

SIMPLE TALKS ON THE TABERNACLE

by

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CHAPTER SIX

THE ALTAR OF BURNT-OFFERING AND THE SIN-OFFERING

“He shall bring the bullock unto the door of the tabernacle of the congregation before the Lord; and shall lay his hand upon the bullock's head, and the priest shall kill the bullock before the Lord. Even the whole bullock shall he carry forth without the camp unto a clean place, where the ashes are poured out, and burn him on the wood with fire: where the ashes are poured out shall he be burnt” (Leviticus 4:4,12).

THE Altar of Burnt-offering is a type of our blessed Lord. It is also a symbol of the cross. Christ was the altar, but also the lamb that was slain on the altar.

Let us approach once more in holy reverence. It was foursquare. He was the only perfect man that ever lived. Study the balance in His character, His humility, His majesty, washing His disciples' feet, the servant of all; meeting majestically the band who had come to take Him. **“Whom seek ye?”** Awestruck, they fell to the ground. Burning with indignation at the hypocrisy of Pharisee and Sadducee, He tenderly dismissed a woman taken in adultery.

Read the Gospels; follow the Lord as He went through the land. Did you ever find Him in a hurry, or unwilling when interrupted? He had put His times in Father's hand (Psalm. 31:5) and, therefore could abide Father's hour, always living in harmony with Father's will.

The altar had four sides and each side tells us of a special gracious gift we receive out of His hands:

1. The forgiveness of sins.

This is the good news which one side of the altar brings us. However stained with sin a soul may be, the blood shed can cleanse him.

“Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow” (Isaiah 1:18).

2. *Substitution, another side promises us.*

How precious for a sin-burdened soul!

“All we like sheep have gone astray; . . . the Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all” (Isaiah 53:6).

If He has taken the burden from my shoulders, I need not feel the weight any more. This teaches the second side of the altar.

3. *Reconciling the Father and the sinner through the Son is found at the brazen altar.*

Our great High Priest takes the hand of the repenting sinner and with the other He touches Father's hand. **“For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus”** (I Timothy 2:5).

He can save to the uttermost them that come through Him to God (Hebrews 7:25). That is the third side of the altar.

4. *Deliverance from the bondage of sin* you may find at the altar, when you are willing to become a burnt-offering yourself, and lay on the altar, being made conformable to His death, reckoning yourselves to be dead unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord (Romans 6:11).

The cross will not only cover our sins, but it will cover us. If the cross covers me, it is a matter of course that it covers my sins; and we find in the brazen altar a saving, a freeing, a keeping power. This is the fourth side of the altar.

“And thou shalt make the horns of it upon the four corners thereof” (Exodus 27:2).

The horns of a mighty stag are his ornament; they may serve as defence and protection. They speak to us of might and strength.

“He shall give strength unto his king, and exalt the horn (the power) of his anointed” (I Samuel 2:10).

“The horn of Moab is cut off” (his power is broken) (Jeremiah 48:25).

“For thou art the glory of their strength: and in thy favour our horn shall be exalted” (our power increased) (Psalm. 89:17).

These passages will suffice to show us that the four horns of the altar point out the powerful value of Christ's sacrifice; and as they point to all four directions, it seems as if they want to tell us: **“Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth: for I am God, and there is none else”** (Isaiah 45:22).

Adonijah fled for protection to the corners of the altar. He had plotted to seize the kingdom out of the hands of his aged father and to be acclaimed king instead of Solomon. Clasp the horns of the altar, he was safe from his brother's wrath. Solomon allowed him to go to his own house (I Kings 1:50-53).

How often have I, as a student, looked at the heavy knocker of Durham's cathedral. Whatever the crime of the fugitive, when he raised that knocker, claiming the right of asylum, he was safe within the sacred precincts.

“He that dwelleth in the secret place of the most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty” (Psalm. 91:1).

But how could the horns of the altar afford protection? Do you not see that they were sprinkled with blood? Death had already been there; the sword of justice had done its work. It was the blood, and the blood only, that gave the horns their protective power. All the sacrifices had to be brought to the altar of burnt-offering. There God met the sinner.

There were two kinds of offerings: the sweet-savour offerings (the burnt-offerings), and the meal-offering (the peace-offering). These typify Christ in His perfect, sinless life, living for His Father and Father's glory. The sweet-savour offerings were prompted by the love and gratitude of the worshipper.

The non-sweet-savour offerings were the trespass-offering and the sin-offering. The trespass-offering partook in some ways of the nature of the sin-offering; it lays weight rather upon the harm done by sin than on the guilt incurred. The trespassing might be due to ignorance, but whatever harm was done to others had to be made good. As evidence of the reality of the sorrow, the harm had to be confessed, and restoration should be made.

Zacchaeus proved the reality of his conversion by restoring fourfold the money which he had obtained by false accusations. I do not think many people doubted the genuineness of his conversion. It is most desirable that, when dealing with enquirers, they should be urged to seek forgiveness and make restoration wherever they have wronged others, as well as seeking forgiveness of God. This is not always an easy thing to do, and the devil may suggest many reasons not to do so, but obedience in this respect gives hope for growth and future life.

