



*the*  
**Golden  
Candlestick**

**THE CHERUBIM AS RELATED  
TO LIFE AND SERVICE**

**Part 2**

**THE ALTAR OF INCENSE**

**THE MERCY SEAT**

**T. Austin-Sparks**

**THE CHERUBIM AS RELATED TO  
LIFE AND SERVICE**

(CONTINUED)

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# **THE CHERUBIM AS RELATED TO LIFE AND SERVICE**

(CONTINUED)

## CHAPTER 4

### **THE CHURCH AND THE LIVING ONES**

*Reading: Revelation 4 and 5.*

We come now to the final presentation which is the consummation of the truth concerning the cherubim. Here in the book of the Revelation the cherubim, under the title of the 'living ones', appear in connection with four and twenty elders. They are so closely related that they move together; their activities are one, their utterances are one, and their position is one. We bear that in mind, and leave it for the moment.

The great shout, the great proclamation, in connection with the elders and the living ones is that through the great redemptive work of the Lamb as slain in the midst of the throne they have been constituted a kingdom and priests unto God. They are united in this great proclamation, this declaration, this statement of what they are, redeemed unto God out of every nation, and made a kingdom and priests.

Now go back to the Old Testament, and if you read in the two books of the Chronicles (1 Chron. 23 and 24 and 2 Chron. 5) you have the type of this. There you find that under David and Solomon the sons of Aaron, the priests, were divided into twenty-four courses. They were divided by lot, which means that they were not selected by preference or by special favour. It was not selecting because of certain things which made them more favourable for their position than others. They were selected by lot; they all stood the same chance of coming into this position. Over them were placed twenty-four elders, twenty-four courses of priests, and twenty-four elders placed over them, an elder to a course. Then the Levites

also were divided into twenty-four courses. These priests were arrayed in white raiment.

Taking that as a very brief Old Testament background of typology and illustration, they represent twenty-four rulers in the House of God. They were twenty-four priestly rulers, elders, arrayed in white garments. They are priests, and they are elders, or rulers. It is very easy to see from the type the meaning of the antitype in heaven in the book of the Revelation. They are in governmental position in heaven and, as a mark of their authority and kingliness, they are wearing a crown of gold upon their heads.

### **The throne**

Going back to the book of Chronicles, these priests brought the ark into the oracle, the most holy place, and placed it under the cherubim in the very presence of God, typically in the very heavenlies itself, for the most holy place is a type of the heavenlies. We know that the veil (which was Christ's flesh) being rent, opened a way right into the presence of God, right into heavenly union and fellowship with God. The cherubim are associated with this movement of the priests who bring in the ark of the Testimony. It is the throne where the cherubim are. It is a throne of grace to the Lord's people under the precious blood and its protection. It is a throne of awful judgement to those who are not under the protection of that blood. It is a throne! God rules there! And the priests come into the presence of the throne!

Coming to the Revelation and the antitype, here are four and twenty elders, priests and kings, and associated as one with them are the living ones, the cherubim. What does all this mean? It is highly symbolical. What does it represent? I think, and as far as I can see from the Word, it means this: The living ones represent the church in general; the elders crowned represent the church in its governmental position in heaven, and the end of God which was His design for His church, the place of the throne, the place of government.

Swiftly run your eye right back to the beginning in Genesis 3. Hebrews 2 says, "Thou crownedst him (man) with glory and honour ... thou didst put all things in subjection under his feet." But man failed, he broke down, he lost his dominion. Through sin, through unbelief, through disobedience, he forfeited the great place of government in fellowship with God, and that man never attained to God's purpose for him. He died;

he became a dead one. All in Adam die and are spiritually dead. All outside of Christ are dead in trespasses and sins. From the standpoint of God's thought about life none live outside of Christ, all in Adam have died. That divine, eternal, incorruptible and indestructible life is shut off from sinful man. He can only know it on the ground of the work of the Lamb slain.

Pass your eye right down the ages to Revelation, to the consummation, and what do you have? The Lamb slain, in the throne, and *living* ones representative of the whole church; and then God's thought and intention expressed in the elders (dominion, kingship, a *kingdom* and priests). What Adam lost is at last realised in the church, *living* ones, alive with the very life of God, His gift of eternal life. But what is the ultimate expression and outworking and issue of that life? It is the throne; it is dominion.

