

THE HIGH COST OF FORGIVENESS - ENCOUNTER SERIES

Good morning Life Fellowship. My name is Dan and I am one of the pastors here. We are continuing our series today called, 'Encounter.' It is a series that looks at the image of the tabernacle in the Old Testament. Now I don't know about you, but I can remember the first time I saw something die. Can you remember that? It is something that is etched on my mind, because at a very early age to come onto something that is dead or dying raises questions, and brings about images that are disturbing.

When you realize that that which is alive can die it causes you to begin thinking about the metaphysical questions that every adult eventually must struggle with like: *'How did we get here? Where are we going? How can I know anything at all? What is the meaning of life? What is truth?'* And so seeing something die can be very life altering and changing.

And yet death is very much a part of life. Today if you go home and you have a hamburger, or a steak, or a pork chop, or a piece of fried chicken, something had to die. I remember growing up on a farm where death was a regular part of our life in that we raised beef cattle, we had chickens, my uncle was a hog farmer, and we went hunting. And while most of us, particularly if you grew up in the city, can get quite accustomed to the idea of going by a meat counter that has nicely displayed meats for our selection, we can sometimes lose track of what it takes to get that sirloin, medium well, with a little A-1 sauce on the side.

On our farm we would have new calves every year, and I would name them. Often we would have one or two that weren't fit for market for one reason or another, sometimes it was because they were blind or something, so we would raise them as pets. Many times we named them 'Gomer' for some reason. Every year I had a pet 'Gomer,' I guess because those were the days of 'Gomer Pyle USMC,' if you remember that old television show back in the 60s and 70s. So every year I had 'Gomer' the blind calf. And the calves would learn to listen for the rattle of the feed bucket. They always got special treats as well. We would just spoil them a little bit.

But the sad thing about it was, and because I grew up on a farm, it wasn't a big traumatic deal for me, but eventually I knew they would get big and fat and we would load them in a truck, and then two or three weeks later we would pick up a big box filled with frozen hamburger, steaks and roast beef. And that connection didn't always make it with me until one day when dad and I took 'Gomer' to the meat locker where we had our meat processed. We unloaded him, and then we went up to the front to do the paper work. Dad told me to go on back out to the pickup, and I took the short cut through the back of the locker. I opened a door, and there in full display it wasn't 'Gomer' thankfully, but it was some other beef animal hanging upside down. I won't go into the details, and I still do eat meat, but it was a little iffy there for a while.

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We would go hunting, and I am the kind of guy that enjoys hunting, because I like being outdoors. And if you don't like hunting that is fine, I understand it is a matter of taste. But I have always been the kind of person that I won't hunt for things that I won't eat, so I don't hunt for deer because I just don't care for venison. I can eat it, but it isn't anything that I crave, so I don't deer hunt. But I do like rabbits and quail.

I remember when I was a pastor in my former church in Palm Beach, Florida, and that is kind of a ritzy place. One day I was talking about hunting when I went home for vacation, and I mentioned that I had been rabbit hunting, and a lady over to the side of the church gasped quite audibly. It was just very shocking for her, and I noticed that she had gasped so loudly that I heard it. So I said, *'Ma'am, I am so sorry. I really do like rabbits, I just like mine fried with gravy on them.'* And I somehow turned a bad situation into worse. *(Laughter.)* Can you imagine that I could do that?

And you know I see these big game hunters and so forth, and that is not something that appeals to me. But I do believe that God has given us dominion over His creation, and we can enjoy meat, and I don't have any problem with that. But I do believe that when we eat meat we also should recognize that the death that is required is substantially a price. And it should not be something that we just flippantly go about.

I am sure you are wondering why I am talking about this at the beginning of a sermon on the tabernacle. It is because today we talk about the Altar of Sacrifice, and it is a serious topic. And I want to say a couple of things up front as we get ready to prepare for this topic today. I want you to understand that sacrifice is a very serious thing.

You have come to church today, and if you have been regularly attending church here, this message won't be a surprise to you. But perhaps you are a guest visiting today and I just want to say this up front - we don't dumb things down for you. That is not who we are. We believe that the Bible is worthy of study and exploration and digging into in order to understand it. That it is rich with imagery and that at times it is confusing. And the fact that at times it is confusing and must be explored, it must be studied, and it must be examined that makes it even more appealing to us. Our faith is not something that we superficially visit. Our faith is something that we attempt to explore in depth and to learn, to make us people of substance, to make us understand the richness that is God, and to answer the difficult questions.

So this morning if you came to church expecting kind of a 'feel good' sermon, or a real easy sermon, or a sermon that won't make you think or make you uncomfortable, I just want you to brace yourself a little bit, because this is a difficult topic. We will be talking about sacrifice, and the high cost of forgiveness. And that is a very serious topic.

