

The Altar of Sacrifice

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[0 : 0 0] Well, if we could, this evening, for a short while, and with the Lord's help, if we could turn back to the book of Exodus and chapter 38.

Exodus chapter 38. And if you read again just at the beginning. He made the altar of burnt offering of acacia wood.

Five cubits was its length, and five cubits its breadth. It was square, and three cubits was its height. He made horns for it on its four corners.

Its horns were of one piece with it, and he overlaid it with bronze. Now, as you know, this evening we're continuing our study on the tabernacle and its importance for us as the Lord's people.

Because everything we're looking at in our study of the tabernacle, it points us forward and it directs our attention towards Jesus Christ. Because as we said before, and as John says to us in his gospel, Jesus is the word who became flesh and dwelt among us.

[1 : 1 8] He's the one who tabernacled among us so that we would behold his glory. The glory is of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.

And so the tabernacle in the Old Testament, it points us to Jesus, our tabernacle. And as we mentioned last week, the biblical order that the tabernacle is presented to us in the Bible, it's theocentric, it's God-centered.

And we can see that even when you look at the beginning of chapter 37. Because the description of the tabernacle, it begins with the Ark of the Covenant, sitting or situated in the Holy of Holies. That's where God dwelt. And then it moves outwards. If you go through chapter 37, it moves outwards to describe the table of showbread, then the golden lampstand, then the altar of incense. And then it moves outward again into the tabernacle courtyard. And we see there the altar of burnt offering and the bronze basin, and then the outer gate.

[2 : 2 2] And so the biblical order that's given to us here is theocentric. It's God-centered. It's moving from where God is in the middle, in the midst of his people, outwards.

But as we said before, we're going to consider the tabernacle and its furniture from the opposite direction. I'd like us to consider the tabernacle as sinners seeking to enter God's presence.

Sinners seeking to enter into God's presence. I want us to come, in many ways, just as we are. And I want us to come as sinners seeking God's favour, forgiveness and fellowship.

We are sinners seeking God's favour, forgiveness and fellowship. And as sinners seeking God's favour, forgiveness and fellowship, we need to come to the altar of sacrifice this evening.

And I'd just like us to consider the altar of sacrifice under three headings. The approach, the altar and the atonement.

[3 : 2 5] The approach, the altar and the atonement. So first of all, the approach. We're told in verse one, He made the altar of burnt offering of acacia wood.

Five cubits was its length, five cubits its breadth. It was square and three cubits was its height. Now we're told there that He, the He mentioned in these verses is Bezalel.

Who, as we saw last week, he was one of the craftsmen whom the Lord used to construct the tabernacle. You'll remember that Bezalel and this man, Aholiab, they were called by the Lord to use their God-given skills and intelligence and knowledge and craftsmanship in order to organise and teach and even instruct others how to build the tabernacle.

And like us, as we said last week, these craftsmen, they were saved to serve the Lord by using their skills and abilities for the work, witness and worship of the Lord.

And the first area that these craftsmen would have set in place, as we saw last week, was the courtyard. And it was established by this white perimeter, this white fine linen cloth surrounding the tabernacle and it was supported on pillars.

[4 : 41] There was pillars on the north side and the south side and the west sides. And the purpose of this perimeter was to lead the sinner all the way round to the east side of the courtyard, to the outer gate.

Because if a sinner, if a sinner approached from the north side or the south side or even the west side, the cloth, the cloth perimeter around the tabernacle, it proclaimed to the sinner, not this way, not this way, not this way.

Because a sinner could only approach God through the way that God had prescribed. And the way that God had prescribed was the outer gate in the east. And as we mentioned before, the reason the outer gate was on the east side of the courtyard was because when Adam and Eve fell into sin, the Lord drove them out of the garden of Eden through the east gate.

The Lord drove Adam and Eve out of the gate in the east. And so in order to come back into fellowship with God, in order to experience favour with God, in order to experience forgiveness with God, a sinner could only do so by entering the tabernacle through the outer gate in the east.

