

The Altar of Incense

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[0 : 0 0] Welcome to our service, and as we come around the Word of God, let us seek his blessing upon his Word. Let us pray. Eternal and ever-blessed Lord, what a great privilege it is that we can come into the very throne room of God, and that we can lay out petitions before thee, not because of any merits that belongs to us, but through the merits of thy Son, that we have boldness and confidence to come before thee, and that we have that boldness and confidence to unburden ourselves, and knowing, O Lord, that thou art the one who, out of the riches of thy grace, is able to meet with our needs.

We give thee thanks for the Gospel, for the good news of Jesus Christ, and as we come today to acknowledge our sinnership, we give thanks to thee for the provision that thou hast made in thy Son, as the fountain that has been opened for sin and for uncleanness, the fountain to which we are invited to come, and to draw from that fountain by faith, and to receive the cleansing that we stand in need of.

We give thanks for the promise of thine own Word, that if we confess our sins that thou art faithful and just, to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness, and that thy promise hath been sealed for us, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, that all thy promises are yea and amen, in Jesus Christ.

O we give thanks that when we are so conscious of the fact that we live in a changing world, we give thanks that thy Word changeth not, that thy Word abides forever.

We come before thee, O Lord, seeking thy blessing upon our communities, upon every home and family, seeking that it may please thee out of the riches of thy grace to meet with the needs of us all.

[2 : 3 6] O Lord, thou art the all-knowing God, thou art the one who sucheth our hearts, who knoweth our ways. There is nothing hidden from thee.

And we pray, O Lord, that it would please thee to meet with us at our point of need. We give thanks to thee, O Lord, for all the tokens of thy goodness and kindness, that thou in thy mercy didst so abundantly outpour upon us every day, in things that are temporal as well as in things that are spiritual.

And we come, O Lord, seeking that it may please thee to bless thy Word to us, to apply it to our hearts by thy Spirit, O that thou would enlighten our minds, that thou would open our hearts to receive thy Word, that thy Word may be lodged in our heart and bring forth fruit in our lives, to the glory of thy name and to the eternal good of our souls.

We pray, O Lord, for our homes and our families, all our loved ones, wherever they may be, that thine everlasting arms would be around them.

Remember those of their number who are indifferent and careless regarding the claims of thy Word. O Lord, may thou through thy Spirit draw them to thyself, that they may come to see their need of that salvation, which thou dost freely offer to them, and that they may come, O Lord, to embrace that salvation by faith, and that they may come to experience that salvation, and the joy that belongs to that salvation, or to be reconciled to our God, to have peace with God.

[4 : 36] We pray, O Lord, that thou would bless our young people and our children, O that thou would raise up a generation that would fear thy no name. Bless those who are ill, pray that thy healing hand may be upon them, and those who mourn the passing of loved ones.

May thou comfort them, O Lord, and meet with them at their point of need. Remember thy people. Grant to them, O Lord, that they may be faithful witnesses for thee.

Bless thy gospel this day throughout our land and to the ends of the earth, and all thy servants who have gone forth to proclaim thy word. May they know the unction of thine own Spirit upon them.

Bless those who are lonely, those who are anxious. O Lord, our needs are so different, but they are all known to thee, and thou art the one who can meet with our needs out of the riches of thy grace.

We pray, O Lord, that thou would lead us into thine own word, that we may be encouraged by thy word and strengthened by thy word, or that we would be able to continue on the path of righteousness, that we may be able to continue on the path that thou hast drawn out for us, looking unto thee as the author and the finisher of our faith.

[6 : 08] We pray, O Lord, that thou would continue with us as we come to wait upon thee, for thy word proclaims to us that it is a blessed thing to wait upon the Lord.

O Lord, remember us in all our needs, and we pray, O Lord, that thou would come in a day of thine own power, and that thou would stir up thy people, thy church.

O Lord, that there would be days of revival within thy church, and days of awakening among those who are still dead in trespasses and in sin.

We pray, O Lord, that thou would continue with us as we wait upon thee, and all that we ask, with the forgiveness of our many sins, is in Jesus' name and for his sake. Amen.

Let us now read the word of God, first of all, as we find it in the book of Exodus, and chapter 30. And thou shalt make an altar to burn incense upon, of shit and wood shalt thou make it.

[7 : 10] A cupid shalt be the lead thereof, and a cupid the bread thereof, four square shall it be, and two cupids shalt be the height thereof, the horns thereof shall be of the same.