The elders and the living ones moving together declare that it is in virtue of that shed blood, "For thou wast slain, and hast purchased unto God by thy blood, out of every nation ...". It is because of that blood, the blood of the Lamb, that they have come to the end which God eternally intended. This is salvation. There is something in this which is more than just escaping hell and being saved from sin. God's thought was more than that man should live a sinless life. God's thought was that men should come to that fulness in fellowship with Himself where they reign with Him for ever and ever.

## **Death abolished**

This book of the Revelation is prophetic. Notice how chapter 4 is introduced: "Come up hither, and I will show thee the things which must come to pass hereafter." It is looking on to the end, the consummation. It brings into view a time which is not time — for time shall be no more — when all death shall have been abolished. That is not just dying in your body and going from this world. Death, the last enemy, the enemy of God's eternal purpose in man, the death in which all outside of Christ abide, though multitudes of them do not know or realise, *that* death shall have been abolished. There shall be no more death nor curse any more, but a universe of living ones. But, more than that, a throne in view for living ones. Is it not striking that chapter 3 closes with, "He that overcomes, I will give to him to sit down with me in my throne ..." and chapter 4 goes straight on with the throne, and the living ones, and the four and twenty elders, leading right up to chapter 12, "And they overcame him because of

the blood of the Lamb.” God’s full thought is represented in the over-comer who comes to the throne to reign. God’s provision for that is the power of an all-conquering life, a life conquering death, conquering hell, conquering the dragon, and rising to the very throne.

This is not all fiction. While much is symbolism and the typology associated with it, inside of that there are great heavenly and spiritual laws. And when you strip these laws, these principles of symbolism and typology, you come to the great central realities of God’s creating and redeeming purpose, that man should live by the power of an endless life, and that that life and the power of that life should eventually bring him to a place of dominion in God’s creation. Over against the fact that God has intended that, and in His Son, by the blood of the Lamb, has provided the power of that indestructible life, there are multitudes still dead, and multitudes who are not living in the power of that life, and multitudes even of the Lord’s people who have the life but who are not rising to overcome in virtue of that life.

The appeal of the great consummation to our hearts is this, that God has intended this and nothing less, and everybody stands the same chance, is in the way of it. There are no favourites, for there is nothing in us by nature qualifying us for this; there is nothing which gives us an advantage over others. All are called, all are in the running for a throne, all are on the same footing of the precious blood and the risen life of Christ. God’s thought is not that we should just escape hell, not even just become possessors of eternal life. God’s thought is dominion in His coming Kingdom, the Kingdom of His Son. We hear the apostle calling to us, “Give diligence to make your calling and election sure” (2 Peter 1:10).

### **The greatness of the Gospel**

There is little more to say. The end has been brought before us. The Spirit of God must move in relation to God’s great thought, but surely this is a tremendous appeal. In the first place it magnifies the work of the Lord Jesus, what His cross means, what the shedding of His blood means; God’s end against which all hell set itself; God’s end which seemed to be involved in disaster, failure, and a state which made it appear utterly impossible of realisation, spread over ages of sinfulness. God’s end nevertheless, in spite of all that earth and hell do, realised in the blood of the Lamb. It magnifies the work of the Lord Jesus, and surely it presents to us the greatness of salvation. Oh, ours is not a little Gospel. Ours is not a

small salvation. It is a mighty thing; it ends in the throne of this universe, to be occupied by living ones! It makes salvation appear what it really is, a great thing. "So great salvation", says the apostle.

It is surely a challenge and an appeal, firstly to those who are not saved, who are definitely not living ones, not having been born again. Surely this so great salvation, this matchless purpose of God in salvation, in redemption, ought to lift us off the mere level of trifling, of dilly-dallying, and oh, it must mean that we cannot control this salvation, cannot govern it. No one can say, "Well, I am waiting! I do not say that I never will be saved, but I am not ready yet! I am watching! Perhaps some day!" You cannot control or govern a thing like this. God has not put it within our power to say when we will be saved. God says, "Now is the accepted time" (2 Cor. 6:2). You cannot say that you will be saved tomorrow, or next week. God says, Now! Now! and it may be now or never! But what a loss! What a loss to have missed all that God intended and provided for through the sacrifice of His Son! It is too big a thing to trifle with, to try and bring within the compass of our holding and governing, saying when we will have it and when we will not have it. If we are not saved it must lift us off a level like that, and show us that this is not something small enough for us to hold for ourselves, to handle, to manipulate. It is not as though it were a cheap thing, and if we are inclined we will have it but if we are not inclined we will not. Let us look at it in these dimensions, its magnificence, its majesty, its costliness, what it cost God, what it cost God's Son, what the end of it all is, the immensity of this salvation, and say: As for me, God have mercy upon me if I do not capitulate to this! You can understand why they sing, and why they fall down before Him that is on the throne, and cast their crowns down. Why? It means this, Oh! Wonder of all wonders in the universe, that ever we should have been privileged to have any part in this salvation! That is a different attitude from, Well, I may or I may not! It is the marvel of our having been allowed to come into God's salvation in Christ. Those who really do know Christ and redemption always marvel at the grace of God. They know that they have found something which is priceless.

