

The Incense Altar

by Henry Law

The Incense Altar represents Christ's intercession and prayer, and its significance is rooted in the connection between Christ's sacrifice and our salvation.

Scripture: Exodus 30:6, Exodus 30:38, Psalm 2:6, Psalm 141:2, Isaiah 9:6, John 14:13

Topics: "Christ's Sacrifice", "Tabernacle Symbolism"

Description

Henry Law preaches about the significance of the Golden Altar in the Tabernacle, symbolizing the Incense of the courts above and pointing to Jesus as the ultimate sacrifice and intercessor. The Altar's position outside the inner curtain, opposite the Ark of the Covenant, signifies a link between the cross and the crown, urging believers to examine their hearts and seek forgiveness and remission. The Altar's design, with gold overlaying wood, and its square shape, represents the strength and welcoming nature of salvation through Christ, the God-man who redeems sinners' souls.

Transcript

"Make an altar of acacia wood for burning incense. It is to be square, a cubit long and a cubit wide, and two cubits high--its horns of one piece with it. Overlay the top and all the sides and the horns with pure gold, and make a gold molding around it." Exodus 30:1-3

He whose daily life is an upward flight to Christ has heaven on his way to heaven. Wide indeed are these fields of light. We may journey far, but they stretch farther. From every point more lofty heights appear. The subject is a book whose pages end not. The more it occupies us, the less it wearies. It richly feeds, but ever leaves an appetite for more. The Redeemer's image is embodied in the Tabernacle-service. 'Behold Him! behold Him!' is the one universal cry. But nowhere is this voice more plainly heard than at the Golden Altar. This filled the tent with richest streams of fragrance. So it preached Him who is the Incense of the courts above.

Reader! this now invites our notice. In mercy may the Spirit cause the sacred odor to arise. The position of this Altar first claims thought. The Lord, who orders all things with wise end, especially enjoins, 'Place the incense altar just outside the inner curtain, opposite the Ark's cover--the place of atonement--that rests on the Ark of the Covenant. I will meet with you there.' Exodus 30:6. Mark where he stands, then, who discharges service at this sanctuary. The expiating altar is behind. His steps have brought him to the borders of the holiest place. He has passed the spot where dying victims bleed (the bronze atoning altar). Heaven's clearest emblem (the Ark of the Covenant) is now close by. Thus the Incense Altar's chosen

position seems as a link to join the cross and crown.

Reader! the spot calls you to pause and look within. Say, have your feet attained this position? Has the first altar seen you humble, guilt-stricken, smiting on your breast, and confessing all your miserable sins before it? Has eager faith there touched the atoning Lamb? Is pardon in your hand? Is your soul calm in knowledge of the curse removed and full remission given?

Have you thus pressed towards this inner Altar, where the incense burns? If so, the veil is almost touched. This screens the sanctuary, which pictures heaven's bright rest. The space is narrow now, which parts you from eternal bliss. The ever-smiling smile of God, the ever-present presence of the Lamb is your near portion. Swift-flying moments will soon waft you to the kingdom from all eternity prepared, throughout all eternity prolonged.

Reader! is such in very truth your place? If so, adore the grace which led you to it! You may have wealth. It cannot profit long. You may have health. Decay will cause its flower to fade. You may have strength. It soon will totter to the grave. You may have honors. A breath will blast them. You may have flattering friends. They are but as a summer brook. These boasted joys often cover now an aching heart. They never gave a grain of solid peace. They never healed a conscience-wound. They never won approving looks from heaven. They never crushed the sting of sin. But floods of peace surround this golden incense altar! Its worshipers grasp mercy and survey glory. They look back on all transgression blotted out. Heaven's rays are breaking on their blood-washed souls. The Incense Altar is so set that these truths sparkle from its instant sight.

Next, let this altar's parts be viewed. No human mind designs this incense altar. God, who gives Christ, gives each foreshadowing sign. His voice directs, 'Let gold be joined to wood.' Christ is the corresponding wonder. He is equal to God in Godhead's greatness, and fellow to man in humanity's low state. He is bold to ascend to Jehovah's throne, and willing to share the sinner's rags. Such is the Savior whom God sends. Such is the Savior whom sin needs. More cannot be. Less would be nothing worth. Would that all tribes of men could form one audience, to hear one word from these poor lips. It should be this--A God-man only can redeem a sinner's soul. A God-man, even Jesus, undertakes the work. A God-man, even Jesus, finishes the whole.

Its form is square. Such is the shape, also, of the atoning altar. We thus are taught again, that our salvation is exceeding strong. It is support which cannot fail. It is most firmly based on God's own might forever. We further learn that one inviting picture is turned to every comer. From every quarter, then, let sinners flee here. Christ never did, He never will, He never can reject. One face, arrayed in ready welcomes, smiles on all.

It had its crown, its horns, its poles. Each sounds glad tidings to faith's listening ear. The crown is a royal emblem. Let Jesus take it, then. It is His right. The prophet sings, 'The government shall be upon His shoulder.' Isaiah 9:6. The Father cries, 'Yet have I set my King upon My holy hill of Zion.' Psalm 2:6. Once, indeed, derision mocked Him with its circling thorns. But now in heaven He wears redemption's everlasting diadem. But though He rules thus high, His darling throne is the poor sinner's heart! His brightest crown is jeweled with saved souls.