And thou shalt overlay it with pure gold, the top thereof, and the sides thereof round about, and the horns thereof. And thou shalt make unto it a crown of gold round about, and two golden rings shalt thou make, to it under the crown of it by the two corners thereof.

And upon the two sides of it shalt thou make it, and they shall be for places for the staves to bear it with all. And thou shalt make the staves of shit and wood, and overlay them with gold.

And thou shalt put it before the veil that is by the ark of the testimony, before the mercy seat that is over the testimony, where I will meet with thee.

And Aaron shall burn their own sweet incense every morning. When he dresseth the lamps, he shall burn incense upon it. And when Aaron lighteth the lamps at the evening, he shall burn incense upon it, a perpetual incense before the Lord throughout your generations.

[8 : 21] And ye shall offer no strange incense thereon, nor burn sacrifice, nor meat offering. Neither shall ye pour, drink offering thereon. And Aaron shall make an atonement upon the horns of it once in a year, with the blood of the sin offering of atonement.

Once in the year shall he make atonement upon it throughout your generation. It is most holy unto the Lord. And also a few verses in Leviticus chapter 16.

Leviticus chapter 16. And at verse 11. And Aaron shall bring the bullock of the sin offering, which is for himself, and shall make an atonement for himself and for his house, and shall kill the bullock of the sin offering, which is for himself.

And he shall take a censer full of burning coals of fire from off the altar before the Lord, and his hands full of sweet incense, beaten small, and bring it within the veil.

And he shall put the incense upon the fire before the Lord, that the cloud of the incense may cover the mercy seat, that is, upon the testimony that he die not. And he shall take of the blood of the bullock and sprinkle it with his finger upon the mercy seat eastward, and before the mercy seat shall he sprinkle of the blood with his finger seven times.

[9 : 48] Then shall he kill the goat of the sin offering that is for the people, and bring his blood within the veil, and do with that blood as he did with the blood of the bullock, and sprinkle it upon the mercy seat and before the mercy seat.

And he shall make an atonement for the holy place because of the uncleanness of the children of Israel, and because of their transgression and all their sins. And so shall he do for the tabernacle of the congregation that remaineth among them in the midst of their uncleanness.

And there shall be no man in the tabernacle of the congregation when he goeth in to make an atonement in the holy place until he come out. And I made an atonement for himself and for his household and for all the congregation of Israel.

And he shall go out unto the altar that is before the Lord and make an atonement for it and shall take of the blood of the bullock and of the blood of the goat and put it upon the horns of the altar round about.

And he shall sprinkle of the blood upon it with his fingers seven times and cleanse it and hallow it from the uncleanness of the children of Israel.

[10 : 59] And so on. May the Lord bless unto us the reading of these portions of his word. As we come on our study of the tabernacle furniture we have already looked at the furniture found in the outer coat namely the brazen altar and the brazen laver the place of sacrifice and washing.

We saw how both spoke of two fundamental doctrines of our faith namely justification and sanctification. Then we entered the first room of the tabernacle called the holy place and there we find three pieces of furniture and we looked at two of them the golden lampstand or candlestick which had one central shaft and six branches spreading out from the main shaft three on each side.

The obvious practical function of the candlestick was to give light. but the symbolic significance of the candlestick was the union between Christ and his people.

Jesus said that he was the light of the world and in Revelation chapter 1 verse 20 he compares the churches to candlesticks. candlesticks. There we read the mystery of the seven stars which thou sawest in my right hand and the seven golden candlesticks.

The seven stars are the angels of the seven churches and the seven candlesticks which thou sawest are the seven churches. the candlestick may have had other meanings as well.

[12 : 39] It may stand for life as it was made in the shape of a tree and there are those who say that it symbolised the tree of life in the garden of Eden.

What we do know is that God is the source of life and light. David wrote in Psalm 36 for with thee is the fountain of life in thy light shall we see light.

Last week we saw another piece of furniture called the table of showbread and we saw how we come as priests unto God to feed upon Jesus Christ as the bread of life by faith.

How we feed upon Jesus Christ to sustain us and how we feed upon Jesus Christ to strengthen us. Now as we seek the blessing and help of the Lord we come to the third piece of furniture to be found in the holy place called the altar of incense.

There in Exodus 30 we read and thou shalt make an altar to burn incense upon of shud and wood shalt thou make it. A cupid shall be the length thereof and a cupid the breadth thereof four square shall it be and two cupids shall be the height thereof the hearts thereof shall be of the same and thou shalt overlay it with pure gold the top thereof and the sides thereof round about and the horns thereof and thou shalt make unto it a crown of gold round about and two golden rings shalt thou make it to it unto the crown of it by the two corners thereof upon the two sides of it shalt thou make it and they shall be for places for the staves to bear it withal and thou shalt make the staves of shud and wood and overlay them with gold and so on.