When we now meditate together on the sin-offering, we are depending especially on the teaching of the Holy Spirit, for our subject will really be Christ and the sinner: the sinner in his need; the Saviour in His fullness and love. Christ glorified the Father, the Holy Spirit glorifies Christ; may we glorify the Holy Spirit in listening to Him, that Christ may become more precious to us than ever before.

There were three grades of sin-offerings, depending on the culprit: whether he was a priest, an official, or a private person. Sin does not only injure the sinner himself, but others in the third and fourth generation. The innocent suffer with the guilty. We all know this; we have seen it.

Sin is not a weakness; sin is a hateful thing. Like a stone thrown into the water, so sin spreads in ever-widening circles. God puts the priest first. Sin in God's children is worse than sin of the unconverted. The sin of Achan caused Israel to be defeated. It may keep relatives from making a decision for the Lord. People in authority have great influence. Happy is the state whose leaders seek guidance from God. To the third group belonged the ordinary people.

- A bullock without blemish as offering for the priest;
- A kid of the goats, a male without blemish for an official;
- A kid of the goats, a lamb, a female without blemish for the common people.

May you and I feel our Lord present as I point out what God required in the sin-offering.

The sinner himself, had in each case to bring himself the offering to the altar. He had to press his hand hard, to lean upon the sin-offering. Listen, I want to speak softly. You have to slay the sin-offering. The priest shall take the blood and put it with his finger on the horns of the altar. The fat of the animal the priest shall burn on the altar. The whole animal shall be carried without the camp and burnt on the wood with fire in a clean place where the ashes are poured out.

Do you see that man with bowed head slowly passing the numerous tents of his tribe going towards the gate of the court? He is leading a little lamb without blemish; he is bringing a sin-offering.

The Holy Spirit has convicted him of sin, sin against God and his fellow-men. Men did not know it. God knows. His conscience does not give him rest. Even when he lies down, his sin follows him. He arises; he chooses the lamb for an offering.

1. He shall bring a bullock unto the door.

No servant, no friend, neither parent nor child can go for you. It matters not whether you are priest or ruler, this must be a personal transaction between you and God, a talk under four eyes with the Saviour.

The woman at the well had such a talk with the Saviour. It was the first step to a life of useful service.

Paul had it on the way to Damascus. He discovered that all he had been so proud of was of no value in the sight of God. His good works were nothing but splendid sins. All the credit had to be transferred to the debit side. He became spiritually bankrupt.

Reader, if you have had no Damascus hour yet in your life, will you now go to the brazen altar?

Looking up into those loving, yet searching eyes of your Saviour, pray:

“Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me and know my thoughts: and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting” (Psalm. 139:23,24).

2. *He shall lay his hand upon the sacrifice.*

Have you done this? It is the next act. You are burdened by your sins, do what the Lord tells you. It is so simple. Never mind whether you have any feeling about it; do what you are told. Lay your hand upon the lamb, press hard, lean hard. When you do this, something will happen. God will take your sins and lay them on Jesus, he said so: **“The Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all”** (Isaiah 53:6 a).

Bunyan's burden rolled from his back. Does the burden of your sin still weigh you down? No, it is gone. How do you know? God said so. **“The priest shall make atonement for him and his sins shall be forgiven him.”** Four times in Leviticus 4 God repeats this statement!

There is even more. Look at the lamb!

Do you see any spot, any blemish in it? Listen, dear soul, what I am going to tell you seems almost too good to be true. The blamelessness of the lamb now becomes the repentant sinner's blamelessness.

“Blessed is the man unto whom the Lord imputeth not iniquity” (Psalm. 32:2).

Blessed indeed, but God according to the riches of His grace does far more. Abraham's faith was imputed to him as righteousness. God's righteousness is Christ. He imputes Christ to us. Does the Bible tell us what imputation means?

Look at that run-away slave. His punishment might be death. He is standing before his master. Philemon has a letter in his hand, a letter from his friend, Paul. He looks at the slave who has wronged him. The stern look makes way to a smile. What did he read?

“Receive him as myself,” reckon to him my merit. **“If he has wronged you, I will repay it.”**

That is what imputation, means. God looks on you, on me, *in the beloved*.

3. *He shall slay the offering.*

I would fain have spared you this. It seems too terrible. No longer is it the Roman soldiers who crucified the Lord.

I slew Him.

I pierced His hands and His feet. It is I that crucified Him. My sins brought Him on that cross. He paid the penalty; He bore the punishment for my sins. He died for me. Come with me to Golgotha. Look at your Saviour, bleeding for you on that rugged cross. Let me come close to you. I want to whisper something in your ear. Let me say it softly. It came from those parched lips: **“Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends. Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you”** (John 15:13, 14).

