

Behold! The Lamb of God
(Reflections on the Bronze Altar)
Ex. 27:1-8 & 38:1-7

When Moses met with God on Mount Sinai, God instructed him on how the Tabernacle was to be built. Within those instructions God told Moses to build an altar upon which the people would make sacrifices. There were several different types of sacrifices made but one altar was used for each of them. We find the instructions for its construction in Exodus 27:1-8 and 38:1-7. The altar was made of acacia wood covered in bronze. It was 7.5' wide by 7.5' deep and 4.5' tall. It had a post on each corner that may or may not have been shaped like a horn. It all depends on whose research you are reading. There are many different opinions on whether they were shaped like horns or not and what their significance truly was. The altar had a grate, much like a grill that we would use today for a barbecue. On the side of each corner were rings that held two poles that were used to transport the altar when the Tabernacle was to be moved. There were some other furnishings that were used in the process of making the sacrifices. There were pots used for catching ashes, shovels, basins, forks, and fire pans. Everything was covered with bronze thus it is referred to as the Bronze Altar. It is also often referred to as the Altar of Burnt Offering or the Brazen Altar.

A very important fact about this altar was its location. It was the first ceremonial item that an Israelite would encounter when they entered the courtyard of the Tabernacle. In fact, unless you were a priest it was the only ceremonial item you would personally encounter and experience in a tangible way. The other steps were performed by the priests on behalf of the worshipper. Apart from the sacrifice, Tabernacle worship was not very hands-on and personal.

I want to say a few words about the Tabernacle and then I would like to speak about the altar and the sacrifices.

The Tabernacle as a sermon from God:

The Tabernacle was one of many sermons that God was preaching to mankind in the Old Testament. The message of the Tabernacle was always more important than the physical manifestation of the Tabernacle and all of

its ceremonial contents and practices. Every piece of furniture and ceremonial act served to point all mankind to a greater truth. The Tabernacle was one of God's greatest object lessons ever taught.

Let me give you some examples of other sermons or object lessons taught by God where the message was greater than the event itself.

Genesis 3:21 And the Lord God made for Adam and for his wife garments of skins and clothed them. You know the story. Adam and Eve sinned against God. They realized they were naked in their guilt and shame so they hid from God. God called them out and pronounced the curse of the Fall as the result of their trespass. And then, hidden right there toward the end the story just before God expels them out of the Garden, he does this seemingly small thing stated in one short sentence. God clothed them with garments of skin. God sacrificed some living thing and covered the man and the woman's guilt and shame with its skin. This small act on God's behalf would cryptically describe the greatest Divine act in human history.

Genesis 6-9 and the historic event of the flood. God was preaching a sermon about his wrath being poured out on sin and evil. In that sermon a great merciful grace is revealed through Noah and his family. If the event itself was the soul concern of God would he not have eliminated evil completely? The event itself was not the ultimate end for God it was a means to an end. It was an object lesson about judgment, grace, and redemption. The message far outweighed the event itself.

Genesis 22 and the sacrifice of Isaac. Perhaps one of the most well known sermon/object lessons in all of the Bible. Almost everyone agrees that it was a Divine object lesson, the problem is that we cannot all agree on what the lesson is supposed to be. We as Christians clearly see this event as a prophetic sermon on the sacrifice of God's only Son and substitutionary atonement, but sadly not everyone sees it that way.

So what is the sermon being preached in and by the Tabernacle? Revisiting some basic facts that we have already discussed in this sermon series can help us answer that question.

- The Tabernacle was the earthly place where God's presence would visit earth. The message was that God is a personal God that desires to be

with His people in a real tangible way. God desires to have a personal relationship with all those who come to him in faith.

- The Tabernacle was the place where people could find temporal atonement for their sins. The message was being conveyed that it is sin that separates us from God and something has to die to atone for that sin so that we can enter into relationship with God.
- The Tabernacle was the place where Israelites could find the presence of the presence of God and where the High priest could enter the actual presence of God once a year. The message was that humans can actually enter into the very throne room of God but there is a very specific way that must happen. Through forgiveness of sin, purification, and a Mediator.