[14 : 36] Now this altar was not exceptionally large it was about one and a half foot square and no more than three feet high. It was made of shud and wood covered with gold and rimmed about with a golden border.

Like the altar in the courtyard it had horns on its top fork on the top in each corner but this time these horns were covered with gold. And like all the furniture of the tabernacle it was designed to be portable so that there were rings on the two sides allowing it to be lifted on a pair of golden staves and to be carried along with them as they journeyed through the wilderness.

The location of the altar within the holy place is determined by God and thou shalt put it before the veil that is by the ark of the testimony before the mercy seat that is over the testimony where I will meet with thee.

It was placed right next to the veil that separated the holy place from the holy of holies and it was placed directly in front of the ark of the covenant or testimony and the mercy seat.

That means that when the priests stood at the altar they were standing right in front of God's presence on his throne for he dwelt in a special way between the cherry beams that was on the mercy seat.

[16 : 10] Now what was the duty of the priests at this altar? Well God instructed them Aaron shall burn there on sweet incense every morning when he dresseth the lamps he shall burn incense upon it and when Aaron lighteneth the lamps at the evening he shall burn incense upon it a perpetual incense before the Lord throughout your generations.

Burning incense on the golden altar was part of the priests' daily routine. every morning when he came to tend to the candlestick and trim its wick and replenish the oil he was to burn sweet incense on the altar and he was to do the same in the evening.

Now we shall come to that point later. We notice here that they were not free to allow the altar to be used on anything but the burning of incense.

Ye shall offer no strange incense thereon nor burnt sacrifice nor meat offering. neither shall you pour drink offering thereon.

Also at the end of the chapter they were instructed as to what kind of spices they could use. And the Lord said unto Moses take unto thee sweet spices stag and onyga and galbamint these sweet spices with pure frankincense of it shall there be a light wheat and I shall make it a perfume.

[17 : 43] They were to beat some of it very small and to put it before the testimony in the tabernacle of the congregation where the Lord met with them. what was symbolic regarding this golden altar?

Like all the pieces of furniture in the tabernacle it must represent Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ is the brazen altar he is the brazen laver he is the golden candlestick he is the table of showbread and now he is the golden altar.

The altar in the outer coat the brazen altar was the place of sacrifice the place where animals were burnt upon but as this altar there was no animal being burnt upon no blood was shed in the outer coat there was the smell and stench of burning flesh but here in the holy place at the altar of incense instead of the smell and stench of burning flesh there was fragrant aroma that filled the tabernacle in fact it is interesting that the word for altar which means slaughter place and we can understand that with the altar in the outer coat at the brazen altar where sacrifice was made but here at this altar the golden altar no such slaughter took place why then call it an altar well I think that it may be because of the particular connection that there was between both altars and we shall come to that point later on as we have already noted when the priests offered incense on this altar they were directly in front of the ark of the covenant or testimony and the mercy seat between the cherubims on the mercy seat was the

Shekinah glory of the presence of God in the book of Leviticus chapter 16 regarding the day of atonement that we read there it says of the high priest that there shall be no man in the tabernacle of the congregation when he goeth in to make an atonement in the holy place until he come out and have made an atonement for himself and for his household and for all the congregation of Israel and he shall go out into the altar that is before the Lord and make an atonement for it the altar that is before the Lord is the way that he describes the golden altar of incense because it was a place for coming before God well what was the significance of the altar what did it symbolise David in Psalm 141 referring to the duty ritual for worship in the tabernacle in which incense was burnt before the

Lord writes let my prayer be said before thee as incense and the lifting up of my hands as the evening sacrifice there David is asking God to receive his prayers just as he receives the incense that is burnt in the tabernacle in the gospel of Luke chapter 1 we read regarding Zechariah the father of John the Baptist and it came to pass that while he executed the priest's office before God in the order of his course according to the custom of the priest's office his Lord was to burn incense when he went into the temple of the Lord and the whole multitude of the people were praying without at the time of incense and there appeared to him an angel of the Lord standing on the right side of the altar of incense as

