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Exodus: Delivered By God, For God / God's Wrath; Place of the Skull; Jesus' Death / Exodus 27:1-8

The brazen altar of the tabernacle points forward to the cross of Christ where the Son of God suffered the wrath of God poured out on Him to pay the full price for the sins of His people.

Introduction

This morning our discussion will shift from the Tabernacle proper to the courtyard. We have gone through the Tabernacle itself and almost all of the items within the Tabernacle. God has one final object that will be built to go into the Tabernacle but it is not revealed until Exodus 30 after the instructions regarding the priestly clothing and the setting aside of Aaron and his sons for the priesthood.

As we will see a little later the courtyard of the tabernacle basically consisted of the perimeter "fencing" or walls, the door, a laver (or wash stand) and the altar. This area of the Tabernacle compound was accessible to all people, not just the priests. In later years as the tabernacle gave way to the temple, this would be the area where much of the teaching would take place.

As the Israelites would enter this area the first object that they would be confronted with would be the altar, and this object is the topic of our discussion for this morning. Our conversation today will be a heavy one, one that much of the modern Christian world would like to forget. There are truths that we will confront here that can and will offend many who will listen later and possibly some of you sitting before us today. The truth is that this is a conversation that should strengthen the heart and the fortitude of those who believe, but for those who do not it will either be used by the Holy Spirit to quicken their hearts or, unfortunately, to harden them. Honestly we will dip into the most hated topic in Christianity.

My prayer during my preparation and my continued prayer during the

delivery is that those who have an ear, let them hear the word of God...

Last week as we discussed the final two curtains of the Tabernacle, the screen for the door and the veil that separated the holy place from the Holy of Holies, one of the truths that we discussed was the fact that the veil was put in place to prevent sinful man from coming into the presence of the Holy God. We talked about how this one place was entered one time per year by one man and then only after he had performed an elaborate ritual to atone for his sins and cleanse him of unrighteousness. During this time together we demonstrated how Christ's sacrifice on Calvary's cross tore the veil and provided access to those who would believe in Him.

We also noted that the reason that man could not enter into the Holy of Holies apart from these rituals or even now apart from belief in Christ is because to do so would bring a sinful creature into the immediate presence the Holy God. Because of His absolute Holiness and Righteousness, God would be left with no alternative but to put that man to death because Holiness cannot abide sin, pure light cannot abide the darkness, and the only response left would be for judgement to be passed and wrath be poured out on that person, leading to death, and subsequently, eternity under that same wrath in pit of hell.

This is the fate of all humanity...that is apart from the finished work of Christ on Calvary's cross.

This is where will enter into our discussion proper for this morning. Our text is Exodus 27:1-8:

Text

Stand with me for the reading of the Holy, Inerrant, Infallible, Authoritative and Sufficient Word of the Living God:

Exodus 27:1-8 LSB

"And you shall make the altar of acacia wood, five cubits long and five cubits wide; the altar shall be square, and its height shall be three cubits.

"You shall make its horns on its four corners; its horns shall be of the *same piece*, and you shall overlay it with bronze.

"You shall make its pots for removing its ashes, and its shovels and its bowls and its flesh hooks and its firepans; you shall make all its utensils of bronze.

"You shall make for it a grating, a network of bronze, and on the net you shall make four bronze rings at its four corners.

"You shall put it beneath, under the ledge of the altar, so that the net will reach halfway down the altar.

"You shall make poles for the altar, poles of acacia wood, and overlay them with bronze.

"Its poles shall be inserted into the rings, so that the poles shall be on the two sides of the altar when it is carried.

"You shall make it hollow with planks; as it was shown to you in the mountain, so they shall make *it*.

Father, grant us, through Thy spirit to help us rightly worship, forgetting the world and entering into your presence, the fullness of life that You give, and be refreshed, comforted and blessed. Grant us knowledge of Your goodness. Reveal for us through Your word, Christ, our Mediator, Brother, Interpreter, Branch, Lamb, that we may be drawn near with brotherly love and boldness. Remind us as we gather to worship that the veil has been torn and that we can enter the holiest place where we can receive in rich abundance the blessings that this day, the Lord's Day was designed to impart. Father may our hearts be guarded and protected against wordly thoughts or cares, our minds be filled with peace beyond comprehension, our meditations on Your word be sweet, our acts of worship filled with life and joy, that we would drink from the streams that flow from Your throne, our sustenance Your precious Word, our defence the shield of faith and our hearts be drawn closer to our blessed Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, Father we ask these things in that very blessed name, Amen.

