

THE ALTAR OF WORSHIP

(The Substance of an Address on Leviticus vi. 8—13 ;
John iv. 23, 24 ; 1 Cor. xi. 23—26 ; Hebrews xiii. 15.)

THE scriptures read deal, for the most part, with the subject of the worship of God. The worship of God is an occupation of the highest character for the believer. A man who is a true worshipper of God in this world rises to the loftiest point of excellence to which his nature can go. It is a remarkable thing that in spiritual worship we should be able to be before God, consciously in His presence, realising His presence by faith, and that our hearts should go out to Him with all freedom, without outward restriction, without inward restraint, going out in adoration and praise to God because He is God, and above all, because He is our Father.

Worship, I say, is the highest and most sublime occupation in which we can engage here below. Moreover, worship comes within the province of the simplest and the youngest believer, as well as of those who are older and more acquainted with the love of God through His grace. Perhaps, the simpler the heart and the soul, the purer, and shall I say, the more acceptable is the worship that rises to God. "Out of the mouth of babes and sucklings Thou hast perfected praise."

We find that worship was laid upon the hearts of the saints all through the scriptural history. From the beginning to the end, those who pleased God on earth were those who worshipped Him. While in heaven above, the worship of God and of the Lamb will be developed to its fullest degree in the redeemed.

Worship on Mount Moriah

One of the earliest examples of worship, and a very instructive one, is found in the well-known chapter (Gen. xxii.), relating the experience of Abraham. This incident, which is presented there in full detail, is really an incident of worship to God. Abraham was called to go to the land of Moriah and there, upon one of the mountains of which God told him, to offer Isaac his son, his only son, as a burnt offering to God. It was a supreme test of his faith in God and of his love for God ; but he was obedient, and was prompt and unquestioning in his obedience. He did not say, "I will not go," and then change his mind and go, but he obeyed at once, rising early in the morning.

Abraham knew what he was doing, as we find from his words to the servants with him: He said to them, "Abide ye here with the ass, while I and the lad go yonder and worship, and return again to you." There we have the act of worship before him actually mentioned.

Abraham and his son proceeded to that mountain, and there, upon the altar that was erected, Isaac was bound by his father to be the burnt offering. At God's bidding Abraham emptied his heart and soul upon that altar, surrendering all to Him. Everything that made Abraham what he was as a depositary of divine promise to the whole world and a wanderer in Canaan, was found in Isaac, and now Isaac, the seed of promise, was upon the altar, and the father's hand was uplifted with the knife to slay his son.

It was not the piteous vision of the boy upon the altar, and the tense features of the father as he was about to slay his son, that was so well-pleasing in heaven. It was the patriarch's act of worship ; it was the act telling God that, to Abraham, God and His word were everything, that Abraham adored and trusted the One Who told him to take his only son and offer him as a burnt offering.

There upon the altar was the victim bound. There, too, near by was the substitute, the ram caught in the thicket, provided to be the substitute for the human life. It came

about that the ram took the place of Isaac, but in God's estimation Abraham had fully performed the act of worship in the presence of His name ; there at the altar he learned the name of Jehovah—in the mount of the Lord it was seen. Jehovah was the great Provider, the One Who was everything to Abraham, and this significance was expressed in his act of surrender, the act of worship.

The patriarch's example lays it upon us that worship, in order to be acceptable to God, must be of the nature of a sacrifice. Worship must cost us something. In a measure, we are poorer, in some way or the other, because we worship God. We give something to Him, i.e., not something of ourselves, but something of Him Who lives in us, of Him Who is ever acceptable to God.

God expects our worship, the Father seeks worshippers. It is incumbent upon every believer to remember the claim God has upon this supreme act of our spiritual lives to worship and to adore Him. And let it be, not occasionally, not seasonally, but constantly, continually. Worship must be as a stream flowing incessantly, springing from God, if you will, but rising again to God, without a break. The heart of the true worshipper is ever in tune by the Holy Spirit, and engaged with praising and blessing God.