[22 : 03] Zechariah was carried out his priestly duty in burning incense the people were praying outside in the book of Revelation chapter 5 we read the four beasts and four and twenty elders fell down before the lamb having every one of them harps and gold vigils full of odors which are the prayers of saints the odors were incense and the symbolism is explained for us that the odors of incense was the prayers of the saints the same symbolism as you find in chapter 8 of Revelation and another angel came and stood at the altar having a golden censer and there was given unto him much incense that he should offer it with the prayers of all saints upon the golden altar which was before the throne and the smoke of the incense which came with the prayers of the saints ascended up before God out of the angels hands all these passages that we have noted it now connect the offering of incense with prayer and this helps us to understand what the priest did at the golden altar and what the golden altar symbolises the priests were offering prayers continually for

God's covenant people symbolised by the smoking incense now we have already noted that the word altar means slaughter place although we can understand that with the altar in the outer coat why call this piece of furniture altar because no slaughtering takes place here however as we noted there is a connection between the altar in the outer coat and the golden altar within the holy place and to understand that connection we may think of the day of atonement in verse 10 of our chapter we read and Aaron shall make an atonement upon the horns of it once in a year with the blood of the sin offering of atonement once in a year shall he make atonement upon it throughout your generations it is most holy unto the Lord on the day of atonement a sin offering was made on the bracelet altar in the outer coat for all of

God's covenant people when the animal was sacrificed its blood was carefully collected in a bowl and then carried inside the tabernacle some of it was sprinkled on the mercy seat in the holy of holies but some was also sprinkled on the golden altar of incense Leviticus chapter 16 verse 18 and 19 explains to us how this was done and he shall go out into the altar that is before the Lord remember we saw that this meant the altar of incense and he shall go out into the altar that is before the Lord and make atonement for it and shall take of the blood of the bullock and of the blood of the goat and put it upon the horns of the altar round about and he shall sprinkle of the blood upon it with his finger seven times and cleanse it and hallow it from the uncleanness of the children of

Israel there we are given the connection between the two altars what happened on the brazen altar in the outer court on the day of atonement where sacrifice was made where an animal was slaughtered and where blood was shed and the blood sprinkled on the mercy seat and on the golden horns of the golden altar made it possible for Israel to use the altar of incense well what is the significance of all that what is it telling us about our prayer life it tells us that our prayers are only acceptable to God through the atoning blood the basis for access to God through prayer was that the blood that was sprinkled on the mercy seat and put upon the horns of the golden altar that blood that made atonement for sin that is why we pray in the name of

Jesus why we end our prayers by appealing to Jesus with the words for Jesus sake it is not simply a way as it were of signing off our prayers although sometimes it may look or sound like that but what we are doing is establishing the basis for our praying to God of setting out petitions before him it is significant that it was put upon the golden horns of the altar as we know the horn is a symbol of power the power of prayer is in the fact of the atoning blood of Jesus Christ who is the Lamb of God although we have simply referred to the day of atonement there was a daily connection between both altars in this respect that they were both used at the same time of day connecting the offering of sacrifice with the offering of incense the priests offered incense in the morning and in the evening at dawn and dusk and at the same time the priests were in the outer court at the brazen altar offering at the morning and evening sacrifice it is important for us to understand the connection between our prayers and the cross of

[28 : 03] Golgotha our prayers and the blood of Jesus Christ our life of prayer depends on having a sacrifice for sin our prayer life depends on the fact that a torment has been made what secures a place for us before the throne of God's grace is the atoning blood that was shed for our sins therefore we are invited to come let us therefore come boldly into the throne of grace that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need all that on the basis that in the midst of the throne there is a lamb as it had been slain another connection between the two altars is that the incense was burnt by fire by the priests and this was the same fire that consumed the sacrifice on the brazen altar it was now used to consume the incense fire was taken from the brazen altar to the altar of incense the same fire the same fire that consumed the sacrifice in the outer court was now used to consume the incense the smoking sacrifice upon the brazen altar was joined with the smoking sweet aroma that rose from the altar of incense

Paul writing to the Ephesians says Christ also hath loved us and hath given himself for us an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet smelling savour in the book of Hebrews we read having the effort brethren boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus by a new and living way which he hath consecrated for us through the veil that is to say his flesh there is a significant difference in the way we come to God and the way the priests of the Old Testament came to him for them there was a veil separating them from his throne but this veil has now been rent and we have access to the very throne room of God through Jesus Christ the work of the cross of Golgotha opened a way for us to come to

God with boldness and confidence in prayer at the tabernacle there was always smoke rising from the altar of incense and Aaron shall burn thereon sweet incense every morning when he dresseth the lamps he shall burn incense upon it and when Aaron lighteth the lamps at evening he shall burn incense upon it a perpetual incense before the Lord throughout your generations Paul instructs us to pray without ceasing meaning that we are to be in a continual attitude of prayer throughout the day Patrick Fairbairn wrote in his book Typology of Scripture where he says pray without ceasing the spirit of devotion is the element of your spiritual being the indispensable condition of health and fruitfulness all from first to last must be sanctified by prayer and if this be neglected nothing in the work and service of God can be expected to go well with you yes it was to be a perpetual incense before the

