

The Altar of Incense

by Chuck Smith

The sermon explores the significance of the altar of incense, the Sabbath law, and the gift of craftsmanship, highlighting God's desire for rest and relaxation and the importance of using gifts for His glory.

Duration: 25:05

Scripture: Exodus 30:1

Topics: "Altar", "Holiness Of God", "Prayer"

Description

Chuck Smith emphasizes the significance of the altar of incense in the temple, representing the prayers of the saints as a sweet aroma to God. He explains how the incense symbolizes the prayers that ascend to God, particularly highlighting the importance of prayer in the believer's life. Smith also discusses the equality of all people before God, illustrated by the requirement for everyone to give the same shekel as ransom money, regardless of their wealth. He concludes by stressing the holiness of God and the necessity of approaching Him with reverence, as well as the unique gifts given by the Holy Spirit for the work of the ministry.

Transcript

Oh let the Son of God enfold you, with His Spirit and His love. Let Him fill your heart and satisfy your soul. Oh let Him have the things that hold you, and His Spirit like a dove will descend upon your life and make you whole.

Now, one of the furnishings inside of the temple was omitted when he was going through and ordering the lamp stand and the little table to show bread and all. And the one furnishing that was omitted was that of the altar of incense, the second altar. And so in chapter 30, he describes now how the altar of incense is to be made.

And again, a little square box made out of acacia wood covered with gold. And it is a cubit, or 18 inches, square. And it is two cubits or three feet high.

And again, the horns are one piece with it, so the top of it of gold, but the horns are made out of gold and come out of the corners. There is to be two gold rings in it, again, for portability. You remember this whole thing had to be moved.

Every time the cloud would move, man, they'd have to go in and roll up the tent and pick up the staves and carry this thing. And so the portable sanctuary where they'd move it wherever they went. And on this was to be burned sweet incense every morning when the priest went in to take care of the lamps, to trim the wicks and all.

Verse 7, he was to burn sweet incense. And when he lights the lamps at twilight, again, he shall burn incense on it. So notice he is lighting the lights at twilight.

And that is why we say they evidently didn't stay burning continually, but only through the evening hours, lighting them at twilight. Now, the incense in the Scripture is always a type of prayer. Our prayers ascending unto God as sweet incense.

In other words, your prayers are to God, pleasant. A pleasant aroma, the prayers of the saints come before God as a pleasant aroma. In the book of Revelation, chapter 5, when there is introduced this scroll in the right hand of him who is sitting upon the throne, the strong angel proclaims with a voice, Who is worthy to take the scroll and loose the seals? The title deed to the earth.

No one was found worthy in heaven and earth under the sea. John begins to sob because no one is found worthy. The elder says, Don't weep, John.

Behold, the lion of the tribe of Judah has prevailed to take the scroll and loose the seals. John turned, saw him as a lamb that had been slaughtered, and he came and he took the scroll out of the right hand of him that sat upon the throne. Immediately, the 24 elders picked up these little golden bowls full of incense and they offered them before the Lord.

The prayers, and it says the incense which are the prayers of the saints. Now, the significance of Jesus taking the scroll, the title deed to the earth, means that the kingdoms of this world are now to become the kingdoms of our Lord and of his Christ. It's all over as far as man is concerned ruling over the earth.

God is now going to rule. God's kingdom is going to come. How many times have you prayed, Thy kingdom come, thy will be done in earth as it is in heaven.

All of these are being stored as incense. And at that moment when Jesus takes the scroll, then these prayers as incense will be brought to God. The prayers of the saints through the centuries, Thy kingdom come, thy will be done.

So, prayer as incense arising before God. I think it's in Psalm 102 where David says, Let my prayer rise as incense before thee. And it is always a type of the prayers of God's people ascending unto the Lord.

So, this altar of incense and special kind of incense that was to be burned. You weren't to try to make this incense for any other purpose. If you did, you'd be cut off.

It was used exclusively, the formulation of this particular incense, used exclusively for this little golden altar before the veil of the Holy of Holies where every morning and every evening the incense would be offered. The symbol of the prayers of God's people ascending to God. Then, in verse 11 it talks about this ransom money.

The shekel that had to be given. And every man above the age of 20 had to give the shekel. Rich or poor, you had to give a shekel.

The rich could not give more, the poor could not give less. The shekel wasn't really very much, but it was called the money of ransom. Whereby you ransomed yourself, in a sense, with a silver shekel.

Now, the fact that everyone had to give the same amount was indicative of the fact that every man is equal in the sight of God. God has no special favors for the rich nor the pure. Every man stands before God on an equal plane.

No matter where you are in the financial scale. Hey, when you stand before God, you're all on the equal plane. God looks at every man alike.