A sinner couldn't come to God according to their own desires and their own design. They could only come according to the Lord's desire and the Lord's design.

[6 : 07] But if you remember, the outer gate of the tabernacle, it was made from a particular cloth. And it was woven together using three particular colours, blue, scarlet, and blue, purple and scarlet, which, as you know, they're all royal colours.

And we'll look at this more when we come to the coverings of the tabernacle. But these three colours, on the outer gate, as a sinner approached, they were to remind the sinner that the one whom they sought favour, forgiveness and fellowship with, he was a king.

They're royal colours. These colours were to remind the sinner that the one whom they were seeking was the King of Kings and the Lord of Lords. In fact, he was the covenant king of his people, before whom a sinner was only allowed to approach and to present themselves if they came with an acceptable sacrifice.

Because in order to approach the covenant king, a sinner was permitted to enter through the outer gate into the tabernacle courtyard, so long as they were bringing a sacrifice.

And we see this time and time again throughout the Psalms, where a sinful worshipper, they are invited to come into the presence of the covenant king, so long as they're bringing a sacrifice with them.

[7 : 33] And that's what we were singing about in Psalm 96, where the Psalmist said, give ye the glory to the Lord, that to his name is Jew, come ye into his courts and bring an offering with you.

And Psalm 96 reminds us that in order to sing that new song to the Lord, you must enter through the outer gate, you must come through the outer gate into the court of the tabernacle, and you must bring a sacrifice with you.

Now, to our 21st century minds, even as we read through Leviticus chapter 1, the idea of sacrificing an animal to the Lord, it seems cruel, and it almost seems barbaric.

But you know, what we have to always remember is that sacrifice was God-ordained. Sacrifice was the means of a holy God having mercy.

Sacrifice was the means of a holy God having mercy. And that has been the case since the fall of Adam. Because you remember that when Adam and Eve fell, it was God who sacrificed an animal in order to clothe Adam and Eve and hide their nakedness and their shame.

[8 : 50] And even when you come to Adam and Eve's sons, Cain and Abel, it was the sacrifice of Abel that was more acceptable to the Lord than the grain offering of Cain.

Why? Because sacrifice is the means of a holy God having mercy. And down throughout the generations, sinners could only approach their covenant king by offering an animal sacrifice. Sacrifice was the means of a holy God having mercy. Because the reality was that sin must be punished. Sin must be punished.

And it must be punished either in the life of the sinner or in the life of a substitute. Sin must be punished either in the life of the sinner or in the life of a substitute.

And that's what the sacrifice is. It's a substitute. It has the sins of the sinner confessed over it and transferred to it. And it stands condemned in the place of the sinner.

[9 : 52] And that's what we're reading about in Leviticus chapter 1. We were reading about where the Lord gave instructions for sacrificing a burnt offering. And the Lord said to Moses, we read that in the opening few verses, speak to the people of Israel and say to them, when any one of you

brings an offering to the Lord, you shall bring your offering of livestock from the herd or from the flock.

If his offering is a burnt offering from the herd, he shall offer a male without blemish. He shall bring it to the entrance of the tent of meeting that he may be accepted before the Lord.

He shall lay his hands on the head of the burnt offering and it shall be accepted for him to make atonement for him. So the burnt offering which the sinner was to, to enter through the outer gate of the tabernacle courtyard with, it was to be a live animal.

And as Leviticus chapter 1 explains, the animal which could be substituted on behalf of the sinner, it all depended on the wealth of the sinner.

The choice of animal depended upon how wealthy you were. Because as we read in Leviticus 1, if the sinner was wealthy, or if he was from an upper class, they would have to offer a bullock.

[11 : 12] If the sinner was, say, from a middle class, they would have to offer a sheep or a goat.

But if the sinner was poor, from a lower, you could say a lower working class, they were allowed to offer a pigeon, or as we read, a turtle dove.

So what we see there is that the Lord graciously made provision for anyone and everyone to approach him, seeking favour, forgiveness and fellowship.

No one was restricted, regardless of their wealth, no one was restricted from coming before the Lord. The invitation to come was to whosoever, just like it is today.

