

Title: **THE OTHER ALTAR**

Text: Exodus 30:1-38

Subject: *The Altar of Incense*

Date: Tuesday Evening — June 9, 2008

Tape : Exodus #99

Readings: *Phil Simpson and Larry Brown*

Introduction:

The title of my message tonight is **THE OTHER ALTAR**. In the 27th chapter of Exodus, we saw Christ our Altar magnificently represented in the great Brazen Altar that stood at the forefront of the Tabernacle in the Wilderness and at the forefront of all the ceremonial worship of the typical, Mosaic age. How we thank God for our Altar, the one and only Altar by which sinners can to God Christ Jesus! — “*We have an altar, whereof they have no right to eat which serve the tabernacle*” (Hebrews 13:10). The Brazen Altar of sacrifice, typified our blessed Lord Jesus, the sin-atonement Sacrifice by whose blood we draw near to God.

But one altar alone was not sufficient to portray the work by which sinners are brought to God and find acceptance with Him in Christ Jesus. So the Lord God ordered that another altar be made to represent our Redeemer, the Lord Jesus Christ, and our access to God by Him. We read about the other altar in **Exodus 30**.

THE ALTAR OF INCENSE — (vv. 1-10) “And thou shalt make an altar to burn incense upon: *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. (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. (6) 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. (7) And Aaron shall burn thereon sweet incense every morning: when he dresseth the lamps, he shall burn incense upon it. (8) And when Aaron lighteth the*

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lamps at even, he shall burn incense upon it, a perpetual incense before the LORD throughout your generations. (9) Ye shall offer no strange incense thereon, nor burnt sacrifice, nor meat offering; neither shall ye pour drink offering thereon. (10) And Aaron shall make an atonement upon the horns of it once in a year with the blood of the sin offering of atonements: once in the year shall he make atonement upon it throughout your generations: it *is* most holy unto the LORD.”

ATONEMENT MONEY — (vv. 11-16) “And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying, (12) When thou takest the sum of the children of Israel after their number, then shall they give every man a ransom for his soul unto the LORD, when thou numberest them; that there be no plague among them, when *thou* numberest them. (13) This they shall give, every one that passeth among them that are numbered, half a shekel after the shekel of the sanctuary: (a shekel *is* twenty gerahs:) an half shekel *shall be* the offering of the LORD. (14) Every one that passeth among them that are numbered, from twenty years old and above, shall give an offering unto the LORD. (15) The rich shall not give more, and the poor shall not give less than half a shekel, when *they* give an offering unto the LORD, to make an atonement for your souls. (16) And thou shalt take the atonement money of the children of Israel, and shalt appoint it for the service of the tabernacle of the congregation; that it may be a memorial unto the children of Israel before the LORD, to make an atonement for your souls.”

LAVER OF BRASS — (vv. 17-21) “And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying, (18) Thou shalt also make a laver *of* brass, and his foot *also of* brass, to wash *withal*: and thou shalt put it between the tabernacle of the congregation and the altar, and thou shalt put water therein. (19) For Aaron and his sons shall wash their hands and their feet thereat: (20) When they go into the tabernacle of the congregation, they shall wash with water, that they die not; or when they come near to the altar to minister, to burn offering made by fire unto the LORD: (21) So they shall wash their hands and their feet, that they die not: and it shall be a statute for ever to them, *even* to him and to his seed throughout their generations.”

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THE ANOINTING OIL — (vv. 22-33) “Moreover the LORD spake unto Moses, saying, (23) Take thou also unto thee principal spices, of pure myrrh five hundred *shekels*, and of sweet cinnamon half so much, *even* two hundred and fifty *shekels*, and of sweet calamus two hundred and fifty *shekels*, (24) And of cassia five hundred *shekels*, after the shekel of the sanctuary, and of oil olive an hin: (25) And thou shalt make it an oil of holy ointment, an ointment compound after the art of the apothecary: it shall be an holy anointing oil. (26) And thou shalt anoint the tabernacle of the congregation therewith, and the ark of the testimony, (27) And the table and all his vessels, and the candlestick and his vessels, and the altar of incense, (28) And the altar of burnt offering with all his vessels, and the laver and his foot. (29) And thou shalt sanctify them, that they may be most holy: whatsoever toucheth them shall be holy. (30) And thou shalt anoint Aaron and his sons, and consecrate them, that *they* may minister unto me in the priest’s office. (31) And thou shalt speak unto the children of Israel, saying, This shall be an holy anointing oil unto me throughout your generations. (32) Upon man’s flesh shall it not be poured, neither shall ye make *any other* like it, after the composition of it: it *is* holy, *and* it shall be holy unto you. (33) Whosoever compoundeth *any* like it, or whosoever putteth *any* of it upon a stranger, shall even be cut off from his people.”