So the message to the world was this: God is approachable but only to a certain degree and only through a certain process that has been designated by God himself. In other words, a person can come to God but only through the shedding of blood and through a priestly escort. The shedding of blood made it clear that every man is a sinner and deserving of death. But, God does accept a substitutionary death. The need for a priestly escort indicates that God is holy and only approachable through a designated person who is worthy and has authority to enter into his presence.

The Tabernacle was never intended to fully accomplish these things. The Tabernacle was always a sign pointing to a greater reality of these truths. It was never intended to be the end, but a means to an end.

I would like for us to breakdown some of the types and shadows within the Tabernacle, specifically the altar and sacrifices, and look at their substances and realities. We will use the greatest commentary on the Old Covenant Tabernacle and Temple, which is the book of Hebrews. However, before we do this I want to point out one very important presupposition that I will be coming from. It is important for you to know that I come from a New Covenant theological perspective. It is no different than Pastor Reggie's perspective or anyone else that will be preaching in this series, but I believe it is very helpful to our study if we have some clarity on this. Also, it helps us to avoid pitfalls or ditches that other theological frameworks may lead us to.

Simply put, a New Covenant perspective means that all of the Old Covenant finds its fulfillment in the New Covenant. By Old Covenant I am referring to the bulk of the Old Testament. The Old Covenant includes the Law, the Prophets, the Tabernacle and Temple, all of the ceremonial laws and festivals, etc.. In other words, everything in the Old Testament finds its fulfillment in the New Testament, in Jesus. This is the basic framework that our entire year's worth of sermons have been based on as we have been looking for Jesus in the Old Testament. ***Luke 24:27 And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself.***

1 Peter 1:10-12 Concerning this salvation, the prophets who prophesied about the grace that was to be yours searched and inquired carefully, ***11*** inquiring what person or time^[a] the Spirit of Christ in them was indicating when he predicted the sufferings of Christ and the subsequent glories. ***12*** It was revealed to them that they were serving not themselves but you, in the things that have now been announced to you through those who preached the good news to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven, things into which angels long to look.

Having said that lets now look at the message of the altar, the substance of the altar, and the purpose of the altar.

1. The Message on the Altar

Types of Offerings/Sacrifices:

1. Burnt Offering (Offering of ascent) - atonement and expression of devotion; bulls, goats, sheep, dove, pigeon
2. Grain Offering - voluntary expression of devotion, cooked bread or cereal
3. Peace Offering - Thanksgivings, freewill, and wave offering; cattle, sheep, or goat. Consecrate meals for fellowship and thanksgiving
4. Sin Offering - atonement for unintentional sins and ceremonial purification

5. Guilt Offering - also known as "Reparation Offering" monetary value to make reparations for sin committed

Imagine your an Israelite and you have an opportunity to go to the Tabernacle and make a sacrifice. According to Leviticus 1 you must take your best male bull, goat, sheep, pigeon, or dove. It must be without spot or blemish, which means it's your most valuable animal. You have basically two goals to accomplish, receive forgiveness of your sins and to be in the presence of God. You bring your animal to the entrance of the tent and as you've been instructed you lay your hand on its forehead and confess you sins. *Matthew Henry says, The laying on of hands signified "(1.) the transfer of all [the worshiper's] right to, and interest in, the beast, to God, actually, and by a manual delivery, resigning it to his service. (2.) An acknowledgement that he deserved to die, and would have been willing to die if God had required it, for the serving of his honor, and the obtaining of his favor. (3.) A dependence upon the sacrifice, as an instituted type of the great sacrifice on which the iniquity of us all was to be laid."*

As you gaze into the eyes of your animal you think about how innocent it is and how much it is worth to your family. You then slit its throat, while the priests catch its blood in a pan. They go and sprinkle the base and the horns/posts of the altar with the blood and you proceed to cut the animal into pieces as you were instructed. With your bare hands you are required to separate the entrails and remove the fat from its body. While the priests lay the animal parts out on the altar to be burned you have to wash the entrails and legs with water. The priests burn the animal and the Lord accepts the fragrance as a temporary atonement for you sins that you may be accepted by Him and continue toward his presence.