The Construction

The details given to us regarding the construction of the altar, are like the other instructions we have studied, lacking in sufficient detail for us to

recreate this piece. This brings us to our reminder once again that these scriptures are not here for us to reconstruct our own tabernacle, but to point us forward to the true tabernacle through the types and shadows that we see before us. We are once again reminded in verse 8 of the seriousness regarding the being obedient to God. Moses is again told that that it shall be made as it was shown to him on the mountain.

The construction details that we do have regarding the altar are rather basic, especially when compared to the instructions that we have seen regarding the construction of the other items and the Tabernacle itself, but just because they are basic, does not mean that this structure is of less importance than the others. In fact, this object, again being the first thing that any Israelite entering the courtyard would encounter, is central and foundational to the entire sacrificial system revealed by God in the Old Testament. It was the place where all of the sacrifices would be made and consumed before God, it was the place where communion between God and His people became possible.

Once again we see the strong, light wood of acacia being used as the basis but this time instead of being covered in gold they were covered in a different metal. Commentators have disagreed over the years regarding the exact composition of this metal, although most have come to acknowledge this as bronze. Some translations still use either brass or copper instead of bronze. Of these two alternatives, brass would be the preferred translation as copper has a lower melting point and likely would not have survived the continual use. Bronze is a very hard and durable metal that was also used in weaponry and armor (both Goliath and Saul's armor were made of bronze).

The altar was a square of about seven and a half feet and stood approximately four and a half feet tall. The outer edges of the altar were constructed of one piece of wood that includes the four horns, one on each corner, again covered in bronze. The utensils used by the priests in attending to the altar and performing the rituals associated with the sacrifices were also made of bronze. As we mentioned above bronze is an extremely durable metal that also resists oxidation making it an ideal metal for use in an outdoor setting.

The next two details of the altar are somewhat subjective to different viewpoints and consisted of a grating and a net. The grating was the top of the

altar and would have served just as the top surface of any grill would have done. The net that is mentioned and the exact purpose of verse 5 is somewhat difficult to ascertain and theories have floated around ranging from the a net to hold the burning wood and hot embers to a netting that would have gone over a space between the boards to allow air in so that the fire would burn properly.

The final piece of the altar mentioned here are the acacia wood poles, again covered in bronze for durability and built for the purpose of transporting the altar from campsite to campsite as the Israelites moved from location to location. The mention of hollow planks in verse 8 likely refers to the fact that the altar was just the frame of boards around the outside, the top which consisted of the edge and horns and the grating and finally the net mentioned in verse 5.

There is an additional detail regarding the altar that is not mentioned here but is revealed in Numbers 4:13–14 “Then they shall take away the ashes from the altar and spread a purple cloth over it. “They shall also put on it all its utensils by which they minister in connection with it: the firepans, the flesh hooks and shovels and the bowls, all the utensils of the altar; and they shall spread a cover of porpoise skin over it and insert its poles.” Numbers 4 deals with the laws regarding the transportation of the items of the Tabernacle. So this cover, like the covering over the ark, the table of the bread of presence, the lampstand and the golden altar (or altar of incense) was only to be used while the altar was being transported from place to place.

The Covering

As I stated earlier the details that we have regarding the construction of the altar pale in comparison to the other items that we have discussed thus far regarding the Tabernacle, however the importance of this object should never be equated with the amount of details regarding its construction. There is much here to discuss and we will take it reverse order of its revelation to us, beginning first with the cover that is used only when being transported.

As I mentioned and as a careful study of Numbers 4 will reveal each of the items that is constructed for use inside the Tabernacle and within the

courtyard has their own coverings all of which are of the same colors has have already been discussed, blue, purple and crimson. The covering for the altar is as we read a few moments ago, purple. In our previous conversations we discussed the colors and their meanings and you should be now have associated the color purple with the color of royalty.