THE INCENSE — (vv. 34-38) “And the LORD said unto Moses, Take unto thee sweet spices, stacte, and onycha, and galbanum; *these* sweet spices with pure frankincense: of each shall there be a like *weight*: (35) And thou shalt make it a perfume, a confection after the art of the apothecary, tempered together, pure *and* holy: (36) And thou shalt beat *some* of it very small, and put of it before the testimony in the tabernacle of the congregation, where I will meet with thee: it shall be unto you most holy. (37) And *as for* the perfume which thou shalt make, ye shall not make to yourselves according to the composition thereof: it shall be unto thee holy for the LORD. (38) Whosoever shall make like unto that, to smell thereto, shall even be cut off from his people.”

The Tabernacle in the Wilderness, along with the priesthood, all the sacrifices, all the ceremonies and all the furnishings of the Tabernacle, were designed to typify our Lord Jesus, our salvation by Him and in Him, and

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our worship of God in Him. When the worshipping Israelite came to worship God, he could do so only in the way God prescribed. So it is with sinners today. If we worship God, we must worship Him in the way He requires. In the days of the Tabernacle...

1. The sinner had to be **typically redeemed**. — He must first be accepted by a sin-atonement sacrifice offered upon and consumed by the fire of the Brazen Altar. And the sacrifice had to be killed and offered by God's priest, in the way God prescribed.
2. Then, the sinner for whom atonement was made, had to be **typically regenerated**. — He must wash in the Laver of Brass before the Tabernacle.
3. And the redeemed, regenerate sinner must be **typically represented** in the court of the Tabernacle by God's priest. As God's priest went about the business of the holy place, we see the blood-bought, regenerate soul walking in the light of the Golden Candlestick (Christ our Light), feeding upon the bread of God upon the Table of Showbread (Christ our Bread — Spread upon the Gospel Table), perpetually accepted by the perpetual merit of Christ's shed blood, Christ our Passover sacrificed for us, who is our great High Priest and Advocate represented in the Golden Altar of Incense before the Tabernacle Veil.

ITS' PURPOSE

(Exodus 30:1) "And thou shalt make an altar to burn incense upon."

The altar of incense is not to be confounded with the altar of burnt offering. No sacrifice was ever offered upon this altar. Nothing but incense was to be put upon its ever burning coals. The sacrifice was made outside, at the door of entrance. The incense of this blood-sprinkled altar speaks of the efficacious merit of Christ's sin-atonement blood ascending up unto God, by which we have unceasing access to and acceptance with God on His throne (Hebrews 10:17-22).

(Hebrews 10:17-22) "And their sins and iniquities will I remember no more. (18) Now where remission of these *is, there is* no more offering for sin. (19) Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus, (20) By a new and living way, which he hath consecrated for us, through the veil, that is to say, his flesh; (21) And *having* an high priest over the house of God; (22) Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having

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our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water.”

- Christ is our constant, all-prevailing Advocate on High (1 John 2:1-2).
- It is through His Name, His precious Name that we make our requests known unto God. — *“If ye ask anything in My Name, I will do it”* (John 14:14). — *“His Name is as ointment poured forth”* (Song of Solomon 1:3).
- By Him we and our works and our prayers and our praise are accepted of God (1 Peter 2:5).