Lord throughout your generations now as we have noted there were three significant things going on at the tabernacle at the same time both morning and evening at 9am and at 3pm three significant things were going on at the tabernacle at those hours at 9am and at 3pm at the brazen altar a sacrifice was made and a smoke ascending to God at 9am and 3pm in the holy place the lamps were being attended to to make them brighter and incense was offered upon the golden altar at those hours three significant things going on at the tabernacle at the same time at the brazen altar a sacrifice was made and a smoke ascended to God in the holy place the last one had been attended to make them brighter and incense was offered upon the golden altar this brings before us the joint ministry of

Jesus Christ in his death as the substitutionary sacrifice and his continual intercession the continual ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ at the right hand of the father where he makes intercession for us the writer to the Hebrews write wherefore he is also able to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them though Jesus is now seated at the right hand of God he is not inactive he continually ministers on behalf of his people by his intercession Thomas Watson in his book The Body of Divinity writes regarding the

[34 : 07] Day of Atonement that Aaron was to do four things he was to kill the beast or the sacrifice then he was to enter with the blood into the holy of holies then he was to sprinkle the mercy seat with the blood and then he was to kindle the incense with the smoke of it causing a cloud rise over the mercy seat and he says Christ our high priest exactly answered to this type he was offered up in sacrifice which answers to the priest killing the bullock and he has gone up into heaven which answers to the priest going into the holy of holies and he spreads the blood before his father which answers to the priest sprinkling the blood upon the mercy seat and he prays to his father that for his blood that he would be provisioned to sinners which answers to the cloud of incense going up and through his intercession

God God God is crucified which answers to the priest making atonement Jesus said in his prayer as recorded for us in John 17 I pray for them I pray not for the world but for them which thou hast given me for their thine what a blessing to be included in the prayers of Jesus Christ and what does he pray well let's hear some of the petitions brought before us in John 17 holy father keep them through thine own name those who thou hast given me that they may be one as we are one praying that the people of God would be united together I pray not that thou should just take them out of the world but that thou should just keep them from the evil praying that

God's people would be kept sanctify them through thy truth thy word is truth praying for their sanctification and if we need encouragement for evangelism then we have it here in the prayer of Jesus and the intercession of Jesus Christ neither pray I for these alone but for them also which shall believe on me through their word what an encouragement for us to go forth and to witness for Jesus Christ to speak for Jesus Christ and then we have father I will that they also whom thou hast given me be with me where I am that they may behold my glory which thou hast given me for thou lovest me before the foundation of the world what a prayer what intercession with that desire to have his people those whom he has redeemed those whom he has set free from the bondage and the slavery of sin that they be where he is that's within the intercession of

Jesus Christ he is ministering there with his desires with his petitions before the father in heaven and the amazing thing is that these petition if you are trusting in Christ tonight that these petition includes you what a blessed thing it is to be included in the prayers of Jesus and as we said as the incense at the golden altar was a perpetual incense before the Lord throughout your generation this intercession continues this part of the ministry of the priesthood of Jesus Christ continues it continues and it is all connected to what took place at Golgotha both altars are connected together and the cross of

Golgotha and the intercession of Christ is connected together oh what a blessed thing it is to be in the prayers of Jesus Christ are you there my friend are you included in the intercession of Jesus Christ at the right hand of the Father tonight may the Lord bless our thoughts let us pray eternal and ever blessed Lord we give thanks unto thee that we have this boldness and confidence to come before thee to a throne of grace seeing that there is a lamb in the midst of the throne a lamb as it had been slain a lamb that offered himself as a sacrifice at the cross of Golgotha a lamb that has made atonement for our sins so that we can come and we can lay out petitions before thee in his merits and we give thanks oh Lord that that lamb intercedes for us that we are included in his prayers oh Lord we pray that we would know that privilege that is given to thy people and we pray oh

[40 : 27] Lord that we would be assured at this evening hour that although we may feel that our own prayers are weakened although we may feel that they are coming so far short of what we would desire them to be we know that there is one who is praying for us and whose prayers are perfect who prays for us in accordance to our needs all we give thanks for the intercession of Jesus Christ we ask oh Lord that thou would continue with us during the coming days and 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 forevermore Amen