He is no respecter of man's person. And so the fact that they all gave the same amount was indicative of the fact that God looks at all of us with equal value. Now, we don't think that, do we? We think that God must value Billy Graham above all of the rest of us because, man, look what he's done, or the Pope, or some of these other guys.

Surely, you know, God values them more than even who am I, you know. But God values us all the same, and thus they all gave the same. Now, the interesting thing, this is also the way they took the census.

They weren't really to number the people. Because God said that the descendants of Abraham would be innumerable as the stars of the heaven, innumerable. David, remember, later on, got into trouble because he numbered the people.

But what they would do is they had this time of the year when every man came in, paid his temple tax, and by this, the temple or the tabernacle was run and kept up and all. But then they would count the shekels. Don't count the men, just count the shekels.

And by that, they knew how many men above 20 were there. And so it was also a way of taking the census. Then there was this bronze laver bowl, the base of bronze.

It was for the washing of the priest. And they were to put water in it, and Aaron and his sons were to wash their hands and to wash their feet whenever they came near the tabernacle. If they would just walk into the tabernacle without washing their hands and feet, then they would be fried.

I mean, they'd be burned. It was a serious offense. So they were to wash when they came near the altar to minister.

And to burn the offering by fire to the Lord, they will wash with water lest they die. Now, two of Aaron's sons, as we move ahead in the story, when they finally set the thing up, and everything is now set up, they bring the first sacrifice in, and everything's ready to go, the people are gathered. As they set the sacrifice upon the altar, a fire came from heaven and kindled the altar and consumed the sacrifice.

And two of Aaron's sons got so excited they grabbed their little incense bowls and they grabbed some fire off the altar and were going to go in to offer the incense. Perhaps they didn't wash their hands and their feet because fire came from the altar and consumed the two of them. One possibility.

Another possibility, they'd been drinking a bit. We'll deal with that when we get to the strange fire that they offered and Nadab and Abihu were slain because of the strange fire that they offered to the Lord. But here it was, again, the approach of God.

Hey, you just don't go running in. You'll be consumed. God is a holy God.

And we can only approach Him through Jesus Christ. Now the formulation of the anointing oil is given. And this sort of aromatic kind of an oil and He gives the compounding of this special anointing oil and they were not to duplicate it for any other purpose.

If any man would try to duplicate it for any other purpose, he was to be cut off. And then in verse 34 to the end, the same was true of the special formulation of the incense. The frankincense and the combining of the other oils with it, the making of the incense was to be, again, something that was used exclusively for the tabernacle and not to be compounded or formulated for any other purpose.

And whoever makes anything like it to smell it for himself and his own pleasure shall be cut off from his people. So, basically, there we have it. The tabernacle, its furnishings.

Now, having given the instructions, the curtains upon which were to be embroidered the cherubim, the various dishes and spoons and shovels and pans and tables and altars that were to be made, we find that the Lord then anointed certain men with His Spirit and gave to them cunning ability at craftsmanship. There are many gifts of God to man. Many gifted people.

I always admire a person who has a gift. There are people who are gifted with the ability to play music. When I tried to play the piano, I had to practice for an hour a day and it never did come out right.

There are some people that can just sit down and play. I mean, it's just in them. There's a gift.

And I believe that it is a gift of God and I believe it's given to glorify God. I think that all of the gifts that God has given are basically to glorify God with those gifts. And I think that it is a prostitution of the gift when I use it for something other than glorifying God.

Now, these men were gifted by the Holy Spirit. So the Lord spoke to Moses saying, See, I have called by name Basileel, the son of Uri, the son of Hur of the tribe of Judah. Going on back, he was the son of Phares, who was the son of Tamar from Judah.

I have filled him with the Spirit of God in wisdom, in understanding, in knowledge, and in all manner of workmanship. So God just gave this fellow special skills in craftsmanship, the ability to work with his hands and to figure things out. And again, there are people who are gifted in this area, artisans.

Those that just have that natural capacity in furniture making and in other artistic crafts. And so God gave to them this gift to design the artistic works, to work in silver, gold, and bronze, in the cutting of the jewels for setting, in the carving of the wood, and to work in all manner of workmanship. And I, indeed, I have appointed with him Aholib of the tribe of Dan.

And I've put wisdom in the hearts of all who are gifted artisans that they may make all that I have commanded you. So the tabernacle needs to be built. God anoints with his Holy Spirit men to do the job.