ITS' MATERIALS

This altar was made of incorruptible shittim wood (v. 1), overlaid with gold (v. 3), and had a crown of gold. There was a horn on each corner, and a golden crown on top. It had four golden rings under the crown for the two staves by which it was to be carried. It occupied a position in the holy place directly in front of the veil. Burning coals were placed upon it, and sweet incense was put upon the coals morning and evening. Fragrant white smoke ascended from it continually.

Like the great Brazen Altar outside, this Altar of Incense was also made of two different materials: — Not wood and brass, but wood and gold. Here again we see both the divinity and the humanity of Christ typified. In the brazen altar the wood was strengthened by the brass. In the altar of incense the wood (human nature) is glorified by the gold.

Gold was united with wood; and Christ is the corresponding wonder. He who is equal to God in Godhead's greatness is one with man in humanity's low state. He who rightfully sits upon Jehovah's throne willingly wears the rags of humanity. Such is the Savior we have. Such is the Savior we need! More cannot be. Less would be nothing.

He who was crucified in weakness, has been raised in glory. He who was the *“Man of Sorrows”* is now the Man in the Glory. He took upon Himself the likeness of sinful flesh. Now that likeness, that body, our nature (Our flesh!) has been glorified in Him. What an encouragement to prayer and faith and worship! Ever remember that the Lord of the glory is still truly human! — *“Consider Him”* (Heb. 12. 3).

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A Man there is, a real Man,
With wounds still gaping wide,
From which rich streams of blood once ran,
In hands, and feet and side.

‘Tis no wild fancy of our brains,
No metaphor we speak;
The same dear Man in heaven now reigns,
Who suffered for our sake.

This wondrous Man of whom we tell,
Is true Almighty God;
He bought our souls from death and hell; —
The price, — His own heart’s blood.

That human heart He still retains,
Though throned in highest bliss;
And feels each tempted member’s pains;
For our affliction’s His.

Come, then, repenting sinner, come;
Approach with humble faith;
Owe what you may, the total sum
Is cancelled by His death!

His blood can cleanse the blackest soul,
And wash our guilt away;
He will present us sound and whole
In that tremendous day!

This Altar of Incense was much smaller than the one Ezekiel saw in his vision of this Gospel day (Ezekiel 41:22), because all things in the carnal worship of the legal dispensation were but “*a shadow of good things to come*” (Hebrews 10:1) in this day when all worship is spiritual. — “*God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth*” (John 4:24; Malachi 1:11).

(Malachi 1:11) “For from the rising of the sun even unto the going down of the same my name *shall be* great among the Gentiles; and in every place incense *shall be* offered unto my name, and a pure

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offering: for my name *shall be* great among the heathen, saith the LORD of hosts.”

ITS' POSITION

(Exodus 30:6) “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.”

The Altar of Incense stood within the door, in the center of the holy place, in a straight line with the Brazen Altar, the Laver of Brass and the Ark of the Covenant and the Mercy-seat. Those vessels which stood in line with the great altar and the mercy-seat seem to indicate the provision made for us to come to God by the blood of Christ, the new and living way. The mercy-seat represented the throne of God, the Altar of Incense stood before it. This is exactly the position of it as John saw it spiritually in Revelation 8:3-4. The whole thing points to Christ, our Great High Priest, the Angel of the Lord, who is before the throne making intercession for us.

(Revelation 8:3-4) “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.”

Our Lord Jesus, our great High Priest, not only prays for us, but takes our prayers and presents them with the incense of His infinite merit before the Father’s throne. He takes our prayers and presents them before God in the fragrance of His high priestly character and on the basis of His perfect sacrifice (Hebrews 4:14-16).

(Hebrews 4:14-16) “Seeing then that we have a great high priest, that is passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast *our* profession. (15) For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as *we are*, yet without sin. (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.”

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ITS' HEIGHT

This Golden Altar of Incense was “*two cubits*” high (v. 2). That little bit of information tell us that it was half a cubit higher than the other vessels in the Tabernacle. I just have to ask — “Why?”

I think I know the answer. — He who humbled Himself unto death has now been “*highly exalted.*” God raised Him from the dead and set Him “*far above all*” (Ephesians 1:20-21). He is now Head over all to His Church. In the estimate of God the merit of His Son’s death is far above all. Christ’s precious blood exceeds everything! Praise His Name! You and I may not be able to appreciate the full value of the Savior’s death, but God can, — and God does!