No one is restricted from coming to Christ because of their wealth, or their upbringing, or their past, or their present. The offer of favour, forgiveness and fellowship with God is to whosoever.

But when a sinner brought a burnt offering to the Lord, we're told that the animal was to be completely consumed on the altar. It was to be a whole burnt offering to the covenant king.

[12 : 20] And the fact that it was to be a whole burnt offering, with nothing left, it implies the wholehearted dedication of the sinner to the Lord.

The sinner was to bring this animal sacrifice. They were to enter through the outer gate into the tabernacle courtyard. And the sinner was to lay their hands upon the head of the animal, confessing their sin, and also confessing their dedication to the Lord.

And it's at that point that the priest would then take over. The priest would take over as the intermediary between the sinner and the Lord. Because as sinner, they were only permitted to enter into the courtyard with their sacrifice, but no further.

And as we said, sacrifice is the means of a holy God having mercy. Sin must be punished, either in the life of the sinner or in the life of the substitute. Therefore, a sinner could approach the Lord with a whole burnt offering, seeking forgiveness and favour and fellowship.

But once they'd handed the sacrifice over, once they'd confessed the sins and made their dedication to the Lord, they were handing it over. For it to be consumed upon the altar of sacrifice.

[13 : 41] And you know, thinking about it, it must have been so solemn to witness as a sinner. Because as you approach the Lord, you're bringing something living with you.

And you know it's going to die in your place. And you're bringing your sacrifice through the outer gate and there's no going back. You go through the outer gate and you're inside the tabernacle courtyard.

And as soon as you bring the sacrifice in, even as we saw in the video, the first thing you would see is where your substitute is going to be placed and where your sin is going to be dealt with.

That's the first thing you'd see as you walk through the outer gate. You'd see that favour, forgiveness and fellowship with God is only going to be achieved by placing my substitute on the altar of sacrifice.

And so that's what we see first, the approach. But then secondly, I want us to consider the altar. We're now reaching the altar. So the approach and the altar. The altar.

[14 : 47] Look at verse one again. We're told that Bezalel made the altar of burnt offering of acacia wood. Five cubits was its length, five cubits its breadth. It was square and three cubits was its height.

He made horns for it on its four corners. Its horns were of one piece with it and he overlaid it with bronze. So the altar of burnt offering or the altar of sacrifice which Bezalel made, as somebody walked through the outer gate, it was one of the most visible features in the tabernacle courtyard. You couldn't miss it. It was just staring you in the face because on entering into the outer gate, you were confronted, maybe even intimidated by this large bronze altar.

Now we're told that the altar of sacrifice, it was made using acacia wood, which was a hard wood. And it was made of acacia wood overlaid with bronze.

And it was overlaid with bronze in order to distinguish it from the altar of incense, which was also an altar made of acacia wood, but that was overlaid with gold. And it was situated inside the holy place.

[16:02] But we're told here that the large bronze altar was to be five cubits long, five cubits wide, and three cubits high. Now, as we mentioned last week, a cubit was said to be the distance from your elbow to the tip of your middle finger.

And on average, some are above average, like David, he's got longer arms than me. But on average, my arm is 45 centimetres, David's is 50, which is about 18 inches.

And so the large bronze altar, if you work it out, the five cubits and the three cubits, the large bronze altar was seven foot five inches wide, or two metres, 25 centimetres, or two metres, 250 mil, depending upon which metric measurement you want to use.

And it was a square altar. So we're told that the length and the width were the same. It was seven foot five inches, two metres, 25 centimetres, or two metres, 250 mil.

And it was also four foot five inches high, one metre, 35 centimetres, one metre, 350 mil, depending again on the metric measurement that you're familiar with.

[17:17] But just to give you an idea of how large this bronze altar really was, it was the size of two small cars sitting beside one another. Or, I actually worked it out the other day.

I was in here with a tape measure and David found me. The width of the altar is from that wall to this screw. That's how wide it would be. And then it would be from this wall to the edge of that table, roughly square.

