

Text: Exod. 27:1-8, 38:1-7

Title: "The bronze altar of sacrifice"

Time: 1/8/2023 am

Place: NBBC

Introduction: We have come to the bronze altar of sacrifice in our study of the furniture of the tabernacle. The bronze altar was the place where the burnt offering of sacrifice was executed to atone for the sins of the people. For this reason, the altar gives the bronze of the tabernacle structure symbolic overtones of sacrificial death to atone for sin.

Bronze is typically 60% copper mixed with another alloy, either tin or nickel. Bronze coins can look a lot like gold coins, but their market value is much less.

I found an article this past week that counselled investors on how they can tell the difference between a gold coin, worth hundreds of dollars, and a bronze coin, worth only a few dollars. Bronze has a darker color than gold. As we compare bronze to gold, we might correctly say that bronze looks like a tarnished kind of gold.

Also, gold is denser than bronze, so a gold coin will weigh more than a bronze coin if they are the same size. As we compare bronze to gold, we might correctly say that bronze feels like a lighter and weaker kind of gold.

The Lord's design of the tabernacle furniture invites a comparison of bronze with gold in at least two ways. First, there are three altars among the furniture pieces, two of which are gold (the ark of the covenant with its mercy seat, and the altar of incense) and one of which is bronze (this altar of sacrifice).

Second, both the gold and the bronze of these pieces of furniture are laid over shittim wood. Remember that the durable shittim wood reminds us of the indestructibility of the humanity of Christ. Where that wood is overlaid with gold, we see the humanity of Christ in union with His deity, unmixed and yet inseparable. A number of the pieces of the tabernacle furniture are constructed with this symbolism.

But here with the altar of sacrifice, the gold overlaying the humanity of Christ has become bronze – what one might call tarnished and weaker gold. As we remember the deity represented by the gold, we find that here the deity of Christ suffers, sacrifices, and dies to atone for sin.

Jesus, God's Son, cried out while dying for us, "My God, My God, why hast thou forsaken Me?" A great hymn of the Wesleyan revivals, "And Can It Be?" describes the truth behind the bronze of the altar, as a tarnished and weaker form of gold this way:

"Tis mystery all! The immortal dies.  
Who can explain this strange design?  
In vain the firstborn seraph tries  
To sound the depths of love divine.  
Tis mercy all, let earth adore!  
Let angel minds inquire no more."

The bronze altar of sacrifice is a symbol of the death of immortal deity; it is the symbol of incomprehensible depths of love divine; and it is mercy that is worthy of the adoration of all the earth this morning on the Lord's Day. If the firstborn seraph and the angels of heaven fail to plumb the depth of this love and mercy, how shall we here together this morning? Worse yet, how shall those, who care not to be in a church worship time like ours this morning, do so?

We may not get all the way to the bottom of this deep love, but we have come together to adore it, and we can make some simple observations about the bronze altar of sacrifice that remind us of these depths of love this morning.

I. The bronze altar of sacrifice symbolizes our need as sinners for God's love (27:1).

Illustration: I do not enjoy reading instructions very much. A week ago, I had to hang up some shower-curtain-rods in our bathrooms, and one of them came with some specific instructions. On the first rod, I did my own approach, and while I got the rod up ok, I know that I could have done better. On the second rod, which was more complex, I followed the instructions that were included, and the rod went up without a hitch.

We know from Exodus 37 and 38 that Bezalel has been following the detailed instructions that the Lord showed Moses in Mount Sinai for the tabernacle (v. 8). Israel was not supposed to come up with their own ideas for worshipping the Lord. They were supposed to follow the Lord's instructions, and they worshipped well when they did so. We worship well when we follow His instructions for our age.

As we have read about this work, we have noticed an important progression from the holy of holies and its ark of the covenant and mercy seat outward to the courtyard fence. In this progression the bronze altar of sacrifice lies just outside the doorway of the tabernacle proper, where God's dwelling place on earth was to be, and just inside the courtyard fence, on the outside of which were the people.

This positioning of the bronze altar of sacrifice has an important message for us today. It tells us that in order for us

to enjoy fellowship in the presence of the holy God of the tabernacle, we must go by way of the One sacrificed on the altar of sacrifice for our sins. It tells us that our sins must be judged first. It tells us that we need atonement.

The Hebrew word for the *burnt-offering* of the bronze altar (38:1) comes from the verb meaning *to go up*. That word reminded the Israelite that his animal sacrifice went up before the Lord and was accepted by Him.

Our New Testaments tell us that Jesus is the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world (John 1:29). And Jesus knew that His sacrifice of Himself on God's altar, the cross of Calvary, would be lifted up to the Father as an atonement for the sinner's sin. He speaks of this and our need to believe on Him for salvation in John 12:32-50.

The bronze altar of sacrifice stands between God and His people because it is only through the death of Christ lifted up to the acceptance of the Father that we can be saved from our sins and reconciled with God. Do you believe what the altar of sacrifice is telling us? Do you see that Christ had to die for you to come to God? The bronze altar of sacrifice symbolizes our need as sinners for this Savior.

II. The bronze altar of sacrifice symbolizes a victory of holy love (27:2, 6-7).

Illustration: I remember the day I first saw Hayley Anderson's collection of trophies. I believe it was only a partial collection, but it was huge. Hayley has a lot of trophies because she has won a lot of tournaments competing in the field of equestrian sports.