The horns speak mighty prowess. They prove that victory is on His brow. It is so. No strength can stand before Christ! He speaks and He prevails. Hell quakes. The captives come forth free. Sin's chain is shattered. Opposing lusts lie down subdued. The baffled world is trodden under foot. Believer, at this Altar,

then, cast out all fear. A conquered kingdom cannot conquer you. A horn has pierced each adversary's heart. You stride to triumphs over death-stricken ranks.

The poles were signs of readiness to move. The Gospel-sound must go into all the earth. Place has no power to shut out Christ. He penetrates the lonely wastes. He cheers Elijah by the desert brook. No bars give effectual hindrance. He wakes a song within Paul's inmost cell. He watches by the wandering Jacob. He walks beside the faithful youths in the furnace-heat. He animates the warring Joshua. He stoops to poverty's most squalid mire, and sits beside the outcast Lazarus. He mounts the steps of lofty palaces, and guards His followers in Caesar's household. There is no pilgrim in the fleet, the camp, the rustic hut, the lordly fort, the hall of science, whose heart Christ cannot reach. His swiftly-flying love calls all His children in from east, from west, from north, from south. They all draw near to Him because He first draws near to them.

Believer, at this altar learn that in life's busiest haunts, in retreat's solitary hours, Christ is an attending friend. It is true that here no victim died. But is it true, that here no blood was seen? Oh, no! On solemn days, which saw atoning rites so solemnly performed, blood was here largely scattered. The high-priest dyed these horns, and sprinkled this holy vessel seven times.

Reader! be wise, and learn the heaven-taught art of mixing blood with every service. Let prayer be mighty in the plea of Jesus's death. Let praise ascend from blood-cleansed lips. Let love be as a flame from blood-besprinkled hearts. Let every work be worked with blood-washed hands. God's eye looks for this sign (the blood of Jesus). When it is seen, mercy's wide door flies open, and acceptance cannot delay. But woe is theirs whose offerings are not so washed. Cain's miserable end gives warning that we bring no sacrifice without atonement.

But this Altar's main use was to receive and inflame the incense. Here the sacred spice was burned. When the morning lamps were trimmed, and when the evening lights were lit, the perfumed flame was kindled.

Reader! observe the process. The fire was first brought. The holy powder was then spread. The streams of aroma then flew high. And the whole tent was fragrant as the garden of the Lord. The Spirit has selected incense as the type of prayer. 'Let my prayer be set forth before You as incense.' Psalm 141:2. We here, then, have a graphic image of the prayer of prayers, the intercession of the King-priest Jesus.

Mark where the kindling fire was brought from. It came not from a human hearth. The outer atoning altar gave the supply. It was the very fire from heaven. It was the very fire which consumed each offering. Great truth is here involved. The atoning-altar feeds the Incense-altar. The prayer of Christ receives its life, its power, its vigor, from His blood-stained cross! The prayer which prevails is drawn from justice satisfied, from payment made, from wrath appeased, from law fulfilled, from curse endured, from covenant discharged. Christ's intercession rests upon His death. Thus incense never ceases to ascend. Heaven is ever fragrant with its precious savor!

Compare all other knowledge with this truth. It flees and vanishes as an unsubstantial mist. This is the brightest jewel in the crown of grace. This is the fullest cordial in the Gospel-cup. Where is there joy like realizing views of the great work, which Christ now acts on high? He pleads. He lives to plead. He ever lives to plead. He shows His finished work. He stretches forth His pierced hands. He claims fulfillment of redemption's contract. Our heavenly Father rejoices in the grateful streams. His every attribute has infinite delight. He smiles approval. His ready hands are opened. All blessings are poured out. Pardons are sealed. The Spirit is bestowed. Ministering angels hasten to their guardian-work. The happy flock are

gathered into the one fold of grace, and prepared for the one fold of glory.

O my soul, may this sweet incense be your constant joy! Shall heaven be glad, and you not clap the hand, and shout all praise? Learn more and more your high and privileged estate. Grasping these horns, you may cast back all doubts and fears which Satan would suggest. He often will whisper that our prayers are weak and worthless, and nothing but insults to the ears of God. Alas! this is too often true. But hope relies not on our holiest work. Christ prays. Christ prays most worthily. And in His prayers acceptance stands. Our praises are often as a dull smouldering smoke. Alas! here is our sin, our shame, our base ingratitude! But Jesus' voice is heard. His merits sweeten our short-coming utterance. Our hearts are cold and dead. But Christ ever loves, and proves His love by unceasing prayers.

O my soul, think how prevailingly Christ works for you. Shall the king say to Esther, 'What is your request? it shall be even given you to the half of the kingdom.' And can the cry of God's co-equal Son be coldly met? Is the promise pledged, 'Whatever you shall ask of the Father in My name, He will give it to you?' And shall there be less acceptance when Christ in His own person supplicates? This cannot be.

Prize, then, your Incense Altar. Delight in it. Use it until you pass the veil. But listen! A word of solemn warning sounds. The incense is most hallowed. God adds, 'Whoever makes any like it to enjoy its fragrance must be cut off from his people.' Exodus 30:38. The type profaned was hopeless death. Will any trifle with the grand reality? If common use were sacrilege, what must the rejection be? Some join with it the fancied prayers of mediating saints. What! is there not enough in Christ? Can He be undervalued, and God pleased? Can they reach glory who rob Him of His crown?

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