Worship and the Burnt Offering

In Leviticus vi., we have what is called the law of the burnt offering. Of all the classes of sacrifice, the burnt offering is the one that speaks most vividly of worship.

Why does it speak most vividly of worship? Because of its contrast with other offerings in this respect that the whole of the burnt offering, whether it was a sheep or a goat, or a bull, whatever animal was offered, the whole of it went up to Jehovah. The entire carcase was placed on the altar, consumed by fire, and ascended up in fumes to heaven. Figuratively, it was to God as a sweet-smelling savour of Christ in His absolute devotion to the divine will, even so far as the death on the cross.

But the worshipper brought the offering, and the worshipper laid his hand upon the sacrifice. The priest took it and offered it, but the worshipper beheld in the ascending column of smoke the acceptance, so to speak, of the worship of his heart. "Oh, Jehovah, Thou hast blessed me. Thou hast done wonderful things for Thy people ! What can I render to Thee ? What can I give to show how I esteem and love Thee, and desire to serve Thee ? I will give Thee my best. I have searched my flocks, and my herds, and I give Thee the best of them. I can give no more. I give my best, and I give it all to Thee." This spirit of devotional worship was the essence of the burnt offering.

In the first chapter of this priest's guide book, details are prescribed of what was due to Jehovah, but in chapter vi. you have the law of the burnt offering. In the first chapter, the words spoken were for the common people, for every worshipper in the convocation ; but the law of the offering in chapter vi. was for Aaron and his sons, the priests. The priests were admitted into closer secrets, if I may so express it, in connection with the nature of this worship.

One feature that comes out in this law of the burnt offering is that a permanent character was given to it. There was to be a continual token of activity at the altar with regard to burnt sacrifice.

It was part of the ritual of the people of Israel to offer the burnt offering every morning and every evening. In the tabernacle, as well as in the temple, there was this expressive form of worship at the commencement and at the close of each day.

But we have here that in the night seasons, when no worshippers were going to the temple, when the services of the priesthood had ceased, still there was to be evidence of worship upon the altar of the burnt offering. A flame was to be seen upon the altar continually throughout the night. There the flame flickered, and there the burnt offering of the day was still being consumed to ashes. The night watches passed, but the burnt offering sent up its sweet savour. The worshippers were asleep, but the flame still rose from the altar. They might be oblivious of this silent

worship, but Jehovah was refreshing Himself with the sweetness, the excellence, the glory, the grace of His blessed Son, to whom the burnt sacrifice pointed.

The sacrifice was ever smoking upon the brazen altar, and the God Who never sleeps, day or night, found His pleasure there, even in the darkness of the night. That burnt offering was always welcome to Him. Why do I refer to this feature of continuity? Does not this regulation speak to us plainly, if it speaks at all, of the value that God sets upon the worship of His people? According to His arrangement, worship must be a continuous thing; sleeping or waking, the hearts of His people must be in touch with Him, enjoying what His Son is, feeling how gracious and good the Lord is in His perfect devotion. This answers to the fire consuming the sacrifice, and causing it to ascend; and it must never be extinguished.

You must have observed, as I read these few verses, how this continuity is emphasised and reiterated. "It is the burnt offering, because of the burning upon the altar all night unto the morning" (verse 9). "It shall not be put out" (verse 12). "The fire shall ever be burning upon the altar; it shall never go out" (verse 13). Why do these words occur over and over again? God repeats nothing in His word, save to impress it more deeply upon our forgetful hearts.

God demands the worship of our hearts continually. The worship of our hearts can never go out to Him apart from the altar, apart from the place where the sacrifice was offered, apart from the excellence and value and glories that were exhibited when the sacrifice was offered upon the cross. All this we find in Christ, the offering of a sweet-smelling savour to God.

The Altar and the Divine Name

In connection with the altar of burnt offering, there is something else that does not appear here, but in Exodus, for instance. Wherever the altar was built, even though it were of earth, there God put His name. This was the

place where He recorded His name ; and His name and the altar are always linked together because it spoke of Christ. God was glorified and manifested at the cross of Calvary. God found everything that His loving heart sought and that His holy nature demanded there—at the cross. If this is so, if God found His all there, why cannot I find mine there ? Is this altar not enough as my satisfying portion ? Must I have the world besides ? Must I have the temporal and trivial things of time and sense besides the name and sacrifice of His Son ? I cannot have the world and be a true worshipper of God.