The message you receive is quite clear. Its a vile and disgusting process because your sin is vile and disgusting toward a Holy God. Also, an innocent and perfectly good animal had to lose its life when you were the one that actually deserved to lose your life. This is all required just to get rid of your guilt and shame and get closer to God. Except you soon realize that even though you are in the presence of God you are still not in the

presence of God. God is in the holy of holies and you are not allowed in there. The high Priest is the only one allowed in there and that only once a year. There is also a Holy Place between you and the Holy of Holies and you are not allowed in there either.

Though you feel so much better than when you came, you know it's only a matter of time before you sin again and the process starts over. You know you will sin before you even make it back home. And, even though you were close to the presence of God, you still long for more. Your heart desires to be fully in the presence of God. The message is loud and clear. The Tabernacle is great but it still lacks something. Loving and obeying God is exhausting and leaves the worshiper always wanting more. There must be something more permanent, something more fully satisfying than this.

Well, there is good news.

2. The Substance on the Altar

Hebrews 10:1-18 For since the law has but a shadow of the good things to come instead of the true form of these realities, it can never, by the same sacrifices that are continually offered every year, make perfect those who draw near. 2 Otherwise, would they not have ceased to be offered, since the worshipers, having once been cleansed, would no longer have any consciousness of sins? 3 But in these sacrifices there is a reminder of sins every year. 4 For it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins.

5 Consequently, when Christ came into the world, he said,

*“Sacrifices and offerings you have not desired,
but a body have you prepared for me;*

*6
in burnt offerings and sin offerings
you have taken no pleasure.*

*7
Then I said, ‘Behold, I have come to do your will, O God,
as it is written of me in the scroll of the book.’”*

8 When he said above, "You have neither desired nor taken pleasure in sacrifices and offerings and burnt offerings and sin offerings" (these are offered according to the law), 9 then he added, "Behold, I have come to do your will." He does away with the first in order to establish the second. 10 And by that will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.

11 And every priest stands daily at his service, offering repeatedly the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. 12 But when Christ had offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God, 13 waiting from that time until his enemies should be made a footstool for his feet. 14 For by a single offering he has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified.

15 And the Holy Spirit also bears witness to us; for after saying,

16

"This is the covenant that I will make with them
after those days, declares the Lord:
I will put my laws on their hearts,
and write them on their minds,"

17 then he adds,

"I will remember their sins and their lawless deeds no more."

18 Where there is forgiveness of these, there is no longer any offering for sin.

John 19:30 When Jesus had received the sour wine, he said, "It is finished," and he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.

3. The Purpose on the Altar

The Lord Jesus was the spotless Lamb of God. He was the ultimate and final sacrifice. His body and blood was sufficient to save all the elect for all time. He was the sacrifice provided by God himself. The altar was not Jesus, if anything the altar represented the cross. Jesus was sacrificed on the cross to save sinners. To make sinners worthy to go fully into the very throne room of God the Father and ultimately spend eternity with Him. The

purpose of the altar was to hold up the sacrifice type that would find its fulfillment in Jesus.

It was on the cross where Jesus justified sinners. Where Jesus settled the debt we owed God for all our trespasses for all time. It was the place where the wrath of God against the sins of the elect was propitiated and settled through the death of His only begotten Son.

1 Peter 1:13-21 **13** Therefore, preparing your minds for action,^[b] and being sober-minded, set your hope fully on the grace that will be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ. **14** As obedient children, do not be conformed to the passions of your former ignorance, **15** but as he who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, **16** since it is written, "You shall be holy, for I am holy." **17** And if you call on him as Father who judges impartially according to each one's deeds, conduct yourselves with fear throughout the time of your exile, **18** knowing that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold, **19** but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot. **20** He was foreknown before the foundation of the world but was made manifest in the last times for the sake of you **21** who through him are believers in God, who raised him from the dead and gave him glory, so that your faith and hope are in God.