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We are going to look at a couple of passages of Scripture, so I invite you to open your Bibles to the book of Exodus Chapter 27. I am also going to read a single verse for you from the book of Hebrews. I want to read both of these passages because I want you to understand that the issue of sacrifice is an Old Testament thing, but it is also a New Testament thing.

And sometimes we look at the Old Testament and we kind of think, '*Yeah, but that's just the Old Testament.*' And we can kind of dismiss it a little bit. But everything that is important in the Old Testament is reinforced in the New Testament. Every symbol, every principle, every commandment and so forth that we find in the Old Testament is relatable to the New Testament. And we should not forget that. It wasn't written to two different groups; it was written for all of us.

The other thing I want you to understand is when we are reading Scripture and we are studying it that not all Scripture was written specifically to us, but all Scripture is definitely written for us. And one of the problems I think we come across in the western church, and also in the 21st century church, is that we have this tendency to want to look at Scripture like Americans. Like people of the 21st century we read our Bibles on our phones, and on our iPads, and we study it through software.

But we need to understand Scripture as it was written was given to people of ancient cultures and ancient histories and ancient perspectives. And one of the wonderful things about Scripture is that it is every bit as true and relevant to us today as it was to them, even though it was written thousands of years ago. And it is the superficial person who wants to look at Scripture and dismiss things because of the way we are living today, and thinking that doesn't apply.

But that presumes and assumes that God changes and that truth is transient, and neither one of those things are true. Truth is always true, and it is true for all people at all times and all places under all conditions. That is what makes it truth. And God never changes because He exists in the past, present and future simultaneously. Maybe you need that explained because you don't understand it. But it is because it is God. And that's why we are here studying the mysteries and the deep things.

So when we start off this morning I am going to just read for you a quick verse from Hebrews Chapter 9. We read this passage at length last week, and by the way I would urge you to go back if you would and watch last week's message. I know last week we had a significant weather event and quite a few people weren't here. And some people told me they watched the service on line, but if you missed it then you can go to YouTube and Google Life Fellowship Charlotte. And there you will see all of our videos come up, and you can just click on the one for last week.

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I gave an overview last week of the entire tabernacle, and I think that is real important and it will help you understand the rest of this series. Last week we also began by looking in Hebrews Chapter 9 remembering that the tabernacle of the Old Testament was completed in the New Testament in the person of Jesus Christ. He is the living tabernacle. Whereas God dwelt among His people at the tabernacle in the Old Testament, God Himself gave us a living tabernacle in the person of Jesus Christ.

Paul describes that in his letter written to the Hebrews, and he explains that what we see in the Old Testament has now been completed in the person of Christ. And one of the verses in Chapter 9 we read was verse 22, where it says: “***Indeed, under the Law almost everything is purified with blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins.***” Now this is one of those moments where you kind of hear the needle screech across the record. What is going on here? There is no remission of sin without the shedding of blood. That is serious stuff.

It brings about dark imagery at times where we need to understand that we are not just talking about the ancient cultures of Egypt, or the pagan cultures of the Aztecs and the Incas, because from that day to this day, and even in recent history we can look around the world and see sacrifices. I have lived in Miami, and it was not unusual in Miami to drive around and see a dead goat, or a goat head, or a dead chicken on the street corner. People would wonder who was doing that and why, but it was obviously something that had been killed ritualistically.

It was done by practitioners of Santeria. Santeria is a dark evil religion that is based in the Caribbean Islands, largely in Cuba. And a lot of the Cubans that came from there still practice it. We would see them routinely all dressed in white, and the scary thing was you would often see them with a little child. The child would be sent to live with the Santeria priest or priestess, and they would train the child in the religion. You would see them commonly in Miami, and if you have ever visited Miami you may have seen some of those who still practice that religion.

That was part of the culture there, so don't think that people today aren't thinking blood sacrifice. And maybe you are thinking, ‘*Yeah, but that's just the pagans. That's the unsophisticated.*’ And I want to say to you to stop thinking like an American, and stop thinking like this is the 21st century, because many times throughout human history, people were offering up their children as blood sacrifices.

If you have ever been to Mexico to visit Chichen Itza you will have gone through the jungles to visit the great Mayan temples. And as you walk through a jungle you will come to a great pool where between 20,000 and 30,000 children were sacrificed. You may have even seen some silly movies that Hollywood produced, where they talked about sacrificing virgins to the volcanoes and so forth. Most of us have seen different

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imagery like in Indiana Jones, so we understand that blood sacrifice has been part of the world's history. And the reason that we see it abused like with the sacrificing of virgins and children is because what God created for a purpose, Satan wants to distort. And Satan always latches on to just enough truth to get gullible people to follow along and then he twists it and perverts it into something that is evil and wicked.