This color represents Christ reign over His kingdom. The thief, hanging on the cross beside Christ saw the purple as he contemplated the events surrounding him. Lukes gospel recalls for us that he cried out Luke 23:42 "And he was saying, "Jesus, remember me when You come in Your kingdom!" but the other thief was only able to see the visage that the world sees, that of porpoise skin like those that covered the tent over the tabernacle displaying the fact that this was but yet another man only one who was marred and was not much to look upon, as you may recall, he joined in with the mockers that day, unable to see that beautiful display of mercy and the grace that was being poured out before his very eyes.

The Altar and The Horns

This quick thought about the covering that was placed over the altar for transportation gives us additional clues as to what the altar itself represents, but before we deal with the altar proper, let us deal with the horns of the altar. As with the rest of the altar they were constructed as we mentioned above of acacia wood covered with bronze.

From our earlier studies in the law you may recall this passage from Exodus 21:

Exodus 21:12–14 LSB

"He who strikes a man so that he dies shall surely be put to death.

"But if he did not lie in wait *for him*, but God let *him* fall into his hand, then I will appoint you a place to which he may flee.

"If, however, a man acts presumptuously toward his neighbor, so as to kill him by deceit, you shall take him *even* from My altar, that he may die.

Along with Numbers 35:6

Numbers 35:6 LSB

"And the cities which you shall give to the Levites *shall be* the six cities of

refuge, which you shall give for the manslayer to flee to; and in addition to them you shall give forty-two cities.

These cities were designated places of refuge, of protection. The horns on the altar served a very similar purpose and were closely related to these cities of refuge as they served as places of sanctuary, or protection. In Psalm 118:27 the psalmist points to the purposeful use of these horns but in doing so also points us toward the picture of these horns as a place where someone would make themselves a living sacrifice to God, it reads "Yahweh is God, and He has given us light; Bind the festival sacrifice with cords to the horns of the altar." The horns would serve as mini cities of refuge, we read in 1 Kings 1:50–51 "And Adonijah was afraid of Solomon, and he arose, went, and took hold of the horns of the altar. Then it was told to Solomon, saying, "Behold, Adonijah is afraid of King Solomon, and behold, he has taken hold of the horns of the altar, saying, 'Let King Solomon swear to me today that he will not put his servant to death with the sword.'"" and then in 1 Kings 2:28 "Now the news came to Joab, for Joab had followed Adonijah, although he had not followed Absalom. And Joab fled to the tent of Yahweh and took hold of the horns of the altar."

We also learn from those accounts, that although one may flee and grasps the horns it does not mean that they are safe, in the case of the cities of refuge, they are able to remain there until a decision is reached regarding the validity of their claim of accidental death. If the judgement is found to be murder, then the due punishment is death, just as is the case for those who grab the horns of the altar for protection.

A final thought on the horns before we move to the true subject of our conversation. It was clearly possible, by deceit of the heart and a desire for self preservation, for one to grab the horns of the altar to obtain the Lord's protection yet still be found guilty and sentenced to death. As we examine this it should raise a concern for those who are with us but not of us. Scripture clearly demonstrates that there are those who follow, yet do not believe. Those who are portraying believers, they fiercely work, serve, speak, and act like disciples, but they are not.

I was reminded of our conversation from Wednesday night during my preparations for this morning when Brother Daniel brought up those who we read of in the closing verses of John 6 where we read the following:

John 6:59–66 LSB

These things He said in the synagogue as He taught in Capernaum.

Therefore many of His disciples, when they heard *this* said, "This is a difficult statement; who can listen to it?"

But Jesus, knowing in Himself that His disciples were grumbling at this, said to them, "Does this cause you to stumble?"

"*What* then if you see the Son of Man ascending to where He was before?"

"The Spirit is the One who gives life; the flesh profits nothing; the words that I have spoken to you are spirit and are life.

"But there are some of you who do not believe." For Jesus knew from the beginning who they were who did not believe, and who it was that would betray Him.

And He was saying, "For this reason I have said to you, that no one can come to Me unless it has been granted him from the Father."

As a result of this many of His disciples went away and were not walking with Him anymore.

