

[Wednesday, June 28, 2017] The Exodus Series, Exodus 30, vss 1-10, The Altar of Incense – Craig Thurman

Chapters 28-29 revealed the dress, consecration, and scope of the service for the priesthood. The priestly garments were for glory and beauty. Being so clothed they were to be consecrated or dedicated to serve in this office. And finally, the scope of the service of the priesthood was within the framework of atonement: the daily sacrifices of a young bull and the morning and evening sacrifices of a spotless lamb for burnt offerings, with a meat offering, and a drink offering; all an offering made by fire for a sweet savor to the LORD. All that we do is based on the finished work of Jesus Christ. All that the believer-priest will do in the context of a N.T. church relationship is because of Christ's sacrifice for sin.

In chapter 30, under consideration are the last two pieces of furniture which relates to the tabernacle: the altar of incense and the brass laver. (vss. 1-10; 17-21) Also, is the collection of the shekel for the sanctuary (from which shall be made the sockets for the tabernacle and the vail), the holy anointing oil, and the perfume. (vss. 11-16; 22-33; 34-38)

1 ¶ And thou shalt make an altar to burn incense upon:

The ingredient for this is found in verse 34. In equal proportions the sweet spices of stacte, onycha, galbanum are mixed together with the pure tree resin of frankincense (also called olibanum; from the Latin expression *oleum libani* ["gum of frankincense"]).

The altar is for sacrifice. It is not an atoning sacrifice, but sacrifice of service.

of shittim wood shalt thou make it.

2 A cubit shall be the length thereof, and a cubit the breadth thereof; foursquare shall it be: and two cubits shall be the height thereof: the horns thereof shall be of the same.

Horns are a type for ruler and authority; kings and kingdoms. (1Sa.2.1; 2.10; 2Sa.22.3; 1Ki.22.11; Ps.75.10; 132.17; Jer.48.25; Lam.2.17; Dan.7; Re.17.12)

This sacrifice stands on the authority of the One that this altar represents.

3 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.

4 And two golden rings shalt thou make to it under 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.

5 And thou shalt make the staves of shittim wood, and overlay them with gold.

The arrangement for the staves particularly refers prepares this vessel for its sojourn through the desert. Of which this points to Christ's earthly ministry, and of our necessity to resort to this feature in our sojourn to the coming of Christ.

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

This details concerning the placement of the altar of incense in the holy place, where it is in front of the vail and before the mercy seat agrees so well with what Paul wrote of in the book of Hebrews. More to this in a moment.

Heb 4:16 Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need.

'It [the altar, added] appears to have been regarded as having a more intimate connection with the Holy of Holies than the other things in the Holy Place ...' *Barnes' Notes, Exodus – Esther*, p.83

The altar of incense is in appearance very much like the ark, which will be set in the holiest of all; made of the same materials: shittim wood overlaid with gold, having four rings and two staves. One difference would be in the size. The other would be the horns on the incense altar, and the mercy seat which serves as a lid to the ark.

altar of incense: 1 x 1 x 2 cubits – ark: 2 ½ L X 1 ½ B X 1 ½ ht.

A careful reading of Leviticus chapter 16 will help us to understand that the altar of incense was not in the holiest of all.

Once a year, when the high priest came into the holiest of all he brought with him a censer, which is not the altar of incense:

*Lev.16.12 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:*

13 And he shall put the incense upon the fire before the LORD (which is in the censer), that the cloud of the incense may cover the mercy seat that is upon the testimony, that he die not:

14 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.

The lack of mention in Hebrews chapter 9 of the altar of incense I cannot answer. But the mention of a golden censer does not appear to be the same as the altar of incense. Again refer to the above text of Lev. 16.13, which would have been a golden censer.

He.9.2 For there was a tabernacle made; the first, wherein was the candlestick, and the table, and the shewbread; which is called the sanctuary.