God has not required of us our sacrifice in terms of blood sacrifice; He took care of it for us through His Son. Some of you here today are students in college, others of you are well educated, and this may seem unreal to you. But please just bear with us, because you are on a journey, and today is just one step in that journey. We invite you to explore, to study, and to look outside of yourself in this moment of time and see what God has done through human history. You will be amazed at what you can learn. That is why we are studying this subject this morning.

So in Exodus Chapter 27 please read along as I read verses 1 through 8. ***“You shall make the altar of acacia wood, five cubits long and five cubits broad. The altar shall be square, and its height shall be three cubits. And you shall make horns for it on its four corners; its horns shall be of one piece with it, and you shall overlay it with bronze.***

You shall make pots for it to receive its ashes, and shovels and basins and forks and fire pans. You shall make all its utensils of bronze. You shall also make for it a grating, a network of bronze, and on the net you shall make four bronze rings at its four corners. And you shall set it under the ledge of the altar so that the net extends halfway down the altar. And you shall make poles for the altar, poles of acacia wood, and overlay them with bronze. And the poles shall be put through the rings, so that the poles are on the two sides of the altar when it is carried. You shall make it hollow, with boards. As it has been shown you on the mountain, so shall it be made.”

Now what we have here in this passage are the instructions found in Chapter 27 of Exodus on how to make the bronze altar. And that is where we are going to be today. We are going to be looking at the seven pieces of furniture all the way through for the next several weeks as we explore the tabernacle, and what each one symbolizes in God's plan for our redemption. And the first piece to look at is the bronze altar, and there are several reasons we are going to look at it first.

I want to pause here and have you note something. If you look at Exodus Chapters 25 and 26 and now into Chapter 27, you will find that God explains something kind of out of order. He put the plans, the architecture for the furniture first in His plan. Before He told Moses how to build the tabernacle He told him how to build the furniture. Stop and think about something. If you have ever built a house, what did you design

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first? Did you design the furniture? No. You designed the house and then you picked the furniture for the house.

But God said, '*No, we are going to design the furniture and then we will do the tabernacle.*' And that is an important distinction because you need to understand that God is telling a story in this, and it is not the story of the building, it is the story of a process. And the process, the plan of God is His provision for our salvation. In order to get to the provision of our salvation we have to comprehend the process.

And in that process God has provided for us salvation. God has provided for us reconciliation. We start on the outside separated from God and then we are going to go inside and this is how we can get unified. And God wants an encounter with us. God wants us to know Him. God wants us to be in His presence. God wants us to experience Him as He has designed us and intended for us from the very beginning.

Remember in the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. In the beginning God formed man out of the dust of the ground and breathed into him the breath of life, and it was good. And God fellowshiped with man, and He walked and talked with him. And all was good until the separation. And in that separation the great wall was erected between us, because God is holy and cannot sin. We fell, we sinned, we separated ourselves from God so a great barrier of disobedience existed between us and Him, and no longer could we encounter Him, experience Him, or fellowship with Him in the same way.

And it was because of the wall of our sin. And yet God has always desired for that wall to be torn down. God desires no walls to be between us and Him. He desires us to be in His presence, to worship and to know Him. He wants that wall torn down, and that is the picture of the tabernacle. That is the image, that we are on the outside and can encounter Him on the inside. And in order to do that He has provided this path toward Him that we might encounter Him.

Another thing we need to take note of, as we look at the tabernacle for the next several weeks, is there is something missing that you normally find in temples of other religions. Inside the tabernacle, inside this holy temple there are no photographs of God. I am not just talking about a Polaroid picture; I am talking about an image of any kind. There are no etchings, there are no paintings, there are no sculptures and there are no sketches. In the tabernacle, and even later in the temple, you do not find that.

And yet if you will go to temples of other religions around the world, you will find idols. Where had the Jews been for the previous 400 years? They have been in Egypt, and Egypt had idols all over the place. They had them made like frogs, like cats and everything in between because they loved their idols. But here this people have been taken out from Egypt and you won't find one idol. In fact it is the very premise of one of

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The Ten Commandments that says, “*You shall not make for yourself an image in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below.*”

I want to pause here, and I am not trying to be controversial, and I am not trying to be offensive, I just want to poke you in the brain and make you think. I want you to look around this room and ask you if you see any images or sculptures of Jesus, or any images. No, you don't, and that is not accidental. You don't even see any crucifixes here? Why is that? You do see crosses, but the difference between a cross and a crucifix is there is a symbol of Christ hanging on a crucifix.