That's how big it would be. And the height of the altar would be from the floor to about the screw again. So that's how big this square altar would be that they put sacrifices onto.

And so entering into the tabernacle courtyard with your sacrifice, you were confronted by this large bronze altar. And as a sinner coming in with your sacrifice, you knew that that's where your substitute was going to be placed.

And you knew that that's where your sin was going to be dealt with. And the message which the altar of sacrifice proclaimed to every sinner who walked through the outer gate was that sacrifice is the means, the only means, of a holy God having mercy.

[18:29] And that sin, sin must be punished either by the life of the sinner or in the life of the substitute. Sin must be punished.

But you know, one of the key features, and I find this so, so interesting, one of the key features on the altar of sacrifice, and it was also on the altar of incense, we'll see that in a few weeks' time, the key feature was the horns, the horns that were on the altar.

We're told in verse 2 that Bezalel made horns for the altar on its four corners, and the horns were of one piece overlaid with bronze.

Now, the horns were probably modelled upon Ram's horns, because in the Bible, the horn was often a symbol of power and authority.

But the horn was also used to symbolise a new beginning and the promise of salvation. The horn was used to symbolise a new beginning and the promise of salvation.

[19:34] And we see that throughout the Psalms, where the Psalmist, he describes the Lord, he says to the Lord that he is the horn of my salvation. Or the Psalmist says that he's exalting his horn, or he's raising his horn, or even he's blowing his horn.

And it's all as an expression of praise to the Lord for his salvation. But more than that, the ram's horn, which was blown at different times, it was called the shofar.

The ram's horn was called the shofar. And it was blown at the beginning of key festivals in the Jewish calendar. The shofar was blown at Rosh Hashanah, which is the Jewish New Year.

And by blowing the shofar at the Jewish New Year, it was marking a new beginning, the beginning of a new year. But the shofar was also blown ten days later at Yom Kippur, which was the most important day, a day of salvation for the Jewish people, because Yom Kippur is the day of atonement.

And so the ram's horn, the shofar, it was blown to mark a new beginning at Rosh Hashanah, the new year, and also to emphasise the promise of salvation. And in many ways, that's what the altar of sacrifice guaranteed the sinner.

[20 : 55] The altar of sacrifice with its four horns on it, it guaranteed the sinner a new beginning and the promise of salvation. It guaranteed the sinner a new beginning and a promise of salvation.

Because when a sinner would bring their sacrifice into the tabernacle courtyard and offer it up as a whole burnt offering to the Lord, they would do as they were told, they would confess their sin unto the sacrifice, they would make their dedication to the Lord, then they would hand over their substitute to the Lord to be sacrificed.

And as we read in Leviticus 1, the priest would then kill the sacrifice, he would slit its throat, or as we saw with the pigeon ring, its neck, and they would catch the blood.

And the blood would be caught in one of the bronze basins that was made by Bezalel. And the priest would then sprinkle the blood, he would go round the altar, this large altar, and sprinkle the blood on the sides of the altar.

And then the sacrifice would be cut in pieces by the priest, then placed upon the altar, and consumed in the fires of the altar as a whole burnt offering to the Lord.

[22 : 13] And you know, although it was a solemn reminder to the sinner that that's what they should have received, the substitute that would be lying, burning in the fires of the altar between the four horns, it was all a message to the sinner.

And the message was loud and clear. This is how a new beginning takes place. And this is where salvation begins. You have received atonement.

It's a wonderful picture that between the four horns is lying the substitute. And the message is clear. This is the new beginning for you. This is salvation taking place.

You have received atonement. And you know, that's what the psalmist was praising the Lord for in Psalm 118. We were singing it earlier.

As we mentioned, it was the last psalm that Jesus sang before he was crucified. But it's a psalm of thanksgiving. Psalm 118 is where the psalmist is thanking the Lord for his new beginning.

[23 : 19] He's thanking the Lord for the promise of salvation through a substitutionary sacrifice.

And as we sang in Psalm 118, we sang in verse 27 where the psalmist says, God is the Lord who unto us hath made light to arise.

