

# The Altar

by Henry Law

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*The sermon emphasizes the importance of trusting in Jesus Christ alone for salvation and the danger of building altars of human rubbish.*

**Scripture:** Genesis 7:20, Psalm 18:2, Psalm 50:23, John 6:35, Romans 12:1, Philippians 4:6, Hebrews 6:18, Hebrews 13:15

**Topics:** "Sanctification", "Obedience To God"

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## Description

Henry Law preaches on the sanctifying power of grace by examining the life of Noah as a godly model. Noah's immediate obedience, unwavering trust in God's Word, submission to His guidance, constant approach through reconciling blood, and joy in prayer and praise exemplify a true child of God. Despite overwhelming distractions and necessities, Noah prioritized building an altar to the Lord, emphasizing the importance of putting God first in all aspects of life, especially in times of busyness and chaos.

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## Transcript

"Noah built an altar unto the Lord." Genesis 7:20

To know the sanctifying power of grace, we must trace its actings in holy men. A machine of many wheels is a complex puzzle, until each part is seen in motion and in work. Thus it is by close study of godly models, that we learn what spiritual temples can arise from vile materials of earth; and how poor sinners, weak as we are, can become courageous like heroes in the field of trial.

The scene may vary with the sun and with the cloud. But still some prominent marks can never be obscured. The child of God will always exhibit--ready obedience to a heavenly Father's will--undoubting trust in His Word--calm submission to His guidance--constant approach to Him through reconciling blood--and hallowed joy in prayer and praise. It is no tree of faith, if it is not laden with these fruits. It is no purified metal if it is not stamped with this image. It is no heaven-born soul unless it proves its descent by these features. It is no heavenward walk, except along this consecrated road.

The truth of this is written, as with a sunbeam, in the annals of Noah. God said, "Make an ark." The work, though strange, is instantly begun. The Lord calls, "Come, and all your house, into the ark." If there be perils without, there are also countless perils within. But in calm confidence he enters--and in following the Lord fully, he has all safety and all peace. Again the same voice speaks, "Go forth from the ark." He leaves his refuge to stand on the grave of a buried world. He had known the earth as the riot-house of evil; but

now it is a noiseless solitude. He reads in one vast ruin the epitaph of sin. It is rightly concluded, that worship was his first employ. "Noah built an altar unto the Lord."

The peculiar moment gives peculiar complexion to this act. Matters upon matters were crowding for attention. He was houseless. There was no fold for the herds. He had all to do; and all demanded thought, and plan, and arrangement, and effort, and toil. If ever man might plead that distracting necessities excluded God, Noah was that man. If ever there was a time too full for thoughts of heaven, this was the time. But no! All shall yield to Him, who is above all. He, who is First, shall have the first. He, who is Best, shall have the best. The earth's first building is an Altar to its Maker. The patriarch's first care is to bless the care, which has so cared for him. His first posture is the bended knee and the uplifted hand!

If I seem to linger on the outskirts of my subject, it is to press this point: Satan often holds back the arm upraised to knock at mercy's gate by the check, Not now, not yet! Earthly duties must have their dues. This hour is claimed by the family--the trade--or rest. Listen not. No time is lost by giving it to God! No work is good, except begun, continued, and ended in Him. Devote to Him your earliest--your last. He will not be your debtor! He, who never can be paid, will more than overpay you.

The Altar was raised, that offerings might bleed thereon. You doubt not, that the dying victim and the flowing blood pictured the dying of the Lamb of God. This is the first letter of the Gospel-primer. It is, however, equally true, though not so obvious, that the Altar preaches Him, who is the sum and substance of redemption's wonders. Jesus is every part of sin's atonement. As He is the true Priest, and the true slain one, so, too, He is the true Altar. He presents Himself to die upon Himself. Believer, thus your sacrifice is perfect because it is entirely divine. You have a Priest--and only one; and He has passed into the heavens, and sits at the right hand of the Majesty on high. You have a Lamb--and only one. No more is needed. And He died but once; for once was absolutely sufficient to satisfy and save. So, too, you have an Altar--and only one. It ever stands before the throne of God. Jesus is this Altar.

This is no dream of imagination. It is the faithful saying of our God. The Spirit Himself leads to the Altar, and bids us read in it this Gospel-lesson. He guided the Apostle's lips to utter, "We have an Altar." Therefore an Altar is counted among our treasures. But where is it? It must be where the Priest is, and where the blood is. They are not here. They are within the veil of heaven. There, too, is our Altar; and, being in heaven, it can only be the Lord Jesus. This is the well of truth which the Spirit opens. With joy let us draw water from it.