### **The crown as reward**

For those who are in Christ surely this is an appeal, as this very book presents: "Let no man take thy crown." It is an appeal to go on to the full end. That is God's thought, reigning together with Him, *but there is*

*always an 'if' connected.* "If we suffer, we shall also reign with him." "To him that overcomes will I grant to sit with me in my throne." That would not be said if everybody was automatically an overcomer. It is the appeal to go on to God's full end, and not to fall short. This is the encouragement in suffering, the encouragement in adversity. Salvation is not a reward. Salvation is the gift of God's grace to those who have no merit, no worthiness. The throne is a reward; the crown is a reward. For what? For suffering, enduring, going on in spite of all the opposing odds, the result of letting go all for the Lord, the issue of that life of His energising in us, bringing us to the throne.

The question arises. Are you a living one? That is where we begin. Have you commenced with the possession of eternal life in Jesus Christ? Are you a living one to begin with? After that the question is, how much are you a living one? Not only, do you have life, but, how much are you living by that life? The whole question from Genesis to Revelation is life; life as the basis, and life as the energy unto God's full end. So the apostle says, "When Christ who is our life shall appear, then shall we be manifested with Him in glory" (Col. 3:4). The issue of Christ our life is manifestation in glory with Him. We are called "unto His eternal glory" (1 Peter 5:10). That glory is the shining out of His life in fulness.

We have to answer the challenge and the appeal. Are we living ones? Are we going on in the life? Is the life having a free, full course in us? Are we checking it, arresting it, hindering it, or are we wholly, utterly capitulated to that life, to let that life have its full, free course in us, obedient to its laws? It will bring us to the throne if that is so, and we shall be the fulfilment of this promise, the four and twenty elders, that is, the church represented in government in the throne. The life is manifested in its fulness in the elders, and it is all by reason of the blood of the Lamb that has been slain.

Let the symbolism go if you cannot understand the whole thing, if it mystifies you. I confess that the cherubim represent far too much for me to grasp. I am only giving you the things which are clear. There are a good many things that are beyond our understanding yet. But if you will strip it all of symbolism, the types, the figures, and view the clear-cut principles, it is simply this: *God, from eternity, meant man to be in the place of dominion.* He created him with that object. Adam lost the power by which man would have been energised unto that had he not sinned, and that to which he would have come as the result of that energy. Another Adam came and recovered by His own blood. We are called into the fellowship

of God's Son through faith in Him and His redeeming work by the cross, and are given eternal life, and are set, by the possession of that life, on the highway to the throne. All the potentialities of government in the Kingdom of God's Son which is yet to be are in the life which we possess through faith. It is for us to live according to the dictates of that life, to learn how to live on the basis of divine life, to be obedient to its laws and faithful to all its energising within us. It is a great thing to have eternal life within, constant energy to bring us at last to full victory, and to reign with Him for ever and ever.

The Lord convey His own message to our hearts, and lead us into a fuller abandonment to Him and His purpose.

*(Concluded).*

# THE MERCY SEAT

*Reading: Exodus 25:17-22.*

To begin with we are shown by means of this type that through and in virtue of the shed and sprinkled blood of the Lord Jesus we have the two great factors in our standing with God.

## **Remission**

The shed blood, which, of course, in the type took place outside by the great altar, provides remission of sins, and before ever we get to the inner place, the sanctuary, the sin question has been dealt with. The sin question is not dealt with in the presence of God, that is, in the inner sanctuary; the sin question is dealt with, as it were, outside. When we do enter in, the question of the remission of sins does not arise at all; that is settled. The matter is not an open matter at all in the immediate presence of God; that has been settled, concluded. But from the shedding of the blood where there is remission of sins the blood is brought in by the high priest into the innermost shrine of God's immediate presence and it is sprinkled. The sprinkling, of course, is related to what has taken place outside. It is a testimony to the fact that sins are remitted, forgiven and atoned for. It is the finished work in relation to sin carried right through into God's presence and placed before Him as a memorial and a testimony that sin has been dealt with. It is not dealt with there; it has been dealt with, but the dealing with it is testified to. The sprinkling says that it is done. It is something in the presence of God which remains the abiding testimony to sin having been dealt with outside.