Worship in spirit and truth is to be engrossed with the person of the Lord Jesus Christ. When I think how good, and kind and gracious and loving He is, how can I help my heart and my whole being rising in thankfulness and praise to Him ? Such praise and worship I cannot formulate in words, but occupation with Christ is the basis of worshipping God in spirit and in truth.

It is not the spirit that speaks, though it should permeate our singing and our praying (1 Cor. xiv.). Our spirit feels and thinks, and God looks for it in our worship. Do not overlook our responsibility as His children, as members of the body of Christ, to give unto God His due in worship and adoration, both individually and collectively.

The Ashes of the Burnt Offering

Then the ashes even of the burnt offering were to be cared for by the priests. They were to be removed from the altar in the morning to make room for the new burnt offering ; and they were to be put beside the altar, in a spirit of holiness, for the priest was to be clad with spotless linen. They were to be put at the side of the altar first of all.

Then the priest was to put off his garments and put on others, and carry the ashes outside the camp of the tabernacle into a clean place, into the place reserved for the ashes. The ashes were thus to be carefully handled and preserved. Why ? Because they were a memorial of that sacrifice in the holy place. Beside the altar, the ashes were a witness

to the priests themselves, to those whose habitat was in the court of the tabernacle, but outside, the ashes were a witness for the whole camp. So the death of Christ has its place in the life of the family of God, and in the worship of the people of God, while it has its place also as a witness to the whole world.

I do not dwell further upon this point, except to remind you that the burnt offering was inseparably connected with the brazen altar, the altar where the judgment of God fell upon the offering, where the sacrifice was made for sin. There it was at the door of the tabernacle, and God's holy name was there too. To this place, the worshipper was to come with his burnt offering. The altar was the place where God's name was, and there he must present his offering of praise.

But a third thing in the law of the burnt offering was that it must be perpetual, not occasional, a continual offering throughout their generations. This permanence is emphasised in scripture. This continual burnt offering, morning and night and all through the night, was a prominent feature of Jewish worship. When Solomon set up his temple, a continual burnt offering was provided, and when Ezra set up his temple, there again the continual burnt offering was offered, even before the building again. Why? Because of Jehovah's claim that this should be the main feature of the worship of His people.

A Book of Praise Prepared

Now in the Book of Psalms we have a kind of transition from the Mosaic system of sacrificial worship. In a veiled way there is a reference to the fact that God was not well-pleased with the offering of bulls and goats. He did not find His pleasure in the sacrifice of an animal that had horns and hoofs. God was looking for something else; He desired what was in the heart. "Sacrifice and offering Thou didst not desire . . . burnt offering and sin offering hast Thou not required." Jehovah's delight was in the language of

the heart that said "Lo, I come . . . I delight to do Thy will." There God in His Beloved and Blessed Son found His full satisfaction.

But the law made nothing perfect, and there are intimations of something which would change the character of worship from formality to spirituality. You find such passages for instance in the Psalms (I commend the subject to your study). Something would take the place of the outward acts of worship which God had instituted under Moses. These material sacrifices were only temporal. God was pleased and would be pleased only with offerings of the heart and spirit.

Another feature of worship is made prominent in the Psalms. They do not speak so much of the continual burnt offering or of the daily offering of lambs, but of a continual attitude of praise on the part of His saints. "I will bless the Lord at all times—His praise shall be continually in my mouth—I will praise the name of Jehovah for ever and ever." A constant stream of praise flows from the worshippers to Him. Throughout the Psalms, this spirit continues, and towards the end comes the recurrence of "Hallelujah," "Praise the Lord." Over and over it is reiterated so that the Book of Psalms closes as the book of Hallelujahs. It is expressive of the spontaneous praise Jehovah will receive from His earthly people during the millennial kingdom.

