

SIMPLE TALKS ON THE TABERNACLE

by

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CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

THE ALTAR OF INCENSE

“And thou shalt make an altar to burn incense upon: of shittim wood shalt thou make it. 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. 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. 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 . . . And thou shalt put it before the vail that is by the ark of the testimony” (Exodus 30:1-4, 6).

“WHAT wilt thou that I should do unto thee?” Twice the Lord addresses this question to different persons.

In Mark 10:51 it is a blind beggar who, outside the gates of Jericho, appeals to the Lord for help. **“Son of David, have mercy on me.”** A noisy crowd surrounds the Lord. Yet the cry for mercy reaches the Lord's compassionate heart. It always does. He bids blind Bartimaeus come to Him. What do you wish me to do for you? The Lord likes us to be definite in our requests. Master, my request is large, very large. It needs a miracle. Give me back my sight! Straightway the Lord grants the request. The miracle is performed. Bartimaeus receives his sight.

In Matthew 20:21, it is a mother with her two sons standing before the Lord. She is the wife and mother of fishermen. Many a time they have resolutely braved the storm. Now they are hesitating; it seems as if one looks to the other to proffer request. The Lord feels they have some wish in their hearts. He always feels it. To encourage them He puts the same question to them: **“What would you have me to do?”** It is the mother who comes to the rescue. **“Grant that my sons may sit, the one on thy right hand and the other on thy left, when thou comest into thy kingdom.”**

It was a mother, ambitious for her sons. Many mothers are. You say it was a foolish request. You are right. There is no room for self on the throne near Jesus. It is only when self is on the cross that Jesus is on the throne. The disciples thought so too. The Lord saw different.

He saw behind the foolish request the great faith that could greet Him as the coming King. It is ever so. The little girl is fond of flowers and fond of father. She loves to gather flowers for father's writing-desk; before they reach the father's table, the mother takes out the weeds, adds some of her own flowers and tastefully arranges them — the child's flowers arranged by mother. That is exactly what our high priest does with our prayers.

Through the heart of Jesus leads the way to Father's heart. In all our afflictions He is afflicted. He feels with you. How often we come to Father with a foolish request. What a comfort it is to know that every sigh, every wish, every prayer has to pass through the heart of our loving Saviour.

At the altar of incense the Lord meets each one of us each day with the question: “**What would ye have me do?**” He adds to it the promise: “**Whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in my name, he will give it you**” (John 16:23).

The altar of incense was foursquare; eighteen inches was its length and breadth; its height was three feet. It was made of acacia wood and overlaid with pure gold, signifying the twofold nature of Christ. The acacia wood points to His humility, the pure gold to His divinity.

“**The Word was made flesh**” (John 1:14).

Seventy-seven times in the New Testament we find the Lord calling Himself the Son of man. While we love to meditate on our Lord as the only-begotten of the Father full of grace and truth, it brings Him close to us when we think of Him as the Son of man.

When we come home weary of a day's work we know that our Saviour can feel with us. He was weary of the journey (John 4:6), sought rest in sleep (Matthew 8:24), knew what it meant to be hungry (Matthew 21:18), and thirsty (John 19:28). He suffered (Luke 22:44), and died (I Corinthians 15). Of His own free-will He emptied Himself of His glory (Philippians 2:6) and had, therefore, to increase in wisdom (Luke 2:52).

Even now in glory, He is God-Man. He rose from the dead with a glorified body. Stephen saw the Son of man in glory standing at the right hand of the Father (Acts 7:56). He will come again and we shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven (Matthew 26:64).

The acacia wood is overlaid with pure gold.

His apostles called Him the holy child Jesus (Acts 3:14; 4:27). Even demons gave testimony to His glory (Mark 1:24; Luke 4:34).

A French proverb says: “A king is not a king to his personal attendants.”

The disciples lived with the Lord three years under the most various circumstances. What do they say about their Master? Peter says: “**Who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth**” (I Peter 2:22). John says: “**In him is no sin**” (I John 3:5), and both sealed their testimony by a martyr's death. The altar of incense was overlaid with fine gold.

