

The Altar and the Basin

Romans 12:1-2

May 7, 2017

Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship. ²Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.

We are looking at worship in the believer's life by studying the Tabernacle in the Book of Exodus. The tabernacle was a movable tent where worship took place as Israel wandered forty years through the Wilderness. It remained the place of worship during the period of the Judges until Solomon built the Temple. It

was the meeting place of God with the children of Israel; it was to be the place where heaven and earth met. Aaron and his sons served as priests and the tribe of Levi was given responsibility to care for it. In Exodus 25, God says to Moses, "Then have them make a sanctuary for me, and I will dwell among them."

John begins his gospel, "*The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us.*" That word *dwelling* is the same word for tabernacle. God tabernacled among us in Jesus. Jesus Christ is the new tabernacle, he is the fulfillment of the picture of the Old Testament tabernacle. In that and many other ways, as we will see during this series, the tabernacle really was a prophetic projection of the Lord's redemptive plan for His people, as we read in Revelation 21, "*And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, 'Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people,*

and God himself will be with them and be their God.”

Our worship is to be a place where heaven and earth meet. We are as first Peter tells us, “*a royal priesthood...that we may declare the praises of him who called us out of darkness into his wonderful light.*”

The altar-sacrifice

Last week we looked at the gate. We discovered that we are to enter his gates with thanksgiving and praise. Today we will look at two pieces of furniture in the outer court; the altar and the basin.

The altar would be the first thing a person would see when coming through the gate. It was made of acacia wood and covered with bronze. It was square shaped about 5-6 feet tall and the same width. There was a horn at each corner where the animal to be sacrificed would be tied.

All worshippers brought their sacrifices to the tabernacle to be killed and its blood poured out at the foot of the altar. Imagine what it must have been like. They didn't come in, grab a cup of coffee and a warm handshake from a greeter, get a program and sit down on a nicely padded chair and listen to some nice music.

It would have been sensory overload with the bleating of animals, all sorts of smells, and blood...lots of blood. I have butchered large animals and it's not a pretty sight.

It would have reminded them in a big way of the need for sacrifice and no doubt this is the image St. Paul had in mind when he wrote Romans 12:1, “*Take your life—and place it before God as an offering.*”

When Paul wrote this it was about A.D. 54 and Temple sacrifice was still going on as it had for centuries. But fourteen years later in AD 70, the Roman General Titus

would decimate Jerusalem and burn down the temple. This slammed the door on the Jewish sacrificial system and both Jews and Jewish Christians fled Jerusalem.

Paul says Christ's sacrifice on the cross has changed all of that. We are justified, not by the blood of goats, but by faith in what Christ has done on the cross. So now what God is looking for from worshippers is for us to offer ourselves to God as a "living" sacrifice. It's one thing to offer God our time, talent and treasure. But it's quite another to give ourselves. Instead of putting our money in the offering plate and offering it to God, what he really wants is for us to put ourselves in the offering plate. Paul wants us to *be* the sacrifice. So the way you live your life is your act of worship. Paul encourages us to look at our entire Christian lives as an act of worship. It's not just done on Sunday in a church building, but what we do every moment of every day.

Why should we do that? Paul says it's because of all God has done for you. By the mercies of God. We do it out of gratitude for his mercy. We don't worship to earn God's pleasure; we worship because of all that God has already done for us.

And as we do that, we will be transformed, Paul writes in verse 2, by the renewing of our minds, knowing and doing God's will.

Paul is strongly encouraging his readers to offer their lives as a living sacrifice. We are to consecrate, or set apart our lives for God's service. And just as the owner of the lamb gave up the lamb to God so that it was no longer his/her own, so it is with us. We no longer belong to ourselves; we belong to God. We are to offer our gifts, our time, our talent, and treasure to be used by God now for his purpose. It is the hardest, most difficult step to take in this spiritual journey, but

it is the first and most important step in learning what true worship really means.

Listen to what Paul says in Romans 12:1 from the Message. *“So here’s what I want you to do, God helping you: Take your everyday, ordinary life—your sleeping, eating, going to work, and walking-around life—and place it before God as an offering.”*

In other words, we worship God as we fulfill our purpose by living out our everyday existence. He doesn’t say “I want you to go to church every day of your life and I want you to pray ten times a day and I want you to talk in spiritual terms and be really spiritual and let everybody know it”. That’s not what He said.

What he does say is, “Here’s what I want you to do now. I want you to love your spouse, raise families and do the things I created humans to do. Be human! This is what I made you to be.” God takes

pleasure in watching you be a human and do human kind of stuff.

This is very important because we tend to think that the only time we are worshipping God is when we are sitting here in church like we are now.

What I’m saying is everything in life can be done as an act of worship, everything in life can be done to honor God, and everything in life can be done for God's pleasure if you do it with the right attitude. If you say, “God, today I want to live for your pleasure.” You can wash dishes for the glory of God. You can love your spouse for the glory of God. You can play with your kids for the glory of God. You can mow the lawn for the glory of God. You can close a deal for the glory of God. You can play golf for the glory of God. Everything you do in life can be worship, can be done to bring God pleasure, if you’ve got the right attitude saying God, “You gave me this ability and

I want to please you with it.” You can please God in the bedroom and you can please God in the kitchen and you can please God at work and you can please God at school and wherever you are if you live for His pleasure.