First of all, we do not serve a Christ that is still on the cross. We serve a Christ who lives today in Heaven. He is not still on the cross, and He is not in a tomb, and He is not in a grave. We don't visit Him at church because He lives within us, and He lives in Heaven before God. And that is intentional, and the roots of that are right here in this Scripture when He told us not to even try to describe Him, not to even try to figure out what He looks like.

Remember when God was encountering Moses up on the mountain He could not reveal Himself fully. All Moses could see was the shadow, the glow. Had Moses looked upon God, Scripture says he would have died from it. Now some of you are thinking, ‘*Wait a minute, what about that wonderful little children's Bible I had that showed God as an old gentlemen with long white hair, sitting on a big old throne.*’ And it is sad that we try to reduce God to something that makes us comfortable, or makes us feel warm and fuzzy, or fits our expectations.

But God doesn't play those kind of games. He is saying that He is God, and we are not, and we need to get over it. I think it is a dangerous, dangerous trend in cultural Christianity today that we try to commonize God. I may just bark here a little bit and say that God and Jesus are not your ‘*home boys.*’ And God is not awesome, like some kind of surfing dude. I heard an evangelical pastor said that he couldn't wait to get to Heaven so he could ‘*high five*’ God. I don't think any of us are going to be approaching God that glibly.

In fact the Bible says that had Moses seen Him he would have died. The Bible says that at His name every knee shall bow, and every tongue shall confess an utterance that they never thought would come out of their mouths. He is Lord. His awesomeness in the real sense of the word, His majesty, His holiness, His authority, His greatness cannot be confined, cannot be described, cannot be re-created, and cannot be captured by those of us who are merely formed in a semblance of His image. We just get to see the shadow. We just need to see Him high and lifted up. What did Isaiah say when he saw himself before God? He said he was undone; he was unbelievably unworthy to be before

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Him. So let's not commonize God. Let's see Him for who He is. I think this is part of what the imagery of the Old Testament is about.

So as we think about the altar in the tabernacle, we need to understand that an altar is synonymous with formal presentation. They are rich with symbolism and significance. It is this symbolic intersection that most of us would understand in our faith of that between the Creator and the creation. It was the place where sacrifices were offered, and prayers and gifts were offered. It was a place of covenant commitment and consecration. It was a place that was heavy with seriousness and importance. Even the most unsophisticated individual almost impulsively understands that approaching an altar involves some kind of interaction with the sacred.

And by the way this is true of pagan rituals even apart from genuine worship. Several years ago I was in Thailand. I have also been in India and Vietnam and seen this. Many of the eastern religions have these very, very ornate, sophisticated temples that were built many thousands of years ago. And there is a huge complex near Bangkok, Thailand that I visited about 20 or 25 years ago. I love history so this was a unique place to me. I had never dreamed of being able to visit it, but they took us to this great Buddhist complex where there were all these different temples. One of the temples was the temple of the Jade Buddha that is made out of a single piece of jade stone. It is absolutely amazing, and people were flocking there to see it.

But there was one temple that I really wanted to see and it was called, 'The Temple of The Reclining Buddha'. I can't remember exactly how long it was but it seemed to be about 90 feet long. I had seen pictures of it, and they looked like this Buddha would be lying over on his side, kind of relaxing. To me I would be able to see something historic, something cultural, something interesting, but there was certainly nothing that invoked any sense of reverence or any awe with me.

I was getting ready to go into this temple, and there were some Buddhist monks on the outside, and they stopped me and told me I was welcome to enter but I would have to remove my shoes first, as this was a holy spot. And I asked them why I had to take my shoes off and they said it was to show reverence. And I decided right then that I wasn't going to get to see the reclining Buddha after all, because at that moment something transitioned, and it ceased being a historical thing. It became a religious thing and I am not playing with that. So I went over to the side where there were some windows and I did the creepy American tourist thing, and I kept jumping up and down trying to get a little glimpse inside, and I never got to see the whole thing. But I remembered that there can be no other gods.

Now again other people have done it, and if you have been there and took your shoes off, that's your choice, but I just couldn't bring myself to do it. And even in the

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context of those temples they understood that they were to leave their gifts of incense and bowls of rice and all these different things at an altar. I have seen that in Hindu temples, and I have seen it in Cuban hostels where I have stayed. In Cuba they would have a Santeria altar. Interestingly enough part of the Santeria religion is they would worship Mary as well as the darker gods. They would leave gifts of little shots of whisky, bowls of rice, fruit and incense. And there would be Christian icons next to pagan icons.