I received an ear of corn that I had to share with my son Brandon after we won the corn hole tournament at Heritage

Baptist Church last year. Clearly, the difference between my trophy and those that Hayley has collected in her sport speaks to the wide difference in our respective accomplishments.

Application: In the Old Testament, the sign of victory is not a trophy, but a horn. Ps. 18:2, "The Lord is my rock, and my fortress, and my deliverer; my God, my strength, in whom I will trust; my buckler, and the horn of my salvation, and my high tower."

The phrase *horn of my salvation* means *a trophy of victory* over David's enemies. The title of the psalm tells us: "To the chief Musician, A Psalm of David, the servant of the Lord, who spake unto the Lord the words of this song *in the day that the Lord delivered him from the hand of all his enemies, and from the hand of Saul.*"

So, it is significant that the bronze altar is designed to have its own collection of four horns, one on each corner. They symbolize the victory of the greatest feat ever accomplished, the work of atonement for sin.

They are to be made coming out of the altar itself, meaning as one piece with the altar and unmovable from it (v. 2). The victory of atonement is inseparable from the sacrificial death of Christ. As we read on the tools of sacrifice are mentioned, as well as the poles indicating that we are reading about something holy, which is not to be carried by human hands like our household pieces of furniture.

In these ways, the bronze altar of sacrifice symbolizes a victory of God's holy love. His is a love that cannot just let by-gones be by-gones. Both God's justice and His desire to justify sinners was served in this victory. The death of Christ was a holy victory over His enemies and ours. Satan, sin,

and eternal death were crushed when Jesus died. The Lamb slain from the foundation of the world is the one who is worthy to open the scroll of the title deed of the universe and to rule and reign as King forever and ever.

His victory is our victory if we claim Him as our Lord and Savior. The Apostle Paul described this victory in his life this way: "I am crucified with Christ; nevertheless I live, yet not I, but Christ liveth in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me" (Gal. 2:20).

When Christ is for us, none can be against us, not even Satan, not even our own sinful unworthiness, not even the death that stalks every one of us.

The night Jesus prepared for His work on the altar, He assured His disciples with these words: "Behold, the hour cometh, yea, is now come, that ye shall be scattered, every man to his own, and shall leave me alone: and yet I am not alone, because the Father is with me. These things I have spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world" (John 16:32-33). Be of good cheer, there are four horns on this altar. In His death, Jesus has overcome the world with a holy victory of God's love.

III. The bronze altar of sacrifice calls us to our own better altar of sacrificial love (Heb. 13:9-15).

Application: The Hebrew believers who first received this letter were Christian families at a crossroads. Prior to coming to Christ, they were Jews who frequented the bronze altar at the temple in Jerusalem. They had left this apostate

form of Judaism, which had rejected their Messiah, but they had done so at great cost.

I believe the recipients of this Epistle had heard recently of the execution of the Apostle Paul in Rome and were anticipating tougher times for Christians ahead. They had suffered persecution of their own already, but for many things had gotten worse not better. They were wondering if they had made a mistake. They were wondering whether leaving Judaism to follow Christ had been the right decision.

In chapter 11, that great hall of faith, the author (Luke, I believe) reminds these fellow-believers of examples of people who had to make the choice of faith. Noah preached righteousness in days of judgment, saving only his family from the flood. Abraham left everything, seeking a city he could not see. Moses chose to suffer affliction with the people of God instead of enjoying the pleasures of sin for a season. And many others, of whom the world was not worthy, gave substance to things hoped for and evidence to things not seen by their observable testimony of faith.

Now it was time for these Hebrew believers to do the same. To encourage them to do so, Luke speaks of an altar that we have, which we did not have prior to our coming to Christ. It is the cross upon which Jesus died.

Like the animals of the temple complex in Jerusalem, Jesus was sacrificed, and He suffered outside the gate. There He died to sanctify His people with His own blood (v. 12). "Go to Him and bear His reproach," says Luke. Will we go to Him and bear His reproach, or will we go back? Many have gone back. And yet, the bronze altar still calls us to our better altar of sacrificial love, taking up our cross of sacrifice to follow our Savior to Calvary.

Conclusion: The bronze altar of the tabernacle points to saving truth. God's work of salvation is a work of atonement. To get from the outside of the tabernacle to the inside of God's dwelling place, we must pass through the altar. That is our need. That is Christ's victory. And that is the call we are to heed this morning. A wonderful hymn written by a pastor's wife in the 1800's says this truth well:

"I must needs go home by the way of the cross.

There's no other way but this.

I shall ne'er get sight of the gates of light,

If the way of the cross I miss."

Are you on the way of the cross, or on another way of your own choosing? Symbolized in the bronze altar of sacrifice, the way of the cross leads to God's eternal home; there is no other way than this.

"A man came—I think it was actually in Philadelphia—on one occasion to the great George Whitefield and asked if he might print his sermons. Whitefield gave this reply; he said, 'Well, I have no inherent objection, if you like, but you will never be able to put on the printed page the lightning and the thunder.' That is the distinction—the sermon, and the 'lightning and the thunder.' To Whitefield this was of very great importance, and it should be of very great importance to all preachers, as I hope to show. You can put the sermon into print, but not the lightning and the thunder. That comes into the act of preaching and cannot be conveyed by cold print. Indeed it almost baffles the descriptive powers of the best reporters."

—David Martin Lloyd-Jones,

*Preachers and Preaching*