In our blessed Lord the human and divine were inseparably blended. **“In that day shall the branch of the Lord be beautiful and glorious.”** The word *“Zemach”* is used of the Messiah. A branch partakes of the nature of the tree. The branch of the Lord points to Christ's divine nature. **“And the fruit of the earth shall be excelled and comely for them that are escaped of Israel”** (Isaiah 4:2) — the fruit of the earth pointing to His humanity.

Both the altar of burnt-offering and the altar of incense point to Christ.

The vessels in the court of the tabernacle point to what Christ has done for us on earth. Those in the holy place show us what Christ is now doing for His Church in heaven, where He is in glory sitting at the right hand of the Father. **“Who delivered us from so great a death, and doth deliver: in when we trust that he will yet deliver us”** (II Corinthians 1:10).

He hath delivered points to His work on earth. It is finished, a full, complete sacrifice, oblation, and satisfaction for the sins of the whole world.

He doth deliver.

This points to Christ's work for us as our high priest in the holy place, praying for us ever living to make intercession for us (Hebrews 7:25), delivering us from the habit and dominion of sin.

We trust He will yet deliver us, points to a glorious future when we shall have a redeemed body.

Salvation is in three tenses.

- Salvation in the past *from the guilt and penalty of sin;*
- Salvation in the present, *being saved from the habit and dominion of sin;*
- Salvation in the future, the redemption of the body *from the very presence of sin.*

“We know that when he shall appear we shall be like him.”

In the court we look up to the crucified Saviour, the Lamb of God that beareth the sins of the world. In the holy place we meet the glorified Saviour, but He is the same Jesus yesterday, today and forever. Both altars had four horns to cling to. There is power, wonderful power, in the blood for forgiveness and cleansing. In the power of His risen life we find the power for a life of victory day by day. He is our life.

Both altars had rings; both were of acacia wood, those in the court overlaid with brass, those in the holy place covered with gold. Both altars had staves which were inserted in the rings. The tabernacle and its vessels accompanied Israel in their travelings in the desert. Our Saviour is not limited to a special place.

Wherever a longing soul cries to Him for help he will find Him. **“Then shalt thou call, and the Lord shall answer; thou shalt cry, and he shall say, Here I am”** (Isaiah 58:9).

The incense on the altar of incense was lit from the fire on the altar of burnt-offering. God punished Nadab and Abihu for offering strange fire on the altar. Our worship should be not of self-will, but in harmony with our God. The same time the lamb was offered on the altar of burnt-offering, the incense rose from the altar of incense.

No animal was to be offered on the altar in the holy place. **“For by one offering, he hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified”** (Hebrews 10:14).

The Lord had Himself ordered the sweet spices, stacte, and onyche, and galbanum in equal parts. To these sweet spices should be added frankincense.

Scofield points out that we are told the component parts of the incense, but Scripture does not tell us the component parts of frankincense, and he suggests that where all point to the perfections of Christ, which we may to some extent apprehend the balm which the Good Samaritan applies to our wounds, the sweet sympathy which makes Him feel with us in our sufferings; the frankincense is the excellencies which the Father sees in His Son and through which our prayers are accepted in the beloved.

This sweet perfume was only to be made for the service in the holies and it was not to be used for ordinary purposes. It was to be holy unto the Lord. If any Israelite should use it for common purpose, he was to be cut off from the people.

“Lord, I cry unto thee: make haste unto me; give ear unto my voice, when I cry unto thee. Let my prayer be set forth before thee as incense; and the lifting up of my hands as the evening sacrifice” (Psalm. 141:1, 2).

When the morning and evening sacrifice was brought to the Lord in the court, the priest took of the fire and in the inner sanctuary lit the incense on the altar. Prayer and incense are closely connected. **“The 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 the saints”** (Revelation 5:8).

There is not enough worship in many of our prayers; the incense is wanting.

Our Lord told the Samaritan woman that the Lord seeks worshippers that worship Him in spirit and in truth (John 4:23).

Andrew Murray in his most helpful book, *With Christ in the School of Prayer*, points out that Christ mentioned three classes of worshippers:

- (1) The Samaritans who worshipped what they did not know;
- (2) The Jews who had the true knowledge of God.
- (3) We worship that which we know; for salvation is of the Jews.

