



## Gospel / Life

### Toward A Spirituality Of Freedom

New Creation Teaching Ministry: Tuesday Night Studies 2011, Seacliff Anglican Church

#### **Meditation – Psalm 30**

#### **Study 20: The Burnt Offering and Devoting Ourselves to God**

As we saw last week, the burnt offering was a symbolic way of showing the offerers' whole-hearted, whole-souled, whole-bodied love for God. Perhaps 2Chronicles 29 shows this connection between the offering and devotion most clearly.

Very early in his reign, Hezekiah the king had acted to restore the Temple, which had been neglected under the reign of his father, Ahaz. This restoration was begun with a call to the Levites to consecrate themselves and the Temple (29:5)—which meant cleansing the Temple from the defiling, idolatrous additions that Ahaz had placed there, and returning to the true practice of worship (29:6-8) that had fallen away, incurring God's wrath. The Levites were exhorted to "not be negligent" (29:11) but to throw themselves wholeheartedly into the ministry for which the LORD had chosen them. This they did (29:15-19). When these things had been done, Hezekiah gathered the leaders of Jerusalem together to go to the Temple for worship and sacrifice (29:20ff). Sin offerings were made to cleanse and reconsecrate the Temple and its furnishings, and to cleanse and consecrate the priests and the whole people of Israel.

When this had been done, a burnt offering was made. Arrangements were made so that this would be done in proper order: an orchestra and choir was put in their proper place (29:25-26). Then, on Israel's behalf, a burnt offering was made, and the orchestra and choir burst into voice (29:27). "The whole assembly bowed in worship, while the singers sang and trumpeters played. All this continued until the sacrifice of the burnt offering was completed." When this was done, everybody (including the king) knelt down and worshipped, as the choir sang the psalms of David and Asaph. The king's words then are significant for our study, showing the link between the burnt offering and dedication or devotion to God:

"You have now dedicated yourselves to the LORD. Come and bring sacrifices and thank offerings to the Temple of the LORD." So the assembly brought sacrifices and thank offerings, and all whose hearts were willing brought burnt offerings. (2Chron. 29:31)

It is important to note that the burnt offering followed the sin offerings by which the Temple and the people were cleansed from their defiling sins. Devotion to God is the outflow of His grace to us, not the cause of such grace: the fruit, not the root, of grace. Moreover, even the action of devotion of the people in burnt offerings (v. 31) was preceded by a provided burnt offering (v. 27). Likewise, our devotion to God arises through union with the devotion of Jesus Christ, the new Adam.

## **The life shaped by devotion to God**

**Numbers 28** provides a schedule for Israel to their offerings. It was important that Israel presented the proper sacrifices at the proper times. This outline showed how Israel could give ritual, symbolic expression to their determination to love the LORD with full devotion.

### *Daily sacrifices (Num. 28:3-8)*

Every day there were two specific burnt offerings of spotless lambs to be made, one in the morning and one in the evening. The day was begun and ended with these actions in the Temple of dedication to God. With the offered lamb, there was to be made a grain offering of flour mixed with oil, and a drink offering of wine (about 2 litres of flour and a litre of wine). Every day this offering was made to the LORD: it was an offering which had its origins at Mount Sinai in the commanded Tabernacle worship.

### *Weekly sacrifices (28:9-10)*

On the Sabbath, a further burnt offering of two lambs was to be made, in addition to the daily sacrifice, but this time with a doubling of the grain offering. This sacrifice linked the resting of the Sabbath with renewed devotion to the LORD.

The Sabbath is rest when the rest is found in hearing the LORD's voice and loving Him, not just in taking a day off from work. As Luther said in his Large Catechism, "For, indeed, non-Christians can also cease from work and be idle, just as the entire swarm of our ecclesiastics, who stand daily in the churches, singing, and ringing bells but keeping no holy day holy, because they neither preach nor practise God's Word, but teach and live contrary to it."