Worship in the Present Hour

Coming now to the New Testament, we have our Lord speaking about the new order of worship (John iv.) and revealing its essential nature. He is speaking not to a learned man of the Jews, not to a teacher in Israel, but to a Samaritan sinner. To Nicodemus, He speaks of the necessity of the new birth, but to this fallen woman He speaks of worship, and shows her that the great heart of God, if I may so say, was hungering and thirsting for the worship of souls here in this world. And who but God could change a sinner into a worshipper to provide praises to His name?

In John's Gospel, as in the Levitical economy, we see that worship is connected with the altar, at least I think this is so. In chapter iii. you find a reference to the cross, do you not? "As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up." There is the cross, which is the righteous basis of all worship. It was the basis of worship for Nicodemus when he was born again. When the Son of man is lifted up, He will draw all unto Him, but He must be lifted up. So you cannot divorce worship from the altar, from the place of sacrifice. The death of Christ is the foundation of life and worship. All our worship must also be permeated with the thought of the death of our Lord Jesus Christ in the power of the Spirit of life and truth.

To the woman of Samaria, the Lord showed that the question of locality no longer came into the question of worship to the Father. God did not seek for worship in "this" mountain, nor in Jerusalem. God had certainly put His name in Jerusalem, and Mount Zion was the centre for Israel and the nations because Jehovah's name was there. But now the time had come, the hour was even present, when the question of an authorised locality for worship entirely disappeared.

Once a local centre for worship was needful. If you have a bullock and you want to sacrifice it, you must go somewhere to do it. If you have a material offering to bring, geography is a consideration; you must go to a place of worship. But when worship is restricted to the heart and spirit, does the place matter? We think sometimes that a special place for worship is essential, but we do not find it so in John iv. The Lord spoke of the necessity that worship should be "in spirit and in truth."

Worship in Spirit and in Truth

The spirit is that part of our being which is altogether independent of locality. Our bodies may be here in the Memorial Hall, but our spirits may be in the heaven of

heavens. The spirit that God has given us cannot be confined to one place or to another. This important feature of worship the Lord was showing to this poor woman. Sunken for so long in sinful ways, yet she had a spirit, and He would redeem it and make it His own, would cleanse her by water and by blood, and make her fit to offer praise and thanksgiving to His Father and God.

Our Lord Jesus was in Samaria seeking someone to receive the love which was bubbling up in His heart, overflowing in the sands of the desert. He sought that this love might return again upwards whence it came, in the power of a life eternal. He could give this woman water, which would be in her a well of water springing up unto everlasting life.

This is true worship. It is the outcome of a power within towards an object without. It springs upward from the heart to God. It is independent of all outward circumstances. The Holy Spirit plants the capacity within us, and by His working it rises to the source from whence it came, to the God and Father of love and grace. Oh, beloved friends, how marvellous it is that we should be made vessels of the Holy Spirit in this way, to praise and worship God acceptably and continuously !

And God is seeking this worship from the redeemed sons of men. "The Father seeketh such to worship Him. God is a spirit : and they that worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth." "That which is born of the [Holy] Spirit is spirit," and so we have a new nature given us. When with this spirit we have truth in us also, we have the two elements of worship to God.

We may sing a hymn of praise tunefully with our lips, but if our spirit is not with it, it is not acceptable worship to God. I must sing with the spirit and with the understanding. My heart must be right before my lips. Why ? Because I am worshipping the Father, and He is seeking worship in spirit.

Worship must be "in truth" too, and if it is in Christ and of Christ, it will be in truth, because He is the truth, as well as the way and the life, in coming to the Father. By His Spirit Christ is the One Who clothes our words and

thoughts with acceptance to God. He, as it were, takes of His own fragrance and beauty to attach to our poor thoughts and words and make them acceptable. All this service is independent of ourselves, and the Holy Spirit does what is needful for the simplest and youngest of saints who seeks to worship God. The fragrance of worship is not in what we say or think, but in what Christ is before the heart. The Holy Spirit does His part, and the whole is acceptable to God.