In the Book of Revelation chapter 4 we see worship taking place. Around the throne are twenty four elders seated on twenty four thrones. They fall before the throne of God and they cast their crowns before it and sing, *“You (God) created everything, and it is for your pleasure that they exist and were created!”*

You were made for the pleasure of God. You were created to bring God pleasure. If you want to know why you’re here on this earth, if you want to know why you are alive, if you want to know why you take the next breath that you take, it’s to give God pleasure in your fellowship with him. We are to enjoy God.

When we bring pleasure to God, we worship God. You were designed to be a worshipper and you will never experience lasting significance in this life or the next if you neglect worship. Nothing else can take the place that worship is intended to fill in your life. The altar of sacrifice reminds us of this key idea.

The basin-cleansing

Let’s look at the basin. It was also located in the outer court between the altar and the entrance to the holy place. It was made of polished bronze and it held water. It was used by Aaron and his sons to wash before they went into the tent of meeting. Exodus 30 tells the consequences of not washing first. It was death.

Water represents cleansing. It is used a lot in the Old Testament, especially in regards to ceremonial washing. In Psalm 51 David’ confesses his sin of adultery

with Bathsheba. *“Wash away all my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin.”*

In the New Testament, the water of baptism represents cleansing from our sin. Hebrews reminds us of this in chapter 10:22 *“²² let us draw near to God with a sincere heart and with the full assurance that faith brings, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water.*

God is in the process of making us holy. We call it sanctification. That’s a theological word which means “to be set apart for a holy purpose.” Just as God set apart Aaron and his sons as priests, God sets us apart. Basically it refers to the process of becoming more like Jesus. It is the process of God at work within you, making you into the image of Jesus.

In Galatians 5:22 Paul talks about the fruit of the Spirit. They are love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, gentleness,

goodness, faithfulness, and self-control. It can be painful to see how far short we fall in some of them. But it can be hopeful also to see where we have grown. But as we grow in the fruit of the Spirit, we are growing into the likeness of Christ. It’s something God does in us. As long as we stay attached to Christ, we will grow into the likeness of Christ. If you haven’t grown in your faith life in the last twenty years, you may need to ask why.

I used to have two apple trees in my yard. They were producing small insect riddled apples fit only to be thrown away. So I put the tree on a rehabilitation program. I pruned the trees back heavily. I sprayed them for disease and insects. I fertilized them. I took care of them. I invested a lot of time into it. The next fall, Melinda and I harvested nine-bushel baskets of good apples. We had apple pies, and applesauce and lots to give away! The trees were finally bearing

fruit. They were doing what they were designed to do.

God has a rehabilitation program designed for you. He is working in your life pruning, watering, spraying, fertilizing so that you too will bear fruit in your life, so that you will be able to do what God designed you to do.

I have discovered that one of the best ways God can rehab me is by reflecting on scripture. James reminds us in chapter 1:19, *“Therefore, get rid of all moral filth and the evil that is so prevalent and humbly accept the word planted in you, which can save you.”*

²² Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says.

Every morning I open the scriptures and pray, “Speak to me today, God”. He shows me how much he loves me and he shows me where I need to change. If you don’t have a regular time of reading

scripture, I encourage you to start today. God’s word will bring us to the place where we are surrendered fully to Christ. This is the place in our Christian walk where we completely turn over our lives to Christ. It’s a decision to be obedient to God. Our calling is to a life of unconditional obedience and surrender to all that God has called us to do.

Broken vessels

Some of us may be thinking, “Knowing what I have done, how could God ever do anything good through me?”

If you are like me, your heart looks like a road map crisscrossed with cracks and fissures, ditches and divots-far from perfect. But we have a God who brings beauty out of ashes. God take all my imperfections and failures and makes something beautiful out of it. He takes our wounds and mistakes and the very areas where we have messed up the worst and uses them to help others.

Conclusion

After receiving my call to preach from God, it took me a year to say yes. I wanted to be obedient, but only up to a point. I thought this was asking too much. I had other plans for my life and they didn't include being a preacher. It was a hard year. Running from God always is. One Sunday night, I went to church to hear a guest speaker. His name was Wayne Fowler. I don't remember his sermon but afterwards, my pastor invited me to join Wayne and himself for dessert at Frisch's. Never one to pass up food, I went along. Wayne asked me where I was with God and I told him of my struggle with this calling. I wanted to know God's purpose for my life, but just wasn't sure if maybe I had heard wrong. I DO remember what he told me. "Mark, you just need to surrender everything to God. Go home tonight and tell him he can have your whole life...including your career. Tell

him you'll do whatever he wants you to do, even preach. Give him all of yourself and hold nothing back."

I took his advice. I went home that night, knelt by my bed and said something like, "God, I don't know what the purpose of my life is. I just know I want to do your will whatever it is. I surrender all." I got off my knees knowing that my purpose in life was to help others connect with God. I have had to surrender other parts of my life since then...I'm still growing in my faith and always will be. But that experience of surrender was essential for the next step in my walk with God.

What would happen if you offered yourself in surrender as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God? What would happen if you came daily to the Lord in praise and gratitude, submitting yourself to God and allowed God to cleanse you through his Word? Would it change your

lives? Would it change the way you treat
people? Would it change the church?