3 And after the second veil, the tabernacle which is called the Holiest of all;

4 Which had the golden censer, and the ark of the covenant overlaid round about with gold, wherein was the golden pot that had manna, and Aaron's rod that budded, and the tables of the covenant;

7 And Aaron shall burn thereon sweet incense every morning: when he dresseth the lamps, he shall burn incense upon it.

dresseth, בָּהֵיטִיבוֹ, Hiphil (causative active) infin. of יָטַב; KJV, to accept, be pleasing, to go well; the idea is of being able to *go on*,

whether it be our lives before the LORD or the burning of the lamps of the candlestick.

8 And when Aaron lighteth the lamps at even, he shall burn incense upon it, a perpetual incense before the LORD throughout your generations.

lighteth, וּבָהֶעֱלֹתָ, Hiphil (causative active) infin. of עָלָה; to come up, go up; and so to cause the lights to come up (marg. *causes to ascend*, or, *setteth up*) the lamps.

About the light of the candlestick:

The lamps of the candlestick were never to go out when the tabernacle was erected. (Lev.24.2, *cause the lamps to burn continually*.) The meaning seems to be that the lamps are to be kept burning as long as the tabernacle remained in its place. (cf. also Nu.8.2) These Scriptures all use the same Hebrew word, עָלָה.

1Sa.3.3 And ere the lamp of God went out in the temple of the LORD, where the ark of God was, and Samuel was laid down to sleep ...

Obviously the temple referenced in 1Sa.3.3 is not that which Solomon shall build. This probably refers to the tent where the ark of God was presently kept. (cf. 2Sa.7.5, 6) But it is significant to that the Word of God notes that the lamp of God went out; a thing that should not have occurred.

9 Ye shall offer no strange incense thereon, nor burnt sacrifice, nor meat offering; neither shall ye pour drink offering thereon.

A warning to them all with the 2ppl. pronoun *ye*. As we understand what the altar of incense is a type of we shall perceive how important it is not to abuse this *instrument*.

What is the altar of incense? It is the place where specially ordained incense is put upon coals. Those coals came from the brazen altar. The

coals from the brazen altar which consumed the sacrifices is the means for offering a sweet fragrance before the LORD.

The whole matter of this beautiful gold-covered box with its incense speaks of the favor and acceptance of Christ before God.

*Joh 8:29 And he that sent me is with me: the Father hath not left me alone; for **I do always those things that please him.***

*Pv.8.30 Then I (our Lord Jesus, the eternal Word) was by him (that is, God the Father), as one brought up with him: and I was daily his delight, rejoicing always before him;
31 Rejoicing in the habitable part of his earth; and my delights were with the sons of men. (The Father delighted in me, and I delighted in the sons of men.)*

Eph 5:2 ... [Christ] hath given himself for us an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweetsmelling savour.

And the elect of God are accepted in Christ.

Eph 1:6 .. he (God) hath made us accepted in the beloved. (this is, Jesus, His Son)

*2Co 2:15 For we are **unto God a sweet savour of Christ**, in them that are saved, and in them that perish:*

Incense is a type for prayer.

Ps 141:2 Let my prayer be set forth before thee as incense; and the lifting up of my hands as the evening sacrifice.

Zacharias, John the Baptist's father:

Lk.1.9 According to the custom of the priest's office, his lot was to burn incense when he went into the temple of the Lord.

*10 And the whole multitude of the people **were praying without at the time of incense.** (Which is called the hour of prayer, the ninth*

hour, which would have been the time of the offering of the evening sacrifice. Cf. Acts 3.1; Ex.29.41)

11 And there appeared unto him an angel of the Lord standing on the right side of the altar of incense.

The offering up of the incense speaks of the intercessions of Christ for us to God.

Ro 8:34 Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us.

Heb 7:25 Wherefore he is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them.

Christ prays for us. In John chapter 17 we have recorded the great intercessory pray of Jesus Christ for us. In it, among other things, He said,

Joh 17:9 I pray for them: I pray not for the world, but for them which thou hast given me; for they are thine.

