself its curse Galatians chapter 3 says Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law been made a curse for us for it is written curse it is everyone that hangeth on a tree as a result the penal debt of the believer is cancelled and his account with the law settled by the sacrifice of

Jesus Christ who stood as his substitute we often refer to Christ as our surety that is that he took responsibility for our dead just as the sacrifices at the altar were substituted for the offerer the offerer deserved to die and the innocent victim stood in his place the whole transaction at the altar indicated that the punishment due to the offerer was transferred to the appointed sacrifice so that the innocent victim bore the punishment due to the offerer to the one who had offended the greatest sign of this altar was a prefiguration or a picture of that great act of divine justice which imposed upon Jesus Christ as the

[29 : 04] Lamb of God sins sins that were not his own Isaiah chapter 53 surely he hath borne our griefs and carried our sorrows yet we did esteem him smitten of God and afflicted but he was wounded for our transgressions he was bruised for our iniquities the justice meant of our peace was upon him and with his times we are healed and the Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of is all the words of Jesus to his disciples at the institution of the supper was this cup is the New Testament in my blood which is shed for you Peter says for Christ also hath once suffered for sins the just for the unjust that he might bring us to God been put to death in the flesh but quickened by the spirit also Peter says regarding Jesus who his own self bared our sins in his own body on the tree now lest we forget it was

God wood before it was man wood because God is satisfied with the substitution the empty grave testifies to what Paul says of Jesus who was delivered for our offenses and was raised again for our justification the altar was the place of sacrifice the altar was a place of substitution but it was also the place of satisfaction Andrew Boner says God and the believing soul meet at the same point and are satisfied by the same display of divine attributes miracles God said regarding the victim upon the altar and it shall be accepted for him to make atonement for him and as we have noted God is satisfied with the substitution and the believer is satisfied with the cross of

Jesus Christ Paul an opponent of the gospel of the cross came one day to say but God forbid that I should glory save on the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ we have already noted that the wood of the altar was covered with either bronze or pure copper noting there of course its ability to resist heat but the altar speaks to us of Jesus Christ who did not resist the intense agony and sufferings as the sinner substitute of what their sins deserve but was able to sustain and exhaust the fire of God's wrath he did not resist there was no need to tie him to the horns of the altar it was not the nails that kept him on the cross you may ask well what kept him there well let's hear the word of the psalmist sacrifice and offering thou didst not desire mine ears hast thou opened but offering and sin offering hast thou not required then said

I lo I come in the volume of the book it is written of me I delight to do thy will O my God yea thy law is within my heart on the cross just before Golgotha he could say I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do the Bible tells us regarding the long suffering of God not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance the invisible cords that tied him to the altar were the cords to carry out his father's will so that sinners like me and you could come to repentance and be saved he was the only one who was able to sustain and exhaust in finite time the fire of God's wrath against sin who can ever estimate or understand what

Jesus as the saviour of sinners endured at Golgotha as he placed himself upon the altar of Golgotha and as the fire of God's wrath against sin laid upon him engulfed him in eternity it will never exhaust itself on the sinner but in finite time at Golgotha the sacrifice exhausted the fire there is a different word used for the fire burning upon the altar and the fire burning the sacrifice outside the camp here at the altar the fire was slow burning but outside the camp it was a devouring fire that speedily reduced the sacrifice to ashes the altar was a place of sacrifice it was a place of substitution it was a place of satisfaction but it was also the place of faith at this altar the action of the offerer gives us a view of faith the hand on the head of the victim in the

[34 : 49] Hebrew it means that he leaned his hand it was not just a touch but a leaning in other words the leaning of the hand expressed the identity of the offerer and offering and the offering again says the offerer puts his hand on the same head wherein the Lord's hand was laid and thereby agrees to all that is implied in his choosing that offering for the altar to have any meaning for the Israelite he had to come by faith maybe this is best illustrated to that story that we have commented upon on numerous occasions in past days that is Cain and Abel as we have already noted that their father Abraham sorry their father Adam would have taught them of what God required he would have taught them of the necessity of a blood sacrifice by which sinful man was to approach