The Sabbath was a day to be kept holy. What would that mean? Again, Luther helps us:

"To sanctify the holy day is the same as to keep it holy. But what is meant by keeping it holy? Nothing else than to be occupied in holy words, works, and life. For the day needs no sanctification for itself; for in itself it has been created holy [from the beginning of the creation it was sanctified by its Creator]. But God desires it to be holy *to you*. Therefore it becomes holy or unholy on your account, according as you are occupied on the same with things that are holy or unholy."

In particular, sanctification happens by exposure to the holy presence of God, i.e. by the Word of God and prayer (1Tim. 4:5). So, the Sabbath is sanctified when we give our time to hearing God's word read and preached, and as we bring our prayers of adoration, thanksgiving, intercession and supplication to Him. Luther again:

"But God's Word is the treasure which sanctifies everything, and by which even all the saints themselves were sanctified. At whatever hour, then, God's Word is taught, preached, heard, read or meditated upon, there the person, day, and work are sanctified thereby, not because of the external work, but because of the Word, which makes saints of us all. Therefore I constantly say that all our life and work must be ordered according to God's Word, if it is to be God-pleasing or holy. Where this is done, this commandment is in force and being fulfilled."

There is a close connection between devotion to the LORD and careful listening to him which expresses itself in obedience. Devotion flows from a full heart; a full heart does not come by filling itself(!), but rather from being filled from the fullness of God. Love in us for God is begotten by the love of God for us, which we receive by prayerful meditation on His word.

### *Monthly sacrifices (28:11-15)*

On the first day of every month (the New Moon festivals) a special burnt offering was to be offered on Israel's behalf, in addition to the other daily and weekly offerings. It consisted of two young bulls, one ram, and seven male lambs—all spotless. The grain offering with the burnt was three times the amount for the daily offering with each bull, two times the grain offering with the ram, and an equivalent amount to the daily offering with each of the lambs. Each of the bull offerings were to be accompanied with a double-sized drink offering, a somewhat larger than normal drink offering with the ram (a third of a hin rather than a quarter), and a regular sized drink offering with each of the lambs. The burnt offering for the start of the month was also to be accompanied with a male goat sin offering.

Daily, weekly, and monthly, Israel gave expression regularly to their love and determination to the Lord. As well as these regular offerings, there were the regular annual festivals (Passover, Feast of Weeks, Feast of Trumpets, Day of Atonement, Feast of Tabernacles), all of which were accompanied by large sacrificial offerings. These offerings were provided for Israel, normally by the king. By these symbolic actions, Israel was both reminded of their obligation and expressed their faithful fulfilment of that obligation to love the LORD their God with heart, soul and strength. He had redeemed and made them His own people, rescuing them from slavery into freedom. That freedom was best celebrated and expressed by love for Him.

### **Some reflections**

Before looking at the implications of this schedule for us, it is good to remember that just as these offerings were made on Israel's behalf by their king, so our devotion to the Lord begins with Jesus the Lord offering himself to the Father on our behalf. All whole lives are "in Christ" – meaning that all that he is and does counts on our behalf.

Starting and ending each day with prayer and the Word of God is a good way to remind ourselves that we are not our own, we have been bought with price, and that our lives are not for our pleasure primarily but for the service and love of God. At times when life is very busy, we may lose this focus. But we are called by Jesus to not worry about much, except this that we devote ourselves to seeking first the kingdom of God and His righteousness.

Giving devoted time to meet with God's people in praise and honour of God, to hear His word read and preached, to pray to Him for our needs, to encourage and help one another is often under pressure in our busy world. We sanctify our whole week, and so create space for the daily worship of God, when we set aside this time. It is true that our weekly worship is as strong and true as our daily worship, but it is also true that our daily worship is as strong and true as our weekly worship. Sunday gathering is the norm to some extent, but need not be fixed so. But whatever day and time, the regularity of it, by which you say no to other options for that time, is part of the expression of our devotion to the Lord.

The church year has certain seasons of focus – Advent to think of Christ's first and second comings; Christmas to think of Jesus' birth and saving plan of God for the world; Lent to think of Christ's faithful obedience, even to death, on our behalf; Easter to think on the glory of the resurrection and to lead into the great Festivals of Ascension, Pentecost, and Trinity Sunday. This approach to the year helps us to sanctify the year, to set aside certain parts of the year with carefulness.