Christ never prayed beneficently to God for any but the elect that were given to Him *before* the foundation of the world. His prayers for the reprobates were:

Ps 5:10 Destroy thou them, O God; let them fall by their own counsels; cast them out in the multitude of their transgressions; for they have rebelled against thee.

Ps.55.15 Let death seize upon them, and let them go down quick into hell: for wickedness is in their dwellings, and among them.

Ps 58:6 Break their teeth, O God, in their mouth: break out the great teeth of the young lions, O LORD.

7 Let them melt away as waters which run continually: when he bendeth his bow to shoot his arrows, let them be as cut in pieces.

8 As a snail which melteth, let every one of them pass away: like the untimely birth of a woman, that they may not see the sun.

Ps.59.13 Consume them in wrath, consume them, that they may not be: and let them know that God ruleth in Jacob unto the ends of the earth. Selah.

14 Thou therefore, O LORD God of hosts, the God of Israel, awake to visit all the heathen: be not merciful to any wicked transgressors. Selah.

Ps 70:2 Let them be ashamed and confounded that seek after my soul: let them be turned backward, and put to confusion, that desire my hurt.

The prayers of the saints are likened to incense:

Re 8:3 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.

4 And the smoke of the incense, which came with the prayers of the saints, ascended up before God out of the angel's hand.

There are prayers that Christ and His saints have prayed against the wicked that shall finally be answered. If we knew the Word of God as we should we should know that there are some who are manifest reprobates, antichrist, for which we cannot pray well concerning. These prayers are cast into the earth ...

Re.8.5 And the angel took the censer, and filled it with fire of the altar, and cast it into the earth: and there were voices, and thunderings, and lightnings, and an earthquake.

Notice there are restrictions concerning this altar of incense. Remember, that the services of the priests were between the morning and evening sacrifices. These sacrifices were distinct from the sacrifices. All that they did was based on the temporal atonement or reconciliation of the blood of

the sacrificial animal. Ministering at the table of shewbread was not atoning. Trimming the lamps was not atoning. Offering incense was not atoning. These services are based on atonement for sin. But not meaning to confuse anyone here, but we should know that this altar is a place for sacrifice. The Hebrew noun for *altar*, מִזְבֵּחַ, *miz-be-ach*, in verb is *sacrifice* or *offering*, זָבַח, *za-bach*. Prayer is a sacrifice.

Pr 15:8 The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination to the LORD: but the prayer of the upright is his delight.

It is an offering, but it is not in any way that which reconciles us to God. Only the blood of Jesus Christ reconciled us to God.

Ro 5:10 For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life.

That we would present our bodies a living sacrifice to God in no way atones for sin. Brethren we can't do anything even after we have come to faith in Jesus Christ which is acceptable to God apart from Christ living and working through me. How much more is it so for those who are without Christ? So someone says in his heart, then how does anyone come to Christ? '*This is the work of God, that ye believe on him whom he hath sent.*' (Jn.6.29) All such services are a sacrifice to God, acceptable and well-pleasing when based on the atoning blood of Christ.

'[T]he incense-offering presupposed reconciliation with God ...' *Keil & Delitzsch Commentary on the Old Testament*, vol. 1, p.457

First, there is a ban against offering *strange incense* on this altar. The incense is a type for the prayers of Christ and His people.

*Re 5:8 And when he had taken the book, the four beasts and four and twenty elders fell down before the Lamb, having every one of them harps, and **golden vials full of odours, which are the prayers of saints.***

As no other incense was acceptable or received, so no prayer but that which Christ takes up, and those which His people pray in Jesus' name is heard. No Christian should ever take up prayers to God in any other name than the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. Christians praying in the name of an angel, apostle, or in the name of some late or living saint of God, be it Mary, Peter or Paul, no matter who it is, offers up strange prayers. These are foreign to God, and He disapproves of them.