## **Communion**

But then the sprinkling, on the other hand, is that which makes it possible for us to have fellowship with God. It is in virtue of the sprinkled

blood that there is communion. Forgiveness, remission — that is good, but then even so we can still be left outside. The letter to the Hebrews sees Christ in the position of the high priest carrying through His own blood, and, in the antitype, passing through the heavens (not through an earthly veil but through the heavens; that veil dividing earth from heaven), with His own blood into the immediate presence, there to appear before God for us. Therefore, Christ being in the very presence of God with His own blood of the testimony, means not just that we are forgiven and left as forgiven ones — with God’s full pardon, nevertheless left there. There is the added and the extra value that Christ, in virtue of His blood, having passed through the heavens, brings us into the same place as He occupies with the Father in the heavens. We are now not only forgiven, but in fellowship with God in virtue of His sprinkled blood. There must be blood in the presence of God if there is to be any abiding in the presence of God, and so the blood carries us right through with Christ into the fullest fellowship and communion with God.

That is the simple truth with which we are more or less familiar. Through and in virtue of the sprinkled blood it is given to us to have fellowship with God in the utter terms, “I will meet with you there.” It is God being free to come to us, to meet with us.

### **Where God speaks**

That brings us into the place of the immediate voice of God, where God is speaking, and when God speaks He is speaking His thoughts, His mind; and God’s thoughts are very pure thoughts. When I use the word ‘pure’ I do not just mean morally pure. It is that essence of God-likeness, that essence of divine nature; not only moral purity but that which is utterly God, and therefore so utterly different from man as man is. “My thoughts are not your thoughts ...”. Your thoughts are not My thoughts. “As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts ...”. There is a vast expanse between man’s mind and God’s mind. I want you to see the vast difference between the mind of God and the mind of man at its best. There is a difference in character, a difference in quality, a difference in nature. The one thing that children of God learn increasingly and right on, no matter how long they may live and go on with God here, is how differently God thinks and how differently God acts from how we think and act. We get some very exalted ideas and thoughts as to what God would have and how God would act

and so on, and yet we learn that our most exalted thoughts which originate in ourselves come far short of His thoughts. We are very sincere, very earnest, very devoted. We mean the very best in what we do and how we do things, in our conceptions of the ways and methods and means of God, and we live to see that they fall far short of God's essential thing, the essence of God's mind.

Here we are in the presence of the most holy place, of God's utter mind, God's utter thought, the very purity which is the essence of God, and the cherubim represent that unmixed thought of God, that divine, that heavenly mind as completely free from the mixture of man's mind and man's thought. If you follow the cherubim through the Scriptures you will find that they are the custodians of what is wholly of God. You see them in the garden in the first instance. What has happened here? Two minds have come into conflict. God's mind has been expressed, laid down quite clearly. God has uttered His thought. Now another mind comes in and raises questions about God's expressed thought: "Has God said ...?" That is reasoning, that is a mind set in motion from another source. The result and issue of that is expulsion, and the cherubim with the flame of a sword gets moving in every direction, saying in effect, in this place of God's abode there is no room for two minds, no mixture of man's thought with God's thought, man's mind, man's judgement with God's mind and judgement. There is no room for the two, and there is expulsion, the severing by fire between these two things. The cherubim right through stand for the thing which is wholly heavenly, divine, utterly of God. They stand to represent that, and are the custodians of that; wholly heavenly, wholly spiritual as to divine thoughts and divine counsels and divine judgements.

Turn to the prophesy of Ezekiel and see the day in which Ezekiel lived. See the mind of the religious people of Israel over against which he was set; the conflict of minds religiously in Ezekiel's day; the terrible battle with the religious mind and God set against that religious mind. The whole of Ezekiel's prophecies open with the presentation of the cherubim, and it is as though God in the cherubim sets in motion His heavenly mind, for the cherubim and the wheels are linked with a Man in the throne. Here is God projecting His counsels, His thoughts, His judgements, setting them in motion so that they go right forward. The Spirit of life is in them, and they turn neither to the right hand nor to the left. There is no deviation in the counsels of God, in the divine thought. It is straight, persistent, inviolable, utter, and Israel with their religious mind astray has got to be measured by these thoughts of God.