- He saves His people according to His own high estimate of the worth of Christ’s atoning work.
- He can and will bless us, according to His own high estimate of the worth of Christ’s atoning work.

ITS' STAVES

The staves or poles (vv. 4-5) by which the Altar of Incense was to be carried were not to be removed. They were always present with the altar. Thus the altar was ever ready for the march, ever ready to move with the children of Israel. The intercessions of Christ are ours, in every place or circumstance, and that continually. — “*Lo, I am with you alway*” (Matthew 28:20). — Always ready! What a privilege! — Always near! What a blessing! Try to get hold of this, my brother, my sister. — When we offer our prayers to our God, — When we come into this house to worship Him, — When we go out to labor for Him, — As we seek to live for Him, mingled with the sweet incense of the Savior’s precious Name, we are standing between the two staves of His faithfulness and power?

As the staves are the means by which the Altar was carried, we are reminded that the Gospel-sound must go into all the earth. Place has no power to shut out Christ. By the staves of God’s faithfulness and God’s power, let us go forth with the good news of His grace!

ITS' HORNS

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At each corner of the altar was a golden horn (v. 2). Horns are symbols of power and fulness. Here they speak of the power of Christ's advocacy and intercession. They were four in number, because Christ has His elect in the four corners of the earth. — *"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"* (Hebrews 7:25).

- The power of Christ's intercession does not lie in His persuasiveness, but in the fact of His presence before God as the glorified Son of Man.
- That God has taken one Man into heaven, that He has exalted Him to His own right hand in human form, gives us hope that He might bring other men to Glory, saved by the right hand of His great mercy.
- The wounds of Christ never fail, in the eye of our gracious God. — He is always *"the Lamb as it had been slain"* (Revelation 5:6). — He always has power to save and to keep us by His grace. — And He has the *"power to open the book"* (Revelation 5:5).

The Altar was square. Such also was the shape of the atoning Brazen Altar. Our salvation is exceeding strong. Christ cannot fail. His atoning work is firmly based on the might of God's own omnipotence forever!

ITS' CROWN

On the top of the Altar of Incense there was a golden crown (v. 3). The crown is a royal emblem. Let Christ Jesus take it, then. It is His right. — *"The government shall be upon His shoulder"* (Isaiah 9:6). — God the Father cries, *"Yet have I set my King upon My holy hill of Zion"* (Psalm 2:6). Once, indeed, derision mocked Him with its crown of thorns. But now in heaven He wears redemption's everlasting diadem.

"But though He rules thus high, His darling throne is the poor sinner's heart! His brightest crown is jeweled with saved souls."

(Henry Law)

Around the top was a ridge or crown, to keep the coals from falling off the altar. The coals of fire were protected by a crown of gold. Christ's priestly power is preserved and assured by His kingly might. He is now *"crowned with glory and honour"* (Hebrews 2:9).

How comforting it must have been to the Israelite who was responsible to carry the altar over the rough desert that God had made provision against

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the falling of the coals of fire. Their feet might stumble, but the burning coals were still preserved by the crown of gold. — Glorious truth this! — What assurance! Our Priest is the King of the universe!

- Though Peter stumbled and fell, the coals of Christ’s intercession failed not. — “*I have prayed for thee*” (Luke 22:32).
- We may fail, but the incense of His merits still ascends.
- The next time you read the 17th chapter of John, remember this golden Altar of Incense.

THE INCENSE

(Exodus 30:7-9) “And Aaron shall burn thereon sweet incense every morning: when he dresseth the lamps, he shall burn incense upon it. (8) And when Aaron lighteth the lamps at even, he shall burn incense upon it, a perpetual incense before the LORD throughout your generations. (9) Ye shall offer no strange incense thereon, nor burnt sacrifice, nor meat offering; neither shall ye pour drink offering thereon.”