Joh 14:13 And whatsoever ye shall ask in my name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son.

14 If ye shall ask any thing in my name, I will do it.

Second, there is a ban against offering upon the altar of incense burnt offerings and meat offerings. Burnt offerings and meat (bread) offerings refer to the offering up of the body of Jesus Christ for sinners and of His righteousness. Prayers are not a supplementation to salvation. Prayers cannot add anything to the saving work of Christ. If Christ did not make full reconciliation of us to God by His shed blood we can be certain that adding our human prayers will never affect any change in our acceptance before God. If prayers could have any saving merit why did Christ die at all in our place? Prayer is for those who are redeemed so that they can ask for the things that they need. No unbelieving prayer is heard. (He.11.6)

Apart from Christ's death there is no prayer to God. No sinner's prayer can be heard of God for whom Christ did not die. The prayer of the wicked is an abomination to the LORD. (Ps.109.7; Pv.11.20; 15.8, 9; 21.27; 28.9) The doctrine of particular redemption is correct. Christ's death for His people makes it so that they might be heard in day of their salvation.

And third, no *drink offering* was to be poured upon the altar of incense. The pouring of the drink offering was made with the morning and evening sacrificial lambs and it constituted a part of the sacrifice made by fire of a sweet smelling savor to the LORD. (Nu.28.8) It represented the effectual power of Christ's shed blood for the sins of the elect of God. Christ didn't die to make salvation possible; He made it certain to all of the elect of God!

By the pouring out of the drink offering God was cheered (Jud.9.13) in that sins were put away.

It is worth noting that this is precisely what many have made of prayer by the use of what is called 'The Sinner's Prayer.' Well-meaning men, especially those who preach the Arminian gospel, have turned prayer into a means *for* salvation. It is this kind of prayer which supposedly brings God to sinners, instead of the work of the Sovereign God bringing them to faith in Christ.

Now, consider the type presented as the priest first attended to the lamps and then moved to the altar of incense. The Scripture reads in verses 7 and 8, *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 even, he shall burn incense upon it, a perpetual incense before the LORD throughout your generations.* In the New Testament the real expression of this type 'is *watch and pray.*'

Mt 26: 36 ¶ Then cometh Jesus with them unto a place called Gethsemane, and saith unto the disciples, Sit ye here, while I go and pray yonder.

37 And he took with him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, and began to be sorrowful and very heavy.

*38 Then saith he unto them, My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death: tarry ye here, **and watch with me.** (watch by what?)*

39 And he went a little further, and fell on his face, and prayed, saying, O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me: nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt.

*40 And he cometh unto the disciples, and findeth them asleep, and saith unto Peter, What, **could ye not watch with me one hour?***

***41 Watch and pray,** that ye enter not into temptation: the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.*

***Lu 21:36 Watch ye therefore, and pray always,** that ye may be accounted worthy to escape all these things that shall come to pass, and to stand before the Son of man.*

Eph 6:17 *And take the helmet of salvation,*

This is a 'know-so' religion: *I know that my Redeemer liveth ...!*
said Job (cf. Job 19.25)

and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God:

As a weapon to battle against every foe, within and without ...

18 Praying always (or, at every season/opportunity, ἐν παντὶ
καίρῳ) *with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching
thereunto* (thereunto, is the Greek εἰς αὐτὸ τοῦτο, cf. Ro.9.17;
Eph.6.22; Ro.13.6; 2Co.5.5)

thereunto, to this same [purpose], which purpose is to stand
[v.13],)

with all perseverance and supplication for all saints;

Col 4:2 *Continue in prayer, and watch in the same* (or, ἐν αὐτῇ, in it)
with thanksgiving;

1Th 5:6 *Therefore let us not sleep, as do others; but let us watch and
be sober.* (sober, νήφω, is contrasted to the state of those who are
sleepy or drunken)

1Pe 4:7 *But the end of all things is at hand: be ye therefore sober*
(σωφρονέω, sound/right-minded; cf. Mk.5.15, the demoniac of
Gadara), *and watch νήφω unto prayer.*

The priesthood, when tending the lamps and burning the incense, were by their type showing us that we, the priesthood of the believer *must* watch and pray. How important this is for us cannot be overstated. Probably the one thing that we think the least of is the how important it is that we keep in prayer to God. We will do almost anything, until we come into trouble, but pray. And so trouble is in reality a God-send to move us to the act of prayer.