Closing: The Call of the Cross

To the church- Do not be the Israelite who found satisfaction in the types and shadows. While all of the Old Covenant ceremonial practices have been fulfilled I fear that in many ways we have created new ones. And, we must recognize that God has instituted ordinances (the Lord's Supper and baptism) as New Covenant ceremonies for the same reason He gave Israel the old ones, to point us to Jesus. God instituted baptism to keep us focused on the means of our salvation. I'm not referring to the baptism as the means of our salvation I'm talking about the death, burial, and resurrection as the means of our salvation. Our baptism is an outward sign reflecting that reality so that we may never forget until that day when no baptisms will be necessary that we have been crucified with Jesus, buried with Jesus, and raised to newness of life with Jesus. The Lord's Supper is another ceremonial way God keeps us focused on his salvific provision in

the broken body and bloodshed of His perfect Son until He returns. As we celebrate these things we should always be left hungering and thirsting for more and more of the full presence of Christ and eternity with Him. We gather every week to worship as a reminder of what we will do for all eternity in heaven. Do not grow complacent and never place your trust in your religion. Christ is the essence of our religion and I pray we never lose our focus on Him.

To the unbeliever:

If you have been listening to this message you have been exposed to the good news of the ultimate and final sacrifice that God himself has provided for the forgiveness of sins and restoration of the soul. The writer of ***Hebrews says (10:26-27) For if we go on sinning deliberately after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, 27 but a fearful expectation of judgment, and a fury of fire that will consume the adversaries.*** He also says in the chapter before that (9:27-28) ***And just as it is appointed for man to die once, and after that comes judgment, 28 so Christ, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time, not to deal with sin but to save those who are eagerly waiting for him.***

Lay your hand on the head of the Spotless Lamb of God and confess your sins. See him on the cross sacrificing his body and shedding his blood for the forgiveness of your sins. Look to him in faith to save you and make you right with your Maker, your Father in Heaven.

CG Discussion Questions

1. Discuss the relationship between each of these aspects of the Tabernacle sacrifices and their fulfillment in the Gospel of Jesus Christ.
 - The altar
 - The animal
 - The laying hands on the forehead
 - The process of sacrifice
 - The sprinkling of the blood

For extra credit

- The smell (Lev. 1:9 and 2 Cor. 2:15)
2. What was the significance of God making the worshipper kill and dismember the animals, and wash the entrails and legs?
 3. Do we as New Covenant Christians need to know about the Old Covenant ceremonies to understand the Gospel? What does it contribute to our faith to know about them?
 4. What are some other sermons or object lessons God taught in the Old Testament that pointed to the Gospel? Can you think of one that wasn't mentioned in the sermon?
 5. What is the primary lesson we can learn from Old Covenant Israelites who, though they had the Tabernacle and sacrificial system, still failed to reach the promised land? (See Hebrews chapter 3 for reference)
 6. How can we use our knowledge of the Tabernacle to share the Gospel with a lost person today?

Daily Devotions - Oct. 30th - Nov. 3rd

- Mon, Oct. 30th - Read Leviticus 1:1-9 and reflect on the process of the sacrifices. Put yourself in the place of an Israelite worshipper. What do you think were some of the messages God wanted you to get from the process and how do you think they relate to the Gospel?
- Tues, Oct 31st- Read John 1:29. In the Bible, to “behold” something means so much more than simply looking at it. It conveys the idea of meditating on and embracing the awe and wonder of it. Spend some time “Beholding” Jesus as the perfect Lamb of God that died in your place to take away your sin.
- Wed, Nov 1st- Read Hebrews 10:1-18 and reflect on the differences between the Old Covenant Law and the New Covenant. Spend time in prayer thanking God for saving you and welcoming you into a covenant relationship with him through the blood of Jesus.
- Thurs, Nov 2nd- Read Hebrews 10:19-25. Can you find the four imperatives the author lists that should be the result of Jesus’ sacrifice? (Draw near to God with a true heart and full assurance of faith, hold fast to the confession of our hope, stir one another up to love and good works, and faithfully meet together)
- Fri, Nov 3rd- Read Hebrews 12:1-4. Reflect on the many ways “looking to Jesus” can encourage and strengthen us in our faith.