(Exodus 30:34-36) “And the LORD said unto Moses, Take unto thee sweet spices, stacte, and onycha, and galbanum; *these* sweet spices with pure frankincense: of each shall there be a like *weight*: (35) And thou shalt make it a perfume, a confection after the art of the apothecary, tempered together, pure *and* holy: (36) And thou shalt beat *some* of it very small, and put of it before the testimony in the tabernacle of the congregation, where I will meet with thee: it shall be unto you most holy.”

Here is something very important. The fire on which the incense was placed was taken from the Brazen Altar, where the sin-offering was consumed (Leviticus 16:12-13). No other fire could be used. Aaron, the high priest, did not make a fire of his own choosing. His sons, Nadab and Abihu, did burn incense on a fire of their own kindling. This is called “*strange fire*” (Leviticus 10:1-2). What did they do that was so abominable? Nadab and Abihu departed from the plain Word of Jehovah, and by their actions signified that worship may be offered to God on another foundation than acceptance through a crucified Christ. For that the Lord killed them and will kill anyone who dares to approach Him in any way except through the bloody sacrifice of the Divine Substitute Christ Jesus (Hebrews 9:22).

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The value of this altar lay in the incense. As we might expect, that which typifies the merit of God's sin-atonement Son will have something peculiar and mysterious about it. It was made by the mingling of three spices each part was to be equal weight (Exodus 30:34-38). What these spices (stacte, onycha and galbanum) were no man can tell. But I know exactly what they represent. They represent the sweet spice of Christ's merit and efficacy as our Redeemer.

- The Merit of His Righteousness — His Obedience
- The Efficacy of His Blood — His Atonement
- And the Prevalence of His Advocacy — His Intercession

Incense, of course, is a symbol of Prayer (Psalm 141:2). As Aaron offered the incense, he was a figure of our Lord Jesus Christ in Heaven offering up prayer on behalf of those who are His (Hebrews 9:24).

- Aaron offered up this incense exclusively for the children of Israel, and so it is that our Lord Jesus prays only for those who are His (John 17:9).
- Those for whom that sacrifice died on the Brazen Altar were included in the prayers of the Golden Altar.
- The fire must first feed on the sacrifice.
- The intercessory work of our Lord does not exceed or fall short of His sacrificial work.

Our Lord as High Priest, not only prays for us, but takes our prayers and presents them like incense before the Father's throne. How He does this is illustrated in (Revelation 8:3). He takes our persons and our prayers and our performances, and presents them before God in the fragrance of His high priestly character and on the basis of His perfect sacrifice, giving us perpetual acceptance in all things with God (Ecclesiastes 9:7; 1 Peter 2:5).

(Ecclesiastes 9:7) "Go thy way, eat thy bread with joy, and drink thy wine with a merry heart; for God now accepteth thy works."

(1 Peter 2:5) "Ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ."

This is the meaning of the type before us: — The intercession of our Lord Jesus is based on and finds its efficacy in the cross, in the sacrifice of Himself as the Sin-offering there.

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- The horns of the altar of incense were stained once a year with the blood of atonement from the brazen altar (Exodus 30:10).
- The priesthood of Christ and His work of intercession on our behalf rests wholly in the blood of the cross. Had He not died and met the claims of Divine justice against us, He could not intercede for us.

These two altars are inseparable. The sacrifice was made on the Brazen Altar, but the atonement is complete on the Golden Altar. **What do we see between the two altars? — Resurrection!** Our Lord died on the cross, the altar of sacrifice; and after His resurrection, He took the blood of the cross to the throne of God in Heaven, having obtained eternal redemption for us! Had He not risen, His death would have been of no avail and our faith is vain (1 Corinthians 15:17). Our High Priest rose from the dead, took His blood within the veil, consummated the atonement there and made reconciliation. It was the blood that gave value to the incense, and it is the blood of Christ that makes both our persons and our prayers acceptable to God!

We dare not come to God, or seek to worship God, or bring any strange fire of free will or good works or law obedience to the thrice holy Lord God, lest, like Nadab and Abihu He slay us in His wrath!

(Exodus 30:37-38) “And *as for* the perfume which thou shalt make, ye shall not make to yourselves according to the composition thereof: it shall be unto thee holy for the LORD. (38) Whosoever shall make like unto that, to smell thereto, shall even be cut off from his people.”

Amen.