But the hour had come when the real worshippers would worship God in spirit and in truth.

This means more than to pray earnestly. Many of the believing Jews did that and no doubt also some of the Samaritans. God is a Spirit and there must be harmony between God and His worshippers.

“Like seeks like” is a law of Nature and is also a law in the spiritual world. There must be kinship; it is the child that speaks to Father. Spiritual worship is only possible through the indwelling Holy Spirit filling the heart of the believer. There are still many who like the Samaritans pray without knowing; they approach the Lord with their lips, their heart is far from them.

To many of God's children James would say: **“Ye have not because ye ask not.”**

Oh, for a spirit of prayer and supplication to be poured upon God's people in these ominous times! Christ still says: The Father seeks worshippers that **“worship him in Spirit and in truth.”**

The incense was composed of four precious spices: stacte and onycha, galbanum, and pure frankincense. These sweet spices should not fail in the prayers of God's people: Worship, Prayer, Supplication and Thanksgiving.

The Father seeks worshippers (John 4:23).

Our Lord taught us to pray to our Father, but He added **“Which is in heaven.”**

We approach Him who dwelleth in eternity whose name is holy; we are in the audience chamber of the King of kings, the Lord of lords. Surely then it beseems us to come to Him in reverence and godly fear. How precious are those moments of silence in concentration as we meditate on Him to whom we are going to speak, and reflect on what we shall bring before Him.

“O God, open then my lips and my mouth shall show forth thy praise.”

Abraham said: **“Behold now, I have taken upon me to speak unto the Lord, which am but dust and ashes”** (Genesis 18:27).

Let us lift up our hearts. Let us meditate on that infinite love of our heavenly Father, as He has revealed it in our Lord Jesus Christ, in the mercy and goodness which have followed us all the days of our life and our hearts will be filled with gratitude, praise and worship.

Our Lord in answer to the request of His disciples gave them that wonderful prayer so simple that a child can pray it, so deep that it contains our innermost longings.

The Lord's prayer, because He gave it to us; the disciples' prayer, because He intended it for our use. How He puts our heavenly Father's interests before our own!

How He teaches us first to say:

- Thy name,
- Thy kingdom,
- Thy will.

Before we ask give us, lead us, deliver us.

Blessed Lord, teach me how to pray, that Thy honor, Thy Kingdom should have the pre-eminence in my thought and prayer-life.

Intercession will certainly then have a large space in our prayer life.

We shall ask the Lord to lay some souls on our hearts for whose salvation we have to pray. A young man was lying months on a sick-bed. He was in the last stage of consumption. After his home-call his mother found a paper with the names of more than twenty of his friends who he had successively prayed into the kingdom. Personally, I never had a doubt that the Lord would hear my prayers for my children because I felt sure it was a prayer in harmony with the will of God (I John 5; 14).

I met one of my young friends this morning. He had just come from a quiet time with his Lord. I asked him to show me a little book he had in his hand.

He had divided the different mission fields in which he was interested and the missionaries he had met over the days of the month. Asia, Africa, China, India, Europe, South America had a place in it. I asked him to put my name in it. I owe a great deal in my service to faithful prayer-partners, and I am quite sure many in Africa, India, China and South America have received also new courage, a new inspiration, and vision by the faithful prayers of their prayer-partners at home.

The greatest missionary that ever lived, Paul, needed the prayers of the churches which he had been able to found. He appealed to the Roman church in this touching way:

“Now I beseech you, brethren, for the Lord Jesus Christ's sake, and for the love of the Spirit, that ye strive together with me in your prayers to God for me” (Romans 15:30)

If Paul felt the need of their prayers, do you not think we, his humble successors, stand in far greater need of them? Do you think you have any right to send out missionaries unless you support them by your prayers in their work for the Master, in their moments of loneliness, weariness, weakness and temptation?

Beloved, we are standing at the altar of incense.

Do you see the One who is standing beside it? It is our faithful high priest who ever liveth to make intercession for us (Hebrews 7:25). He continues to pray for us, as He did for His disciples on earth.