The Altar has many uses; but this is the main--it is the victim's dying bed. Hence Jesus, when He comes to die, must have such a bed. Now, let faith go back to Calvary--the cradle of its hopes. There, in the fullness of time, our great High Priest is seen, leading a willing Lamb. The Lamb is Himself. It bears no common burden, "for the Lord has laid on Him the iniquities of us all." The weight of one sin would thrust a soul forever and ever, downward and downward, deeper and deeper into the bottomless pit of woe. But who can count the sins under which Jesus groans? The number is infinite, and each a mass which knows no measure. On what altar, then, can this heavy-laden sufferer lie? Let all angels spread beneath Him their combined strength--it is but a broken reed. Shall worlds be piled upon worlds?--They would crumble into dust. Heaven can give no aid. It is all dark above, when Jesus cries, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken me?" Earth has fled. He looked, but there was no man. But all that He needed, He was in Himself. His Deity is the Altar of His expiring humanity. He is His own support. Supported by Himself, He fails not under the whole flood of Jehovah's outpoured wrath. Upheld by Himself, He drinks the last dreg of the cup of fury. Firm on this rock, He pays, until justice cries, Enough. Strong in His own might, He

satisfies, until satisfaction overflows. Immovably based on His own Godhead, He blots out iniquity, until iniquity no more is found.

Reader! I thus earnestly exalt Jesus, as the one Altar of expiation, that you may learn more clearly, that He is All in buying the soul from death. Believe me, it is not easy, it is not common, to see this truth in its unclouded glory. Satan and all hell strain every nerve at every moment to darken it with mists. Poor nature is prone to drink the potion, that some help from Christ makes all things safe. Self, bewitched with self, and self-performances, fondles the conceit, that man's meritoriousness, decked with Christ's merits, is the key of heaven. What is this, but to build an altar of human rubbish, with human tools, and then add Christ thereto? This is the delusion, which, with Christ on its front, stalks through the earth, and murders thousands! This is the poison tree, beneath the shade of which, many lie down and dream that they make Christ their only hope, while the main weight of trust is hung on self! This is the fiend, which mocks the lost, by showing them too late that Christ extolled in name, is not Christ reigning in the heart. This is the foe, which often makes the faithful ministry a fruitless field.

Men imagine that to hear of Christ, and to commend the sound, amounts to saving grace. Self, in some form, is earth's loved altar. Here is the deep mischief of the Church of Rome. Here is the net so speciously wrought--so craftily spread, by that power of darkness. That heresy admits enough of Christ to calm the conscience, but it retains enough of self to slay the soul. It denies not, that Jesus lived and died to save--but it denies that Jesus alone can suffice. It therefore erects very many altars--and very high--and very captivating to sense and fancy. It makes these the real groundwork of the sinner's hope. It then surmounts the whole with Christ, and, like a Babel-builder, thinks that the summit will extend to heaven. There is a semblance of uplifting Christ. But it is Christ added to angels--Christ added to saints--Christ added to a train of mediators and intercessors--Christ added to the church--Christ added to penance--Christ added to purgatory--Christ, as the pinnacle of a pyramid of man's works. This is the papal Gospel. But the feet of the image are of clay. It cannot stand--and its downfall will crush, like Dagon's temple.

Others sport with this idol, who are papists in heart, though not in name. They find an altar in forms, and services, and self-denials, and superstitions. They build on a foundation of their own, and then call Christ to decorate their structure. They grant that the scale is light without Him; so at last they cast in the plea of His merits to supply defects. This creed may seem to lead to life, but it goes down to hell. The word is sure, "You who are trying to be justified by law have been alienated from Christ; you have fallen away from grace!"

But there are other uses of the altar. It received the gifts and first fruits of the worshiper. From it, supplies of food were taken. To it the guilty fled. Its ground was a sanctuary; its horns a refuge. Jesus is all this. Reader! your calling is to dedicate yourself--your soul--your body--all that you are--all that you have--all that you can do--a sacrifice to God. You may not keep anything from Him, who has given more than all heaven for your ransom. Settle this truth, then, steadily in your mind; that there is no acceptance for person, or services, except in the Beloved. Words and works are worse than worthless, except when offered in the faith, and through the merits, and for the sake of Jesus. That fruit is only rottenness, which is not sanctified by His blood, and consecrated to His glory. Cement yourself, your every intent--your every doing to Him. Nothing but the rich incense, which curls from this Altar, can render you, and your life, a sweet savor unto God.

Reader! be much in prayer. This is the breath of a living soul. Each moment is a need, each moment should be a heaven-ascending cry. But it is only at one altar, that petitions gain power to prevail. Supplicants, with Christ in their arms, take heaven by storm. But prayer unmixed with Christ is a smoke vanishing into air. It is scattered, as the chaff of the summer threshing-floors.

Abound, too, in thanksgiving. The command is, "In everything give thanks." The tide of mercies ever flows. Shall the stream of grateful love ever ebb? But it is no welcome praise, unless it be fragrant from this Altar. Adoration must here plume its wings, or it can never fly above the skies.

The soul needs hourly food. And it is here that it must seek refreshment. Rich indeed is the meal to which the Gospel calls! The word--the promises--the ordinances--the sacraments--are spread as an abundant feast. But it is Christ, who constitutes the essence of the nourishment! Apart from Him means of grace are but a choking husk.

The Altar, too, had horns. The offender clinging to them was safe. No avenging hand could touch him. Thus, all who flee to Christ, may smile at every foe. No threat of the law, no sword of justice, no pursuer's rage can harm. Happy the believer, who has made this Altar the home of his safe delights! Beneath its shelter he will often resolve, "Here I have laid down the burden of my every sin; here will I add, by the Spirit's power, the whole of a devoted and adoring life. He, who is the Altar on which I die to sin, shall be the Altar on which I live to God. For pardon and for godliness, Christ shall be my All."

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