I am of the nature that I believe in spiritual warfare, so I would go to my room and I would open my Bible and pray like this: *'Lord, I don't know what has been going on in this room, but I do know what is going on in that one, and I just ask you to consecrate and bless this room for the time that I am here, because I am here to serve you, and to be a witness of light. And I ask for your Holy Spirit's protection.'* I did that because I understand that there is a dark world out there that we can't see. And I am not trying to be spooky, but I am trying to be honest. The Bible tells us that we wrestle not against flesh and blood, that there are spiritual powers in this world that we need to be aware of.

So altars are serious spots. It is interesting that the very first piece of furniture in the tabernacle complex was an altar. When you walked through the gate there was the altar of sacrifice. And actually there are two altars in the tabernacle complex. There is the altar of sacrifice and then further on when you get into the Holy Place there are a couple more pieces of furniture before you get to the Holy of Holies. And then there is a big curtain and right in front of that curtain is an altar of incense.

And at the altar of incense the symbolism there is that you offer prayers and praise to the Lord, and you offer these sweet smelling sacrifices. But in order to get to where you could worship the Lord there, you had to pass and do business at the altar of sacrifice first, because that was the cost of our forgiveness. You couldn't worship at the altar of incense until you did business with God and were reconciled with Him at the altar of sacrifice.

So this first altar was an important altar. And we understand that it was inside the complex, because outside were those who didn't offer sacrifice, who didn't care about reconciliation with God, but were just going through life on their own terms. And that great curtain that surrounded the tabernacle courtyard was the difference between being damned and seeking. It was the difference between those who were lost and those who sought to be found. And we need to understand that part of the encounter that God has with us is He draws us and says, *'leave and draw near,' 'come and see,' 'follow me.'* The Spirit draws from the outside to the inside.

I want to also mention this before we get to the altar. There is only one way in. There weren't gates on each side; there was only one gate on the eastern side. Last week

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I explained that when God sent Adam and Eve out of the Garden of Eden He sent them out east of Eden. And the eastern side of the courtyard is where they entered heading west toward the Holy of Holies. And so they re-entered that exit symbolically through the one entrance. I think it is important to note this because this is an important doctrine of genuine Christianity that we can never compromise on. There is only one way to reconciliation with God and that is through the person of Jesus Christ. Jesus said: ***“I am the door, if anyone enters by me, he will be saved”***

In John Chapter 14 and verse 6 Jesus said: ***“I am the way, the truth, and the life, no one comes to the Father except through me.”*** In I Timothy Chapter 2 and verses 5 and 6 it says this: ***“For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus who gave Himself as a ransom for all, which is the testimony given at the proper time.”*** Do you understand the exclusivity of the person of Jesus Christ? Without Him there is no salvation.

In other words let me be very, very clear to you because we live in a narcissistic pluralist society that wants to re-create God’s plan to something that they find politically or socially or personally acceptable, and it doesn’t work because we are dealing with truth matters. And whether or not we believe it does not change whether or not it is true. If it is not popular, it does not change that it is true. And Jesus Himself made the very narrow declaration very specifically - ***“I am the way,”*** not a way, ***“the truth,”*** not a truth, ***“and the life,”*** not a life. And ***“no one,”*** not one single exception, ***“comes to the Father except through me.”*** That is narrow. (Applause.)

We have to understand that. We have to appreciate that. Maybe that doesn’t make you feel comfortable - that doesn’t matter. Maybe you think if you were god - but you are not. Maybe you just can’t understand it - well, work on it some more. At some point we have to realize that He is God and we are not. Maybe you feel like that offends you - offense does not change truth. Maybe it makes you uncomfortable - discomfort does not change truth. Maybe you think that is narrow and if that is what God is like then you don’t want any part with Him - okay, but then understand you must accept upon yourself the consequences of that decision.

I am not trying to be unkind. I don’t have the power to damn you. I don’t have the power to condemn you. But my responsibility is to look at the word of God and to declare the truth. And all of our responsibilities are to look at the word of God and to obey the truth. And so doing that does not make you unloving, it does not make you unkind, it does not make you intolerant, it does not make you unsocial, it just simply means you are really, really committed to truth. And hey, isn’t that what we want to be?