"The Father seeketh such to worship Him." The Son of God, the Good Shepherd, went out on the mountains to seek the lost sheep. He brings it home on His shoulders rejoicing; but the Father seeks worshippers. The Good Shepherd seeks sinners; the Father seeks worshippers. Shall He be denied? God the Father is seeking now. He is seeking in the City of London, in the world, for worshippers to worship Him. There are great public buildings and secluded cloisters, there is the ritual of æsthetic service and gorgeous vestments with all the outward show that the nature of man loves, but all the while the Father in heaven is seeking worshippers in spirit and in truth. It is possible for you and me to give God the Father what He seeks.

"God is a spirit." He is the Being Who is spirit in essence. It is not merely that this is His character, as would be expressed if the phrase were "God is spirit." But God is a spirit. It refers to His being, to the Person. He has no bodily shape. He is not circumscribed like ourselves, and He is an omnipresent spirit, and therefore though in heaven, He is here, and we being spirit are in His presence.

"God is a spirit, and they that worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth." This is not a matter of choice, but of necessity. But apart from the action of the Spirit within us, and apart from that truth which Christ has expressed in His life, and in His death, we cannot worship Him thus. How simple, yet how solemn!

Worship and the Lord's Supper

Now let us turn to the well-known scripture in 1 Corinthians xi. to show that some of the elements and essentials

of worship are found in connection with the Lord's supper. You certainly have the name of the Lord here. Israel had the name of Jehovah in connection with the altar of burnt offering. He recorded His name there, as He did in Zion afterwards. And so, we have the name of the Lord in connection with the great Christian observance.

We gather together to His name, and the Lord has affixed His name to His supper. It is the Lord's table, and it is the Lord's supper in a special way. The original expression is such that it shows the supper belongs peculiarly to Him. His name is upon it as being His own supper, just as the first of the week is distinguished as the Lord's day.

There is a distinction made in the passage (1 Cor. xi.) between a brother taking his own supper instead of the Lord's supper. So that the name of the Lord is attached to this memorial supper as Jehovah's name was to the altar. The Lord's supper at His table is the great gathering point for the collective worship of the saints of God, particularly on the Lord's day.

Moreover, you find that the sacrifice of Christ is also expressed there. There is the loaf and there is also the cup. The loaf is the emblem of the body of Christ, and the cup of His blood. They are separate emblems, but both show that Christ's death is set forth in the supper. We show forth the Lord's death. This, under the Spirit's guidance, is the great motive power in connection with the worship of believers on this occasion. The Lord's death awakens the keenest emotions of thanksgiving and praise in His name to our Lord Jesus Christ, and the God Who gave Him.

What a subject! How can we rightly comprehend that He Who was ever God, He Who created all and was the sustainer of all, even when here in this world, that He should offer Himself a propitiatory sacrifice for sins! We think about it, we sit together in silence under the influence of the Holy Spirit when we take the Lord's supper; and, above all things, we desire that the Holy Spirit may enlarge our hearts and give us greater views, grander thoughts, more correct ideas concerning the death of the Lord Jesus in its baffling beauty.

There before us, the subject of the obedience of Christ in His death looms in its grandeur and power. I am sure *it touches every emotion of our being to think that He loved us to death and to such a death, glorifying God even at that point in respect of our sins.* And this is God's way that our cold and unresponsive natures may not become callous and indifferent to the sufferings of our Lord. We meditate upon them over and over again. They never lose their power, though they do not stir us as they should. Still, it is God's way to awaken our worship by setting before us again and again the Lord's death, He the risen and ascended One being in our midst.

Is it not because we often fail to apprehend the reason of our assembling that our worship becomes so strained and difficult, so formal, empty, and dead? In such a case, we have lost sight of the great object for which the Lord instituted His supper. It was to be a memorial of Him. It was to be the ashes of the sacrifice, set beside the altar bearing His name to speak to us, the company of priests, of Himself and of what He had done, of what had been undergone upon the altar of sacrifice. It is when we observe the true object of our gathering that suitable worship rises to the Father and to the Son in all the fragrance of His person, Who became dead and is alive again.