It is to His intercession that our prayers are acceptable in the beloved. His incense is added to the prayers of His saints. As we share His life, shall we not also share His work? Shall we not be in fellowship with Him in His work of intercession?

I should be so thankful if this study would lead some of my readers to start a prayer-list. In that case, may I advise you before you close your list to do what the Lord tells us in Matthew 5:44. If you do this you will soon discover a double result, not only objective, but subjective as well. Prayer will change our disposition to people who have been unkind to us.

Pray “for kings and all that are in authority” (I Timothy 2:2).

How often I have listened to criticisms of those in authority; how seldom I have heard God's children pray for them. How people on whose shoulders rest such tremendous responsibilities need our prayers!

Thanksgiving is one of the sweet spices that should not fail in our prayers.

How much we have to thank the Lord for, how many answers to prayers! How often I have prayed with a happy young mother (Psalm. 116). **“I will offer to thee the sacrifice of thanksgiving and will call upon the name of the Lord”** (Psalm. 116:17).

“Ask and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find, knock, and it shall be opened unto you” (Matthew 7:7).

That is the law in the kingdom. Begin with asking; soon you will want not only gifts but will long for the Giver. You will seek and find. Then you will always want Him to be with you; you will want the indwelling Christ. He will come up and sup with you and you with Him.

Pray for your friends!

The Lord turned Job's captivity when he prayed for his friends (Job 42:10).

He will do the same to you.

Accustom yourself to talk with the Lord about everything.

The Queen of Sheba communed with Solomon all that was in her heart (I Kings 10:3). “She told him all her plans,” according to one commentator. You will be wise if you do the same. It may save you many a false step. If the Master does not approve of your plans, then you drop them.

Tell Him about all your difficulties.

He will find a way out. If anybody has been unkind to you, tell Him. He will help you bear it.

Tell Him about your work, about the visits you have paid, the letters you have received or written, about the book you have been reading. It all concerns Him.

And if you tell Him about your sorrows, do not forget to tell Him about your joys.

Let Him share your life. Make it a habit to consult Him and talk with Him about everything; anxiety, and worry will flee. Our Lord is a good listener and He always has time for you. Do not forget to give Him a chance to talk to you too. Remember, prayer is a dialogue, not a monologue; and what He says to you is more important than what you say to Him.

Our Lord spent much time in prayer: When He commenced His public ministry (Luke 3:21); when He chose His apostles (Luke 6:12); when on the mount of transfiguration (Luke 9:29); after a hard day's work when His disciples were struggling with the waves, He was on the mount praying. If our Lord felt the need of prayer, do we not need it much more?

May I ask you a question? How much time do you spend each day in prayer? Have you been at the altar of incense today? Daniel prayed three times a day. Business of state took so much of his time, the responsibility resting on his shoulders was so great, that he felt the need of a breathing-space in the middle of the day. The span of time between morning and evening prayers was too large. He built a bridge. Do the same. It will give you balance, peace and concentration of mind. It will help you to grow in grace.

We have been meditating at the altar of incense. We have recognized that we do not pray enough; that our prayer life is the thermometer of our inner life. We have seen how our Father-God is waiting to bestow His gifts on us. He only waits for our asking. It is like us to think of ourselves and the benefits we receive through prayer.

Have you ever thought of the fact that you are Father's child and that He longs to see you and hear your voice? I am a father. I have been away from home now nearly two years. Do you know that I am often homesick for a sight of my children?

I know a mother who every Monday waited for a letter from her boy in another country; who, a fortnight before he came home for his vacation, made his room ready for him. I know that when the day drew near she counted the hours before the train arrived at the little country station, and wondered whether the steamer had been delayed.

I have dear children now myself; they love their father, but I feel sure Father longs more for a sight of His children than the child looks for the father. Father loves you; how much I cannot tell you. He gave His best for you, and He loves to see His child.

He says: "**Seek ye my face!**"

Let the response of my heart be: "**Thy face, Lord, will I seek**" (Psalm 27; 8).

~ end of chapter 21 ~

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