Bind ye unto the altar's horns with cords the sacrifice. And what the psalmist is praising and thanking the Lord for is the promise of a new beginning and the promise of salvation that he's able to enjoy through the substitutionary atonement of a sacrifice.

It's a wonderful, wonderful picture of, as we'll see in a moment, it's a picture of the cross. It's a picture of atonement. That's what I want us to see lastly.

So they approach the altar and the atonement. They approach the altar and the atonement. We'll read again in verse 2.

He made horns for it on its four corners. Its horns were of one piece with it and he overlaid it with bronze. As we said earlier, the horns on the large bronze altar of sacrifice, they were modelled on the ram's horn.

[24 : 37] And the ram's horn was called the shofar. It was blown at the beginning of key festivals in the Jewish calendar. The shofar was blown at the Jewish New Year, Rosh Hashanah, to mark a new beginning.

The shofar was blown at Yom Kippur, which is the Day of Atonement. Now what's really interesting is that today is the Day of Atonement.

Today is the Day of Atonement. Throughout the world today, Jews have been celebrating Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement. And as you know, the Day of Atonement was the one day in the year when the High Priest would enter into the most holy place, the Holy of Holies.

He would go through the veil and sprinkle blood on the mercy seat in order to make atonement on behalf of the people. And the High Priest, he would make atonement through substituting a sacrifice, an animal sacrifice on behalf of the people and sprinkling its blood before the Lord.

And although the blood of the animal on the Day of Atonement was to be sprinkled on the mercy seat inside the Holy of Holies, the dead animal was always consumed outside on the altar of sacrifice.

[25 : 56] It was to be an offering to the Lord in which the substitute was to be slain and consumed in the fires of the large bronze altar between the four horns.

and you know what I find fascinating about the altar and the fire? The fire on the altar of sacrifice was burning continually.

In fact, the Lord commanded the priests in Leviticus chapter 6. He said, fire shall be kept burning on the altar continually. It shall not go out. The fire on the altar of sacrifice was to be burning continually day and night.

it was never to go out. And that fire, as soon as you saw it on entering into the tabernacle courtyard, the fire was to be a reminder to sinners that God is holy.

God is a consuming fire. Sin must be punished and it must be punished either in the life of the sinner or in the life of a substitute. And you know, that's why Jesus spoke so much about hell.

[27 : 04] He described hell as the place where the fire is not quenched and the worm dieth not. Because, well, hell is the place where sin will be punished.

And sin will be punished either in the life of the sinner or in the life of a substitute. And that's the picture that's been portrayed to it. That's what happened.

Substitutionary atonement was achieved on the altar of sacrifice between the four horns. And it all happened so that sinners would have a new beginning, so that sinners would know salvation, and so that sinners would have favoured forgiveness and fellowship with God.

Now, as one commentator states, animal sacrifices gave no pleasure to God by themselves. They only gave pleasure in what they reflected and anticipated.

they only gave pleasure in what they reflected and anticipated. And of course, every sacrifice on the altar of sacrifice, it looked forward, it pointed forward to the greatest sacrifice and substitute, our Lord Jesus Christ.

[28 : 19] Because if sacrifice is the means of a holy God having mercy, and if sin must be punished either in the life of the sinner or in the life of a substitute, and if the law demands that without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sin, then sinners today must come to the altar of Calvary and see what has been done on our behalf.

Because you could say that even between the four horns of his cross, being consumed in the fires of hell, was the spotless Lamb of God, what was he doing?

Taking away the sin of the world. And through his death, a substitutionary atonement was achieved. And it was achieved so that sinners could have a new beginning, so that sinners could experience the wonder of salvation, and so that sinners would know favour, forgiveness, and fellowship with a holy God.

And you know, my friend, as we come to the altar of Calvary, and we're to come to it every day, do you know, we have to confess with Horatius Boner, bearing shame and scoffing rude, in my place condemned he stood, sealed my pardon with his blood, hallelujah, what a saviour.