Moreover, you remember, the burnt offering was to be *perpetual*. There was to be a continual flame upon the altar, never to be put out, never allowed to die down. So we are to show the Lord's death "*till He come.*" The supper is a constant occupation in the body of Christ, a continual observance. How many times have you remembered the Lord in His death? A great many times, some of us, but it is ever new to us; and the will of the Lord is that it should be so. It is the will of the Lord that the fire upon the altar should never go out, that it should be continued week after week, and oftener if possible, until the Lord comes.

"Oh," you say, "we all eat the Lord's supper when we gather together." Exactly, it is the collective remembrance

and worship that is spoken of in 1 Cor. xi., the act of those assembled for that purpose ; so I turn to Hebrews xiii. 15, for what is more general, and also individual.

Our Continual Offering of Praise

“ By Him ”—that is, by the Lord Jesus, Who has sanctified us by His blood, and suffered without the gate—“ by Him therefore let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of our lips ”—or calves, as we have in the margin, referring to the burnt offering—“ giving thanks to ” (or confessing) “ His name.” This injunction I take to be general, and it includes those who are unable to attend the commemoration of the Lord’s death at His supper on the first of the week. It applies to believers singly, and it applies to all seven days a week and twenty-four hours a day. Every believer must offer a continual sacrifice of praise by Him, the Lord Jesus Christ. Worship must be an unbroken daily habit.

The Lord Jesus is the Sacrifice and the Priest. As a great Priest over the house of God, He is ever active and ready. He is a continual medium, and wherever I may be, whatever the circumstances, however doleful or difficult, there I can sing a song of praise to Him, my God and Father, through Jesus Christ His Son. Is this not so ?

An Israelite was debarred for the most part from attending the tabernacle daily, but the appointed things were done for him, morning and evening. The priest was there, and he saw that the flame never went out. We have our priest, our minister of the sanctuary. He is ever there, waiting to take the little expressions of our hearts, even as we acknowledge with thankfulness God’s grace and goodness and care, making them burnt offerings of praise, acceptable to God, through Christ Jesus.

Perhaps you are doubting the possibility of fulfilling this Christian precept. You may think it is impossible. You may say to me, “ You do not know my circumstances, or

else you would never think that I could offer a sacrifice of praise to God continually." What I am certain of is that God in His word never enjoins us to do what we cannot do. If He lays upon us a duty or a responsibility, we must not say, "I have no power to do it." God sees to the means. The point is, do you want to do it? Satan would take the sacrifice of praise out of our mouths and fill them with words of complaint, or bitterness, or reviling: but we must see that God's name is praised first of all, as He enjoins.

We shall always find a subject of praise. There is One Who is a perennial object of praise, that is, the Lord Jesus Christ. Do you say I have nothing to give thanks for? God has given me His Son and with Him He has freely given me all things, so at once my mouth is filled with praise. This is true not only to-day, but yesterday, and the day before, and will be in the days to come too.

It is God's will that we should offer the sacrifice of praise continually. "The fruit of our lips" is to tell God what beauty and satisfaction we have found in Christ according to the scriptures. This delight in the Lord is bound to be acceptable. God never refuses to receive such words. They are well pleasing to Him, Who delights in His well-beloved Son.

"Confessing His name." He has attached His name to His supper and He has also attached it to ourselves. We are called by His name. We bear the name of the Lord. We are not our own, we belong to Him. The Son has made known to us the name of the Father, that it may be embodied in our worship to the Father and the Son.

We are known in this world as those that are Christ's, as those who bear His name, and we ourselves become, as it were, *an altar of thanksgiving*. His love, His grace have kindled a fire within our hearts. He has kindled it there, and His Spirit will keep it burning; it will never go out.

But the flame of devotion might burn more brightly than it does. It would be more acceptable to Him, perhaps, if our hearts were fuller of Christ, if we read more about Him,

and sought to live more like Him, reproducing Him here in this world. Then our lives, and so our lips, would habitually bear the name of Jesus, and so they would be ever acceptable to God our Father in a living sacrifice of praise. May it be so, for His name's sake.

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