

SIMPLE TALKS ON THE TABERNACLE

by

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CHAPTER FIVE

THE BRAZEN ALTAR, A TYPE OF OUR LORD

“And thou shalt make an altar of acacia wood, five cubits long, and five cubits broad; the altar shall be foursquare: and the height thereof shall be three cubits. And thou shalt make the horns of it upon the four corners thereof: his horns shall be of the same: and thou shalt overlay it with brass. And thou shalt make staves for the altar, staves of acacia wood, and overlay them with brass. Hollow with boards shalt thou make it: as it was shewed thee in the mount, so shall they make it” (Exodus 27:1, 2, 6, 8).

WE have entered the gate of the court. The desert is behind us. We stand within the holy precincts. The question naturally arises: Why did God command this holy place, His dwelling place amidst the people, to be in three, separate divisions:

1. The court;
2. The sanctuary;
3. The Holiest of all.

Five hundred years the children of Israel had dwelt in Egypt, strangers in a strange land. Their numbers had greatly increased. A king ascended the throne that did not know Joseph and did not know how much Egypt owed those strangers. He feared their numbers. They might ally themselves to his enemies and dispossess him as he had done his predecessor. He determined to exterminate those undesirable aliens. He did not succeed. No one will — Israel is God's covenanted people.

A wonderful future is still awaiting them. God led them out of the house of bondage with His mighty arm.

They were now in the desert on the way to Canaan. The Lord wanted to reveal Himself to His people. This revelation necessarily had to be progressive. They were like little children. Israel had not passed unscathed through Egypt; they had much to learn and to unlearn. They were in the kindergarten stage. They did not learn quickly, but the teacher was patient. He gave them object-lessons and taught them through pictures.

The tabernacle with its furniture, and the different sacrifices were a wonderful object lesson.

They showed them sin and its dire consequences, but also a way of reconciliation between a holy God and His sinful people. Jesus Christ is the way; and the tabernacle, its court, sanctuary, and Holy place, its furniture and offerings, should show the Israelites the way of salvation and point to Christ, the wisdom of God who has been **“made unto us wisdom and righteousness and sanctification and redemption”** (I Corinthians 1:30).

The court is the place where the prodigal finds his way back to Father's house, where lost sinners become obedient and cleansed children of God. In the court we are covered with the precious blood of Christ, the lamb without spot. The court is the first grade in Father's school. With grateful hearts the little ones learn to spell the word *reconciliation*. No one can come to God who has not passed through the court. Our Lord is the living way to Father's heart. The Lord God sent Adam forth out of Eden and placed at the East of the garden Cherubims with a flaming sword. The sword of divine justice pierced our Saviour's heart and through His heart goes the living way to the heart of our Father in heaven.

The sanctuary could be entered only by priests. Our Lord has made us **“kings and priests unto God and His Father”** (Revelation 1:6). **“We are an holy priesthood to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ”** (I Peter 2:5).

The Bible teaches the universal priesthood of all believers — saved to serve.

“That he would grant unto us, that we being delivered out of the hand of our enemies might serve him without fear” (Luke 1:74). Only those who at the brazen altar have been delivered from the burden of their sins and have been cleansed at the laver can render God acceptable service.

One of the reasons why God in such a remarkable way blessed Dr. R. A. Torrey's missionary tour around the world was that he always insisted on new converts starting at once to win others for Christ — saved to serve.

The Holy of holies could only be entered once a year by the high priest on the day of atonement, and that not without blood. When Christ died for us, the veil of the temple was rent in twain. It was a type of the human body of Christ. Now a new and living way is opened and all God's children may have free access and uninterrupted communion with their Father in heaven (Hebrews 10:20).

The brazen altar would at once draw the attention of a worshipper when he entered the gate. It was called the brazen altar to distinguish it from the golden altar of incense in the Holy Place. Copper was the metal mostly used in the court, gold in the inner sanctuary. It was also called **“the table of the Lord”** (Malachi 1:12).

The burnt-offering which the Levites offered on it was called **“the bread of the Lord”** (Leviticus 21:6). Every offering had first to be brought to the altar of burnt-offering.

It was of greater dimensions than any other furniture of the tabernacle; it was the center of worship. To show its pre-eminence, we find that in Exodus 29:44 it was simply called the altar.

Let us make a mental picture of the altar. I have already mentioned that it was larger than any other vessel in the tabernacle; they could indeed all find room in it. The altar was made of acacia wood. This might at first surprise us, as a constant fire had to be maintained in it. We, therefore, read that it was overlaid with brass or copper — acacia wood overlaid with copper.

It was foursquare, nine feet in length and nine feet in breadth. It was five feet high. Around the altar at the top was a compass, a border or rim similar to the crown of gold around the altar of incense. There was a grate of network brass. Commentators have differed in placing this grate. I take it to be the lower part of the altar, going halfway up with a ledge which served as a shelf for the priest to stand on when he was arranging the sacrifice — two and a half feet from the ground, easily reached by a gentle slope of earth.

We notice that at each of the four corners was a horn made of acacia wood overlaid with brass, and that there were staves for the altar made of acacia wood covered with brass, going through four brazen rings attached to the four corners. We also notice that the ashpans, shovels, basins, fleshhooks and firepans were all made of brass.