Sir Arthur Simpson, a child of God, an eminent surgeon, who in 1845 discovered the use of chloroform, writes in his autobiography:

“I was a boy of twelve. When we boys came out of school I saw a sight I have never forgotten: a man was tied to a cab. His back was bare. As he was dragged through the streets the scourge fell on his back, blow after blow. His back was bleeding. What had he done? He had taken a parcel from a mail coach. It was the last time that a man was openly punished for that crime. Did anybody stop that cab and offer to take his stripes? — nobody. Jesus did for me; with His stripes I am healed. Some years afterward, coming from college, I saw another sight. A man was led out of prison. On the market was a scaffold; he was to be publicly hanged. What had he done? He had stolen a sheep. It was the last time anybody was publicly hanged. Did anybody offer to take his place? — nobody. Christ took my punishment and died for me. **‘He was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed’** (Isaiah 53:5).”

The fat of the animal the priest shall burn on the altar.

The sin-offering was not to be sacrificed on the brazen altar. It had to be burned outside the camp, but its fat was to be offered on the altar. There was in the sin-offering, too, a sweet-smelling savour.

How often I have read Isaiah 53 on Good Friday. I often halted at the tenth verse. **“It pleased the Lord to bruise him.”** Need I tell you that although Christ bore the punishment of our sin, the taint of sin never touched Him. He was the Holy Son of God also on the cross.

“The cup which my Father has given me shall I not drink it?”

That loving obedience to His Father's will, the consciousness that during those dark hours of suffering He was pleasing His Father; that His Father loved Him, because of His laying down His life: this was the ray of light in the awful gloom hanging over that cross. The Father suffered with the Son, but the filial obedience of His beloved Son pleased Father's heart.

The whole bullock he shall carry forth without the camp.

I cannot exhaust the meaning of this chapter. May the Holy Spirit lead you through it. I only quote Scripture. **“And they took Jesus and led him away. And he bearing his cross went forth into a place called the place of a skull, which is called in Hebrew Golgotha”** (John 19:16, 17).

“Wherefore Jesus also, that he might sanctify the people with his own blood, suffered without the gate. Let us go forth therefore unto him without the camp, bearing his reproach” (Hebrews 13:12, 13).

“That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death” (Philippians 3:10).

Do you see that heap of ashes? — the whole offering burnt to ashes. Christ was not conquered. He remained conqueror. His greatest victory was won when nailed to the cross. He cried with a loud voice, “**It is finished**” (John 19:30). He suffered and was buried, and the third day he rose again according to the Scriptures, Christ's resurrection, the Gibraltar of our faith, the proof that Father had accepted the sin-offering on the brazen altar.

“**There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus**” (Romans 8:1).

Christ paid the penalty; no longer does the law has a hold on us.

I take you to a churchyard in the country in Holland. A very simple gravestone with only four words inscribed on it: “*He died for me.*” It was the time that Napoleon the First ruled over Holland. Constant levies were held. Napoleon needed soldiers, and a father of a large family was recruited. A friend offered to go in his stead, and he came back severely wounded and died at home. Gratitude put those words on the gravestone. Two years afterward a French officer again recruited for the war with Russia. Again the same man was taken. He replied to the military commission, “I am dead.” He took the officer to the grave of his friend — “*He died for me.*”

The new theology has no longer room for the atonement, and doubts its morality, and stutters at what they like to call “the blood theology.”

I can only answer, atonement is taught all through the Bible. The Holy Spirit teaches us that it is the only way for men to become reconciled with God.

I believe there is far more in the atonement than the human mind can conceive. I cannot explain it. When I finish with the following illustration, I do not wish to state that it clears away all the difficulties. Of the atonement, even the greatest theologians have to say: “**We know in part, and we prophesy in part. But when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away**” (I Corinthians 13:9, 10).

An eastern legend tells us of a young prince who had just ascended the throne. During his minority, for many years, the government had been in the hands of his mother. She was proud and loved to rule; it was not easy for her to put the reins in the hands of her son.

There was a hostile party plotting a revolution. Strange to say, some of the most important decisions of the cabinet, state secrets leaked out and came into the hands of the enemy. When this happened a second time, the king issued an edict that whoever the guilty person might be should be openly scourged in the market place. Investigations were made, traces led to the royal palace, and it was found that the old queen was the guilty person. This became known. The people said, “The king will not have his own mother punished, there is one law for the rich and another for the poor.”

A public dais was raised on the market place. The judges and nobles had taken their seats, people had come from far and near to witness the trial. At twelve o'clock the gates of the palace were opened; the king appeared and leaning heavily on his arm the trembling woman.

The court opened, witnesses were heard and in profound silence the verdict was given: “Guilty.”

Already an officer had laid his hand on the shoulder of the guilty woman to lead her to the whipping post. Then the young king sprang from his throne, he bared his back, and blow upon blow fell upon it, till with bleeding back he was carried into the palace.

Was it right?

The principle of equal justice was more firmly established for the good of the kingdom than ever before. No one could say, “There is one law for the rich, another for the poor.” Nor did the king ask any of his nobles to bear the punishment instead of his mother. He took it himself.

“God was in Christ, reconciling the world to himself” (II Corinthians 5:19).

“Mercy and truth are met together; righteousness and peace have kissed each other”
(Psalm. 85:10).

“If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (I John 1:9).

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