You know, that should be the song of the Christian, hallelujah, what a saviour. And you know, to our 21st century minds, the idea of sacrificing an animal on an altar, is in many ways barbaric and cruel.

[30 : 00] And to many even, God the Father sacrificing his own son on the cross, people see it as barbaric and cruel. But that's not how the Christian sees it.

That's certainly not how the Apostle John saw it. Do you remember what the Apostle John said? He considered the cross upon which the Prince of glory died.

And John said, here in his love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his son to be the propitiation for our sin.

Here in his love, that's what he said, that God sent his son to be the propitiation, to be an atoning sacrifice. That's what the word propitiation literally means, to be an atoning sacrifice that would remove the wrath of God against our sin.

Here in his love, that's how we should look at the altar of sacrifice. Here in his love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his son to be the propitiation for our sin.

[31 : 14] And our response, hallelujah, what a saviour. And so the approach, the altar, and the atonement. But as we see Jesus, our tabernacle, presented before us in the altar of sacrifice, we have to remember that coming to the altar of sacrifice, in many ways, it was only the first step of the Christian life.

Because it's from the altar of sacrifice that you move then towards the brazen laver. And we'll see what that symbolifies. as we continue our study next time.

So may the Lord bless these few thoughts to us. Let us pray. O Lord, our gracious God, we give thanks to thee this evening, that we have a substitute, and that we had a willing sacrifice.

We thank thee, Lord, that in our place condemned he stood. And Lord, help us never to forget it, help us never to lose sight of it. Help us, Lord, never to see, to lose sight of seeing the beauty of the

cross and what Jesus has done.

And Lord, we thank thee and we praise thee for even our study of the tabernacle, how it is a wonderful picture, pointing us ever to Jesus, the author and even the finisher of our faith.

[32 : 40] Lord, bless us then, we pray. May these things be an encouragement to us, to remind us day by day that the cross is a picture of love, where God demonstrates his love towards us, and that whilst we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.

And Lord, we thank thee and we praise thee that he has begun that good work in us, and he will continue to bring it on to completion at the day of Christ Jesus. Lord, bless us then, we pray, and Lord, give to us even a plea, a plea that more would come, that in that way, Lord, that more would come inside, through the gate, that they would come to the altar of sacrifice, that they would come confessing Jesus as their Lord, and Jesus as their Saviour.

Oh Lord, hear us then, we pray, bless us in our being together, and go before us for Jesus' sake. Amen. We're going to bring our service to a conclusion by singing in Psalm 40, Psalm 40 in the Scottish Psalter.

Psalm 40, page 259. We're singing from verse 5 down to the verse marked 8.

Psalm 40 at verse 5, O Lord, my God, full many are, the wonders thou hast done, thy gracious thoughts to us were far, above all thoughts are gone, in order none can reckon them, to thee of them declare, and speak of them, I would they more than can be numbered out.

[34 : 25] And particularly verse 6, where it says, no sacrifice no sacrifice nor offering didst thou at all desire, mine ears thou bore, sin offering thou, and burnt didst not require.

And these words, they're quoted in the letter to the Hebrews as a reminder that they speak very, very clearly about Jesus. No sacrifice or offering was desired.

Why? Because Jesus was the sacrifice and the offering. he was the one who was substituted in our place. And that's why Psalm 40 is in many ways the testimony of the Christian.

So, Psalm 40 from verse 5 down to the verse marked 8, to God's praise. O Lord my God for let thee art of wonders thou hast done.

Thy gracious thoughts to us were found above all thoughts are gone.

[35 : 44] In order none can be heard of them to thee have them declared.

I speak of them my would they more than can be numbered are.

Do sacrifice nor offering har thanks to that bells What all desire My ears Thou portst In offering love And burnt It's not required Then to the Lord These were my words I come behold and see Within the volume Of the book

It written is of me To do thine will I take delight O thou my God-Latart Yea, that most holy law of thine I have within my heart The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ The love of God the Father And the fellowship of the Holy Spirit Be with you all Now and forevermore Amen Yes The love of God God The grace of the Father That God