Finally we shall not forget that the altar was hollow, without floor resting on the earth, and made of different plates joined together. As it was shown to Moses on the mount, so it had to be made.

As we are able now to have a clear conception of the altar and have noticed the important points, let us pray that the Holy Spirit may help us to see the significance of each point, always bearing in mind that the altar is a type given us by God of His blessed Son.

Paul's greatest longing was to know Christ; he was ready to surrender all for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ.

The altar had to be made of acacia wood and overlaid with brass — not the wood without the brass; not the brass without the wood.

The shittim tree or acacia tree grew in the desert. The bush Moses saw in the wilderness might well have been a wild acacia tree. Its wood was white and durable. Higher critics might express it unlikely that an altar on which the fire should not go out should be made of wood. God said: **“Thou shalt make an altar of acacia wood.”**

Acacia wood is a symbol of Christ's humanity, His human nature; the brass with which it was overlaid, the righteous divine judgment of sin. Need I point out that Christ had a divine hatred of sin? How His sensitive nature must have suffered as He saw the havoc sin had wrought in men! He knew the thoughts of men and had no need to be told. He saw the evil that proceeded out of a corrupt heart. He knew that the Holy God could not let sin go by unpunished.

Christ is perfect man and perfect God. Well might we ask with the virgin: **“How shall this thing be?”** We cannot explain the incarnation. It is a mystery, God manifested in the flesh.

From the earliest ages the Church has taught us in her creeds, “Who for us men and for our salvation came down from heaven, and was incarnate by the Holy Ghost of the Virgin Mary and was made man.”

It is one of the main pillars of our faith. **“The soul that sinneth it shall die.”**

Either the lamb at the Passover had to die or the firstborn. If Christ had to bear our sins, He had to die for us. And not only had He to take upon Himself our human nature, but that human nature had to be spotless and undefiled, a lamb without spot or blemish. Who knew no sin, God made sin for us (II Corinthians 5:21).

The incarnation is a pillar of our faith.

Not that in the incarnation Christ took fallen man into union with Himself; the incarnation without Christ's death and resurrection could not have reconciled us with God, but His divine nature gave that sacrifice its infinite value; a full, sufficient sacrifice and oblation for the sins of the whole world.

Our heavenly Father in His infinite love had foreseen the fall of the human race and even before the foundation of the world had provided the means of reconciliation.

In Eden He pointed out to our fallen parents that evil should not be victorious, that the woman's seed should bruise Satan's head. Need I point out that this expression, “woman's seed.” occurs only once in the Bible and points out the wonderful birth of the Redeemer? Does it not find its explanation in the word God spake through the prophet Isaiah: **“Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel”** (Isaiah 7:14).

God so loved the world and you, that He sent His Son; but listen, that Son was willing to come, and loved you enough to die for you. How I pray that the Holy Spirit may use this chapter to make Christ precious to you! Christ was not a martyr! No Roman governor could have forced Him on that cross. He was a willing victim. He said: **“Therefore doth my Father love me, because I lay down my life, that I might take it again. No man taketh it from me, but I lay it down of myself”** (John 10:17, 18).

Brazen altar, thou art a symbol of Christ and His infinite love for fallen men, His supreme sacrifice. Thou art to me also, a symbol of His rugged cross. May I often in quiet meditation kneel at its foot, and may it be my heart's prayer:

Lord Jesus, make Thyself to me
A living bright reality,
More vivid to faith's vision keen
Than anything on earth can be.

“Thou shalt overlay it with brass” — a brazen altar. Brass everywhere in the court: a symbol of divine justice — not human justice that may err, that may be influenced by outward circumstances, and has not always had its eyes bandaged. Divine justice does not err:

“The Lord will not hold him guiltless that taketh his name in vain” (Exodus 20:7). It is a divine decree: **“The soul that sinneth, it shall die”** (Ezekiel 18:4). **“The wages of sin is death”** (Romans 6:23).

God sent His Son. Do you realize what that meant for God the Father? Do you think if there had been any other way for the human race to be reconciled with God; would He not have chosen it? The altar was overlaid with brass — divine justice. Christ was the Altar, divine justice personified. His greatest wish was to do Father's will, to see His Father glorified. Listen to what Christ says: **“The Lord God hath opened mine ear, and I was not rebellious, neither turned away back. I gave my back to the smiters, and my cheeks to them that plucked off the hair: I hid not my face from shame and spitting”** (Isaiah 50:5, 6).

Read those words again and again, and tell me would Christ have chosen that way if there had been any other possibility to satisfy the eternal principles of divine justice, and to lift up to Father's heart His fallen children? No, friends, there was no other way. Christ took our place. **“The Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all. He was wounded for my transgressions, he was bruised for my iniquities: the chastisement of my peace was upon him, and with his stripes I am healed”** (Isaiah 53:5, 6). Only an altar of acacia, overlaid with brass: only a man partaking of flesh and blood, a perfect man, a sinless man, could suffer in our stead and die; only a man could be the last Adam. **“There is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus”** (II Timothy 2:5).

~ end of chapter 5 ~

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