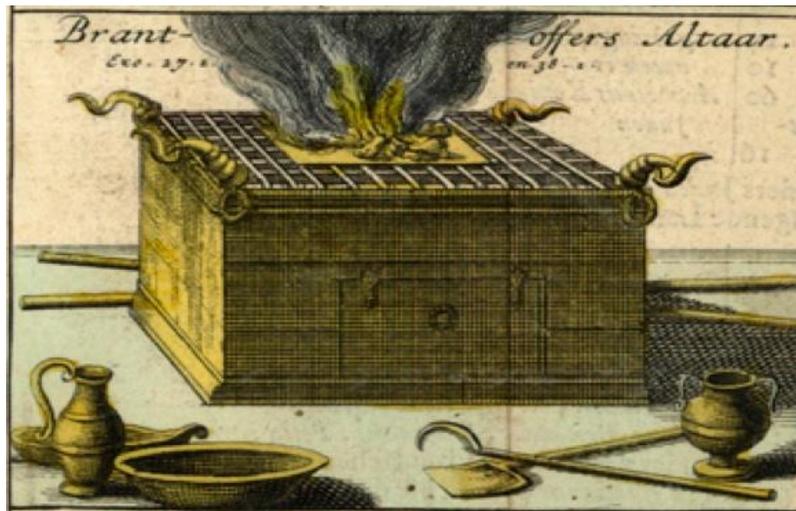
We must understand that Jesus is the way to eternal life. Maybe you are wondering what about all the people in other places with other ideas. Well, what about

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you today? God has a plan, and that is what we are here for, and that is to explore His plan. I dare you to look at the other plans and then come back and look at this one. I have so much confidence in the Holy Spirit and the Word of God that I believe that you will look at this and realize it is true. I am not intimidated by that. We can talk about it and even argue about it. We can discuss their plans and their strategy for salvation and then we can talk about this one. It can be a process and a journey, and I hope some of you are on that journey today.

Let's pause now and look at the altar of sacrifice. First of all we know that the altar was handmade. It was designed by God and made by hand. It was made of wood and covered with bronze. Take a look at how it was constructed with me as we kind of go through some of the details. First of all we need to understand that it was very specifically designed to be made of acacia timber, also called shittim wood, which was a very hard wood. The altar was five cubits, or seven and a half feet long on each side, so it was a perfect square. And again that is symbolism. It was about four and a half feet tall with a grating on which the meat would be placed.

There were four horns which were carved onto the sides. And then there were rings through which poles would be inserted. Everything was overlaid with bronze, which was a picture of judgment, which we will talk about in a minute. The meat was laid on the fire, and the ashes would fall through the grating. And then they had these utensils, some would collect blood, some would collect ashes and some would be used to move the meat around. That is how the altar actually looked.



But there are several things I want to call attention for you to notice. Shittim wood or acacia wood is kind of like the Cypress trees that are found in Florida. Now acacia wood grew in the desert and Cypress trees grow in the swamp, but they have similar characteristics in that they are a very hard wood, they don't decay, they last for

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hundreds and hundreds of years without rotting, and insects do not get into them. The wood is a picture of Christ in His humanity.

At the same time the wood was covered with bronze. And bronze in Scripture is always a picture of judgment. In the Old Testament in Daniel some of the imagery there included a statue with feet of bronze which symbolized judgment. You see the same thing in the New Testament in the book of Revelations. Throughout Scripture anytime you see bronze it is a picture of judgment. Maybe you remember the passage of Moses lifting up the serpent in the wilderness because the children of Israel were being judged by poisonous serpents. And when the people repented, Moses put a brazen serpent up on a pole, so that everyone that looked at it in belief would be healed. Again that was a picture of judgment.

So the altar was constructed with acacia wood covered in bronze. Now secondly I want you to note that the altar was a place of sacrifice, a place of judgment for sin. In other words it was a horrible place, a difficult place. Sacrifices were offered here daily as part of their ritual. There were three types of sacrifices, with five individual animals that could be offered. There was the herd sacrifice which was usually a bullock, a young male that had just reached breeding age. Then there would be the flock sacrifices and those would be of goats or sheep. In order to offer one of those it had to be a male without defect. You couldn't bring a sick one, a crippled one, or a blind one, it had to be one that was healthy. In other words it had to cost you something. And we will look at some more imagery later on in this study.

Another type of offering would be the bird sacrifices and there were two of those. So there was a herd sacrifice which was a bullock. There were two flock sacrifices which were goats or sheep. Then there were bird sacrifices which could be a pigeon or a dove. And even people that couldn't afford a goat or sheep would be able to afford a bird. So everybody could bring something for their sacrifice.

So they would bring their sacrifices during the week from time to time. Now there was another sacrifice that was offered only once a year and that would be on what was called the Day of Atonement. Interestingly the Day of Atonement in Israel was last week on the 18th and 19th of September. And that is the one time of year when the high priest would take a lamb and sacrifice it for the sins of all the people of the nation. And that blood would be sprinkled in the Holy of Holies. We will be looking at that in a few weeks during this series.