Ps 94:12 Blessed is the man whom thou chastenest, O LORD, and teachest him out of thy law;

13 That thou mayest give him rest from the days of adversity, until the pit be digged for the wicked.

14 For the LORD will not cast off his people, neither will he forsake his inheritance.

15 But judgment shall return unto righteousness: and all the upright in heart shall follow it.

*Ps 59:11 **Slay them not, lest my people forget:** scatter them by thy power; and bring them down, O Lord our shield.*

We all know that we should learn to be in a prayerful attitude at all times. We can enter in and out of pray through the day. And if our Lord took time for prayer; official prayer, where that is what He purposed to do at certain times of the day how much more should we?

Sometimes regular, systematic, daily prayers *seems* to be a rote exercise and ineffectual, but the truth is that we have regular needs; we need this day's provision of food, strength, shelter, clothing, and work; we meet with evil every single day and we need to pray, if the Lord will, to deliver us from it. (Mt.6.13) And we certainly have great need to combat our worst enemy, our old nature.

My personal need for prayer:

Brethren we need grace. We need *grace* to be *fruitful*. I need grace to repent, forgive, forbear, and long-suffer. I need grace to be patient, gentle, and kind. I need grace to love, joy, and to be cheerful. I need grace that the peace of God might rule in my heart; and to seek peace. I need grace to speak words which will work to edify others in Christ; I need grace sometimes to say things that are very hard to say. I need grace to understand the Word of God, to rightly divide it, and to present it in an orderly way to the dear saints of God. I need grace to be a husband, a father, grandfather, an uncle, a brother, a friend, and a pastor. Brethren, I *need* to pray, and I need to learn to pray faithfully.

Jesus Christ is my golden altar of incense, and He is the sweet odor of incense which was kindled by the coals which came from the brazen altar where He was judged in my place. Christ prays for me and for you, and we receive answers from our Heavenly Father because His intercessions.

1Pe 3:12 For the eyes of the Lord are over the righteous, and his ears are open unto their prayers: but the face of the Lord is against them that do evil.

Ro.8.26 ¶ Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities: for we know not what we should pray for as we ought: but the Spirit itself maketh intercession (obtains by exceeding)

maketh intercession, ὑπερεντυγχάνει, 3ps. pres. ind. of ὑπερεντυγχάνω, ὑπέρ exceeds, in our behalf + ἐν in, with, by + τυγχάνω, to obtain (perhaps acquire);

for (in behalf of) us with groanings which cannot be uttered.

27 And he that searcheth the hearts knoweth what is the mind of the Spirit, because he maketh intercession for the saints according to the will of God.

28 And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose.

יְכַפֵּר

10 And Aaron shall make an atonement upon the horns of it once in a year

הַכִּפּוּרִים

with the blood of the sin offering of atonements: once in the year

כִּפְּרוֹ

shall he make atonement upon it throughout your generations: it is most holy unto the LORD.

The blood of the sin offering for atonement was applied to the horns of this alter only once a year. This showed that all of the animal sacrifices in fact

did not avail to put away sins. And this pointed to that one sacrifice that Jesus would make in our behalf. So this once-a-year atonement applied to the altar of incense served temporarily, 'to purify it from the uncleannesses of the children of Israel.' *Keil & Delitzsch Commentary on the Old Testament*, vol. 1, p.458. Again, all service, including prayer, is based upon Jesus Christ's death on the cross for us.