Many who are introduced to the gospel and are never drawn by the spirit will continue to act according to the sinful desires of the flesh and fall away, some will, like Joab, will grab the horns of the altar or "claim that they believe" but never truly do and will suffer the same fate as Joab did in verses 1 Kings 2:30–31 "So Benaiah came to the tent of Yahweh and said to him, "Thus the king has said, 'Come out.'" But he said, "No, for I will die here." And Benaiah brought the king word again, saying, "Thus spoke Joab, and thus he answered me." And the king said to him, "Do as he has spoken and fall upon him and bury him, that you may remove from me and from my father's house the blood which Joab shed without cause."

This uneasy truth of those who would come but not truly believe brings us to the topic of the altar proper. As we have noted the construction is the same wood, which you should remember represents the human nature of Christ covered or plated in bronze. In scripture bronze, depending upon the context in which it is used, signifies different things. For example, we

read of bronze in relation to evil things, such as the armor of Saul and Goliath in 1 Samuel, the chains of Samson in Judges, and Zedekiah's chains in 2 Kings. Bronze also speaks of the judgement of God. Passages such as:

Numbers 21:9 LSB

And Moses made a bronze serpent and set it on the standard; and it happened, that if a serpent bit any man, when he looked to the bronze serpent, he lived.

reminding the people of the curse and the divine judgement as a result. and Deuteronomy 28:23

Deuteronomy 28:23 LSB

"And the heaven which is over your head shall be bronze, and the earth which is under you, iron.

Where one is literally trapped between two crushing objects

And in Isaiah where we see judgement giving way to glory

Isaiah 60:17 LSB

"Instead of bronze I will bring gold,

And instead of iron I will bring silver,

And instead of wood, bronze,

And instead of stones, iron.

And I will make peace your overseers

And righteousness your taskmasters.

finally in Revelation we read

Revelation 1:15 LSB

His feet *were* like burnished bronze, when it has been made to glow in a furnace, and His voice *was* like the sound of many waters,

as the descriptor of Christ in judicial character inspecting the churches and pronouncing sentencing upon them.

We also see in Scripture where bronze is used as a symbol of endurance:

Deuteronomy 33:25 LSB

"Your locks will be iron and bronze,

And according to your days, so your fortitude will be.

and in Jeremiah 1:18

Jeremiah 1:18 LSB

"Now behold, I have given you today as a fortified city and as a pillar of iron and as walls of bronze against the whole land, to the kings of Judah, to its princes, to its priests, and to the people of the land.

The material of construction then should draw our attention to once again to the dual nature of Christ. The fact that He was truly man, as represented by the wood, and yet truly God as represented by the bronze, speaking to the power of Christ only to endure the judgement of God.

The Wrath of God

Isaiah chapter 53 is entitled the suffering servant. In it we read:

Isaiah 53 LSB

Who has believed our report?

And to whom has the arm of Yahweh been revealed?

For He grew up before Him like a tender shoot,

And like a root out of parched ground;

He has no *stately* form or majesty

That we should look upon Him,

Nor appearance that we should desire Him.

He was despised and forsaken of men,

A man of sorrows and acquainted with grief;

And like one from whom men hide their face
He was despised, and we did not esteem Him.
Surely our griefs He Himself bore,
And our sorrows He carried;
Yet we ourselves esteemed Him stricken,
Smitten of God, and afflicted.
But He was pierced through for our transgressions,
He was crushed for our iniquities;
The chastening for our peace *fell* upon Him,
And by His wounds we are healed.
All of us like sheep have gone astray,
Each of us has turned to his own way;
But Yahweh has caused the iniquity of us all
To fall on Him.
He was oppressed and He was afflicted,
Yet He did not open His mouth;
Like a lamb that is led to slaughter,
And like a sheep that is silent before its shearers,
So He did not open His mouth.

By oppression and judgment He was taken away;
And as for His generation, who considered
That He was cut off out of the land of the living,
That for the transgression of my people, striking *was due* to Him?
So His grave was assigned with wicked men,
Yet He was with a rich man in His death,
Because He had done no violence,
Nor was there any deceit in His mouth.
But Yahweh was pleased
To crush Him, putting *Him* to grief;
If You would place His soul *as* a guilt offering,
He will see *His* seed,
He will prolong *His* days,
And the good pleasure of Yahweh will succeed in His hand.
As a result of the anguish of His soul,
He will see *it and* be satisfied;
By His knowledge the Righteous One,
My Servant, will justify the many,
As He will bear their iniquities.