But today we are talking about the more common sacrifices that were offered. So let's imagine it is Friday night and dad tells his children they are going to go down to the tabernacle and offer a sacrifice. The children may ask him why they were going to do that. And dad would tell them it was because they had sinned this week, and they needed

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to get forgiveness. He would tell them that they had a holy God and He required them to do business with Him in this way to get forgiveness of sins. The children would probably ask how they were going to do this. And dad would tell them they were going to take a lamb.

We understand that in many of the rituals, particularly of the Passover lamb, it was expected that the lamb would live with them for about four days prior. And the reason for that was because after four days it kind of became like a member of their family. It became their pet and the children probably played with it and took care of it. The reason for that was that God wanted them to have a little touch of the cost of their forgiveness. This wasn't some anonymous animal you picked up down at the 'Sacrifices or Us.' This was something that came out of your own flock and it was supposed to be a perfect one, and one you cared about.

So they would take this little lamb, this firstborn male without flaw, up to the horns of the altar. Sometimes we read in Scripture about someone grabbing the horns of the altar which was the place where the sacrifice was to take place. They would take the little lamb which had a rope around its neck, and they would tie the rope around the horns of the altar so that it couldn't move. Then the dad would draw his family around him, and he would symbolically put his hand on the head of the lamb, because that was the symbol of transferring their sins onto the innocent little lamb.

The priest would come by with a knife and a small bowl, and while the father's hand was on the lamb, the priest would slit the lamb's throat. Maybe you are thinking *'that is just gross, that is awful, what did that lamb ever do?'* But remember it was a symbol, because what did Jesus ever do that was wrong? Nothing. Did He deserve it? No. Was it awful for Him? Yes. Was it painful for Jesus? Absolutely.

Interestingly, and again forgive me because I am a country boy, but I was a part of something like this one time on a mission trip when I was involved in the closing of a land deal in Albania. In that culture you had to have a feast as part of the closing. So this guy brought a lamb with him, and I saw this happen. He took his knife and slit the lamb's throat until it bled out. You know in Isaiah the Bible talks about how the lamb at the slaughter is dumb, and truly that little lamb just stood there as his throat was cut, and he never made a sound. And by the way Jesus did not fight either; He willingly became the sacrifice for our sins.

So the priest would catch the little lamb's blood in the bowl. Then the priest would take the blood and place it on the horns of the altar because everyone needed to see the price that had been paid. Then he would take the rest of the blood and dump it into the soil and their sins would be forgiven. Next they would take the lamb and burn it completely to ashes. The priest was not to benefit from this, so he could not eat the meat.

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The only thing that they would keep was the skin which could be used. After that the sacrifice would be complete, and their sins forgiven. The family could then go home for another week and remember the high cost of their sins, the high cost of their forgiveness.

That is sobering, isn't it? We aren't going to dumb it down so that we all feel comfortable, because as horrific as that is, remember this, someone real, the Son of God died so that you and I could be reconciled with our Heavenly Father.

The next thing we need to know is the altar is a type and symbol of the cross of Calvary. It is a symbol of it. Inasmuch as a little lamb died for a Jewish family, the Son of God died for us. He was the chosen Lamb of God, He was the mature male, firstborn, and without flaw. Even in our Saviour's death no bones were broken, His blood was shed, it marked the cross like the horns of the altar were marked. And His blood spilled into the soil out of which you and I were made. It symbolizes the time and the place of the sacrifice offered to give payment for our sins. So while we do not have this altar as they did in the tabernacle, we have that cross. And when you look at that cross remember the high cost of our forgiveness.

So what should that mean to us today? First of all remember this - we have no standing before God until we come to the altar of Christ's sacrifice for us. Do you want to know God? Do you want to be reconciled with Him? Do you want to be at peace with God? Then you have to come to that altar of sacrifice where you say, *'I believe. I trust. The price has been paid.'* And it was because of that blood shed by Christ that we now can come boldly unto the throne. He is our high priest. He is our sacrificial lamb. He is the perfect lamb of God who took upon Himself our sins so that we could be forgiven.

Secondly - when we dismiss or discount the vileness of our sins, we show disrespect for the cost of our salvation. It is time for the church today, for people today, for Christians today, to recognize the awfulness of sin. It is not something that is amusing, a matter for jokes, it is not something that we should just dismiss with the wave of our hand. *'Oh, we are all sinners saved by grace. I'm a sinner, you're a sinner, we're just all sinners.'* Yes, we are, but remember this, our sins were taken upon Him and He shed His blood for us. If we had not been sinners, there would have been no need for a sacrifice. But because we are sinners, Christ died for us. And from Him we get forgiveness. From the shed blood on the cross we have hope.