God Genesis chapter 4 we read and in process of time it came to pass that Cain brought of the fruit of the ground an offering unto the Lord and Abel he also brought of the foshlings of his flock and the father of the Lord had respect into Abel and to his offering but into Cain and his offering he had no respect and Cain was very wroth and his countenance fell Cain brought the works of his own hands he probably laboured extremely hard and there was probably much that commended that offering to himself but what was the problem with Cain suffering it did not involve the shedding of blood that was the key difference between the offering of Cain and his brother Abel Abel brought a sacrifice that pointed forward to the atoning death of the spotless substitute in the fullness of time at Golgotha Cain see we cannot come to

God in any way of our own device and that is what Cain did he decided for himself he was going to come to God in this way he is a picture for us of all those who come pointing to their own works or their own merits and their own righteousness those who reject and despise coming to God in the way that he has appointed through the sacrifice of his own beloved son Jesus Christ the writer to the Hebrews in chapter 11 says by faith Abel offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain by which he obtained witness that he was righteous God testifying of his gifts and by it he been dead yet speak of John Calvin says the sacrifice of Abel was more acceptable than that of his brother only because it was sanctified by faith Paul tells us that for whatsoever is not of faith is sin

Abel came in faith while Cain came in unbelief and John exhorts us that we should not be like Cain he was of the evil one and murdered his brother and why did he murder him because his own deeds were evil and his brother righteous his brother came by faith to offer to God sacrifice Abel in faith obeyed the divine revelation in Romans 10 we are told faith cometh by hearing and hearing by the word of God you see faith must have a foundation on which to stand and that foundation is brought before us as being the divine word of God in other words Abel did not come to worship God in accordance with his own feelings or by his own inventions or saying this is a better way of worshipping God that is exactly what Cain did Cain's worship was man centred and man invented but

Abel comes to worship God in accordance with God's revealed will we must remember that God is jealous regarding his worship the Bible and many ways brings that principle before us so the altar was a place of sacrifice it was a place of substitution it was a place of satisfaction it was a place of faith but may I end by saying it was a place of assurance Andrew Boner again says when the worshipper has thus simply left his sins conveyed by the laying on of his hand upon the sacrifice he stands aside that is all his part the treatment of the victim is the Lord's part God the happy Israelite who saw this truth might go home saying I have put my hand on its head it shall be accepted as an atonement faith he says in the

[40 : 08] Lord's testimony was the ground of an Israelite peace of conscience nothing of it rested on his own frame of mind or character or conduct so it is for me and you our assurance rests totally upon the Lord's testimony that the sacrifice of the altar of Golgotha the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ has been accepted to make atonement and what is required of me and you to have this assurance of salvation is to lean our hand upon the head of the sacrifice in other words to become identified with the sacrifice by faith by trusting alone on him for salvation by leaning upon him alone for salvation just as the

Israelite could go home saying I have put my hand on it said it shall be accepted as an atonement and faith in the Lord's testimony be the ground of his peace of conscience the same is true for me and you if we have by faith leaned upon Jesus Christ it shall be accepted as an atonement that's what the Lord says that is what he testifies to us in his word and faith in the Lord's testimony must be the ground of our peace of conscience nothing of it must rest on our own frame of mind upon our character or conduct so the altar then was the place of sacrifice the place of substitution the place of satisfaction the place of faith and the place of assurance may the

Lord bless these thoughts to us let us pray eternal and ever blessed Lord we give thanks that as the altar of burnt offering to the Israelite was a place of sacrifice of substitution of satisfaction of faith and assurance that the cross of thy son the Lord Jesus Christ has become the place of sacrifice substitution satisfaction and faith and assurance for thy people and we pray oh Lord that we indeed be like thy servant of all that if we are to boast in anything it is to boast in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ we give thee thanks oh Lord for his finished work and we give thee thanks for the efficacy of his finished work and we pray that daily we would draw near to the altar of

Golgotha and may we sit there and may we meditate upon what is taking place there at Golgotha oh Lord we pray that thou would bless thy word to us bless our meditation upon it and we pray oh Lord that thou would continue with us during the coming days and all that we ask with the forgiveness of our many sins and the forgiveness for all our shortcomings is in the name of the one who is at thine own right hand in whose merits we stand and have boldness to seek thy mercy and to seek thy grace our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all now and forever more Amen