Therefore, I will divide for Him a portion with the many,

And He will divide the spoil with the strong;

Because He poured out His soul to death,

And was numbered with the transgressors;

Yet He Himself bore the sin of many,

And interceded for the transgressors.

This brings us to the truly weighty matter for this morning, a discussion that centers around a reality of God that the majority of people shy away from, that is no longer considered proper conversation for church but that is most necessary for us to understand the significance of Christ and His work on the Cross.

Jonathan Edwards, thundering from the pulpit as he delivered his sermon "Sinners in the hand of an angry God" states in his description of all of humanity before salvation: "The God that holds you over the pit of hell, much as one holds a loathsome spider over the fire, abhors you, and is dreadfully provoked; His wrath towards you burns like fire; He looks upon you as nothing else, but to be cast into the fire... you are ten thousand times so abominable in his eyes, as the most hateful and venomous serpent is in ours."

The truth that we find in churches today pales in comparison to this, somehow we have digressed from understanding the wrath of God in this manner, to one which said God loves you just the way you are. Here is the truth in regarding that viewpoint, it damns us to the very pit of hell. The reason, because it assumes that Christ's work on the Cross saves all apart from faith. This viewpoint assumes that God is too merciful, too loving, too forgiving to ever allow us to go to hell, yet the message of scripture continually tells us the very opposite is the truth.

Listen, God is loving, forgiving, merciful, but when we separate this from His holiness, His righteousness, His judgement, His wrath removes the truth of being loving, merciful and forgiving. It is precisely because He is holy, righteous and that He does judge and that His wrath is real that makes the

mercy, love and forgiveness so great. Our problem is we have a much higher view of ourselves than we do of God... which is why, as the Israelites entered into the Tabernacle courtyard, the first thing they would have been confronted with was the altar, the object that made it possible to even begin to enter into the presence of God.

For us, that object, that altar, that sacrifice, is Christ and the Cross of Calvary. Were it not for Christ's ability, as only one who was truly God and truly man could, endure the wrath poured out upon Him that day by the Father, then you and I have no hope, we have no ability to enter into the presence of God, there is no possibility that we can ever achieve what is our chief purpose - to glorify God and enjoy Him forever.

Conclusion

Brothers and sisters, as we have walked through the courtyard of the Tabernacle this morning, standing before the altar, we have been confronted with the weight of sin and the necessity of sacrifice. The altar, constructed with acacia wood and overlaid with bronze, stood as a solemn reminder that without the shedding of blood, there is no forgiveness of sins. It was the first object seen by all who entered, pressing upon them the reality that sinful man cannot approach a holy God apart from atonement.

But we must not leave this truth as a distant historical fact or an abstract theological concept. The altar of the Tabernacle pointed forward to the cross of Christ, where the ultimate and final sacrifice was made. On that day, the wrath of God was poured out in full measure upon the spotless Lamb, who bore the punishment that was rightfully ours. And so, the question that now stands before you is this: **Have you truly come to the altar?**

Not in mere ritual, not in empty profession, but in genuine faith and repentance. Many in Israel saw the altar, many brought their offerings, many went through the motions—but only those who truly believed were justified. The same is true today. You may claim the name of Christ, you may walk through the doors of the church, you may even serve in ministry—but have you truly laid yourself upon the altar as a living sacrifice? Have you truly been washed by the blood of the Lamb?

For those who believe, this truth is a cause for deep gratitude and worship,

knowing that the wrath we deserved was placed upon Christ, and in Him, we are clothed in righteousness. But for those who do not—those who stand at a distance, those who have grabbed the horns of the altar with no true surrender—there remains no refuge outside of Christ. The altar stands before you today, not one of bronze and wood, but the cross of Calvary. The question is not whether you will come to it—the question is whether you will come in faith or whether you will one day face it in judgment.

May God grant ears to hear and hearts to believe. Amen.