The third thing is this - His sacrifice for us is a call to offer our lives as a sacrifice to Him. Don't miss this. Sacrifice on Christ's part in His death gives us the privilege of sacrifice on our part in our lives. In Romans Chapter 12 Paul says to the church at Rome: ***"I appeal (beg you, beseech you) to you therefore, brothers, (my fellow believers) by the mercies of God, (by everything that is holy because of what Christ has done for you) to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your***

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spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.”

The idea was that when we offer ourselves as living sacrifices we don't go out and continue in sin; we go out to demonstrate forgiveness. What that reconciliation does, what that hope does, is demonstrate forgiveness. In other words we are transformed, not out of duty, but out of devotion. We are to now offer ourselves daily before the Lord to be used as redeemed instruments of His grace that others might see forgiveness and seek forgiveness as well.

Which brings me to the final point - as living tabernacles of God today, remember that Christ lives in us, through the miracle of the Holy Spirit, given to us at Pentecost. And because Christ lives in us we are living tabernacles today and we have a holy responsibility to invite people to the altar of forgiveness, so that they too can be restored to fellowship with God. Here is the idea - invite others to the altar. Invite others to forgiveness. Invite others to enjoy an encounter with God. That is what being a living sacrifice is all about. Now we can say the price has been paid. All you have to do is bring yourself. You don't have to bring the lamb; the Lamb has already been sacrificed. You don't have to bring an offering; the offering has already been given. You don't have to die; He died for us. All you have to do is believe. Believe!

We don't shed blood today because there is no need. We don't bring our lambs to church because there is no need. The price has been paid by the blood of Jesus Christ. You know there was a day in church history where we sang and celebrated the blood of Christ, and I am afraid today, because of the pressures of our culture, that we have lost touch with that.

Some of you are old enough to remember the great old hymns: *‘There is a fountain filled with blood, drawn from Immanuel's veins, and sinners plunged beneath that flood lose all their guilty stains.’ ‘What can wash away my sins? Nothing but the blood of Jesus. What can make me whole again? Nothing but the blood of Jesus. Oh, precious is the flow, that washes white as snow. What can make me whole again? Nothing but the blood of Jesus.’ (Applause.)*

The altar of sacrifice in the Old Testament was a picture of the cross to come. For us today when we see the cross we can 'look and live.' ***“For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved,”*** because we were bought with His blood.

That is my invitation to you today. Continue your journey with that next step which says, *‘I know I am a sinner, and I can't save myself. But I understand that somebody had to pay the price so that I could be reconciled with God. And that person was Jesus Christ. He died for me. He does not require of me additional sacrifice. He*

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just requires faith from me. And if you have that faith you will receive God's grace, His forgiveness, His reconciliation and an encounter with Him that never ends.

We are going to stand in a moment and I am going to pray. We are going to sing a couple of songs and my invitation to you is to join the family of God and encounter Him. Maybe you don't know how to do that. Here is what you need to do. While we are singing, some will be praying, some will be giving, some will go and take communion and those are all wonderful things that we invite you to do.

But if you do not know Christ as your personal Savior, if you have never received the gift of eternal life through Him, would you please go right over here to this spot where there will be some people that will take you to a private room where they will open the Bible and show you what the Bible says you need to do. There won't be any pressure, don't bring a check book, and you won't have to sign anything. This is just about encountering God.

You just need to say something like this: *'Lord, forgive me. I am a sinner. I want to trust you as my Lord and Savior. I believe and I ask you to make me one of your own.'* It is as simple as that. Will you do that today? Encounter God. He has been to the altar of sacrifice for us. The high cost of forgiveness has been paid. All that we need to do is receive it. And you can do that right now. Let's stand as we pray.

Father, we love you. Thank you for your Word. Thank you for paying the price of our awful sins. Help us, Father, to walk out of here with a renewed sense of the high cost of our forgiveness and a celebration and a joy and a commitment to be living sacrifices wherever we go. And, Father, the next person we meet that doesn't know you, may we be your messenger to invite them to that altar of forgiveness as well. Father, for those today who need to do that, let them with courage come forward. Let them go over and pray with someone and get that free gift of eternal life. Father, if they are not ready, help them to get to the point where they will fill out that connect card, or they will call us on the phone, or they will send us an email, or they will stop us after the service. But, Father, let no person who hears the message of your love walk away uninvited to have an encounter with you. For it is in Christ's name I pray, Amen.

The preceding transcript was completed using raw audio recordings. As much as possible, it includes the actual words of the message with minor grammatical changes and editorial clarifications to provide context. Hebrew and Greek words are spelled using Google Translator and the actual spelling may be different in some cases.