The tabernacle of meeting, the ark of the testimony and of the mercy seat that is on it, and all of the furniture of the tabernacle, the table, utensils, the lampstand, with all its utensils, the snuffers and so forth, the altar of incense, the altar of burnt offering with all of its utensils, the laver, the base, the garments for the ministry, the holy garments for Aaron the priest, the garments for his sons to minister as priests, the anointing oil, and all that is necessary for the tabernacle worship. Having then gifted these men to do the work, the Lord then spoke to Moses concerning the Sabbath law. Speak also to the children of Israel, saying, Surely my Sabbaths you shall keep, for it is a sign between me and you throughout your

generations that you may know that I am Jehovah, who sanctifies or sets you apart.

Now God gave to Abraham the covenant of circumcision. To Moses he made another covenant, whereby they might be acclaimed always as the people of God, and this is the Sabbath day for their worship, for their holy day. You shall keep the Sabbath, therefore.

It is holy to you. Everyone who profanes it shall surely be put to death. And so we think of that as a pretty severe punishment for a person who would violate the Sabbath.

Whoever does any work on it, that person shall be cut off from among his people. That is, put to death. Work shall be done for six days, but the seventh is the Sabbath of rest, holy to the Lord.

Whoever does any work on the Sabbath day will surely be put to death. Now we think of that as extremely severe, and the Jews did develop, and even to the present day among the Orthodox have developed a very strict adherence to the Sabbath day. There are areas in Jerusalem today where you dare not drive your car through the neighborhood on the Sabbath day.

There are barricades. There are little boys with piles of stones near the barricades. Evidently there's nothing in the law against throwing stones on the Sabbath day.

They prepare all of their food on Friday. They put a big pot of hot water on with the electric plate under it and plug it in before the sun goes down Friday night. If they fail to plug it in before the sun goes down, then they can't plug it in.

They can't have their coffee over the Sabbath because you can't light any fires on the Sabbath day. So they prepare all their food on Friday, and then they rest, and they really do rest on the Sabbath day. It's a family day.

It's a day of relaxation. It's a day of rest, and I think it's a tremendous idea. It's a sign between God and the nation of Israel.

It is not a sign between God and the church nor God and the Gentiles. Verse 16, Therefore the children of Israel shall keep the Sabbath to observe the Sabbath throughout their generations as a perpetual covenant. It's God's covenant between Him and the nation of Israel.

It is not something that was placed upon the Gentile believers or upon the church. Now there are some within the church who seek to put themselves back under the yoke of the law, and there are some churches that insist upon Sabbath day worship. You have the Sabbath day Adventists, you have the Sabbath day Baptists, and you have the Jehovah Witnesses who convene on Saturdays.

But it is a covenant between God and Israel. When in the early church there were certain from Jerusalem who came down to Antioch to spy out the liberty that the Gentile Christians had. They became upset when they saw the liberty of the church in Antioch, and they said, unless you keep the law of Moses and are circumcised, you can't be saved.

So Paul herded these guys up, and he said, let's go up to Jerusalem, we'll settle this thing once and for all. And so they came up to Jerusalem, they called a church council. And Peter spoke first, and he told how God called him to the Gentiles, and how God blessed the Gentiles and poured His Spirit upon them.

Then Paul and Barnabas gave witness of how God had been working among the Gentiles throughout the world in their missionary journeys. Then James finally said, I suggest that we write them a letter and tell them to keep themselves from fornication and things offered to idols, and if they do this, they do well. And so those were the only restrictions they saw necessary to put upon the Gentile believers.

Peter said, why should we put on them a yoke of bondage that neither we nor our fathers were able to bear? It is interesting to note that Jesus was constantly being accused of violating their Sabbath. You weren't to do any labor, any hard type of labor. That was forbidden.

But to help, to relieve from suffering, that was acceptable. We'll return next time with more of our verse-by-verse study of Exodus, as Pastor Chuck Smith provides some valuable insights behind the establishing of the Sabbath. And we do hope you'll make plans to join us.

But right now, I'd like to remind you that if you missed any part of today's message, or perhaps you'd like to order a copy for that special friend or loved one, you can do so by simply contacting one of our customer service representatives, and they'd be more than happy to assist you with the ordering details. Simply call 1-800-272-WORD, and phone orders can be taken Monday through Friday, 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. Pacific Time. Once again, our toll-free number is 1-800-272-9673.

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And now, on behalf of The Word for Today, we'd like to thank all of you who share in supporting this ministry with your prayers and financial support. And be sure to join us again next time as Pastor Chuck Smith continues his verse-by-verse study through the book of Exodus. That's right here, on the next edition of The Word for Today.

Now, once again, here's Pastor Chuck Smith. May the Lord be with you and bless and keep you in His love. May He watch over you and give you a beautiful week.

A week that is devoted to the consciousness and awareness of His goodness, giving thanks to the Lord, for He is good and His mercy endures forever. God bless you, in Jesus' name. Hello? Oh, hey, I've been waiting for your call.

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