There is no place in the presence of God for man's mind. God's mind is utter and it is final. What would you think (it is unthinkable really) of Moses going into that most holy place, and between the cherubim God beginning to express His will, His mind, and saying, Now, so-and-so! Then Moses saying, I think, Lord, it would be best to do it this way; or, So-and-so said this about it! It is unthinkable. There would have been a breaking forth of the fire. Man's mind has no place here. It is not the advice that someone else has given, not what someone else has said. God here tolerates no mixture of man's mind or judgement; His thought is here guarded, preserved; it is final. We may not bring into the oracle what we think or what others say.

You see the point. The life of the Lord's people was to be governed out from that centre. There was a centre to Israel's life and all the government came from that centre, and that centre was the most holy place where only God speaks, only God's mind rules, not man's mind. From the most holy place the life of the Lord's people has got to be governed, not by human counsels. We do not begin from the circumference in counsels, and judgements, and committees laying plans and projecting schemes, discussing what we are going to do for the Lord. That is beginning from the circumference. The life of God's people has to begin from the centre, where everything is silent before the Lord. We stop our thinking, and judging, and coming to conclusions, comparing, taking into account the pros and the cons and then arriving at something. We stop being influenced by outside things such as apparent demand, seeming requirement, force of circumstances; all such things have to be silenced. All that the best of God's people would counsel and advise has to be put back. There is something that comes before that, there is something deeper than that. The most holy man, the most holy woman must not be allowed to protrude their best judgements into the place which God occupies alone with His people. All those things have got to be silenced before we can know the Lord and the Lord's mind. In that place there must be the utter silence of everything that belongs to the life outside, religiously and in every other way. The one and only thing in the most holy place is what God says, and God waits for that silence before He speaks. Only as we are free from man's system of things can we get a pure expression of God's mind. God will lead us in the measure in which we are free from the government and influence of an accepted order. If we are governed by a system which is in the hands of men more or less; that is, if we have our spiritual lives governed by something established of men, in that measure

we have no voice of God within. But to have the utter voice of God every other influence and government has to be put back. There may be very good men and women who know the Lord, but we can never be sure that the best man, the best woman, the most godly, is not in some little way influenced by some consideration that is human, earthly, that their judgement is not in some little degree touched and affected by upbringing, training, tradition, human opinion, the accepted thing. You can never be sure. Therefore, the aim and object of every child of God should be to be silent to every other voice, every other influence, silent unto the Lord. "My soul be thou silent unto God" ("wait thou only upon God", is our version; Psa. 62:5 Lit.). "My soul ...". What is my soul? My feelings, my reasonings, my desirings, my willing, all the life around me and its influences. "... Be thou silent unto God".

This is a very high and a very utter position. I have to measure up to it as much as you have. I am not presenting something to you; we all have to recognise this. But this is not only a demand, not only a challenge; this is a blessed privilege, a blessed possibility. He, Jesus, the Son of God, has passed through the heavens; that passing through the heavens which were closed ("No man cometh unto the Father ...") until He fulfilled His work on the Cross and God raised Him from the dead. Then the heavens were rent. The rending of the heavens, which is the removal of the barrier, the opening of what was closed, made it possible for man by the Holy Spirit to go through an opened heaven. The Holy Spirit came in virtue of Calvary, by which the heavens were opened. Now we are represented as being in the heavenlies. That is only another way of saying that what is in heaven is in us. There is no geography in this matter. There is no space nor time in spiritual matters. It is all present and immediate. The same is in us as is in heaven. What is it? A most holy place. How? "... My Father will come unto him, and we will make our abode in him". Christ within is the propitiatory, the mercy seat, of the remission of our sins, and also the sanctuary where God speaks. In a word, we have an opened heaven, we have a place in the immediate presence of God; Jesus is in our hearts. This is what Peter meant when he said, "Sanctify in your hearts Christ Jesus as Lord." What does that mean? Well, if Jesus is in your heart, making there the sanctuary, then Jesus must be Lord, and you acknowledge Him as Lord when you put back your own mind, your own judgements, your own feelings, your own desires, and all other considerations of what people say, or want, or judge, or predict, or threaten. When you sanctify Him as Lord in your hearts, then you recognise He there is governing, and any

other mind has no place there. This is the place where He is to be sanctified as Lord, the Lordship of Christ is to govern.

This is our privilege. However high and difficult it may sound, this is the privilege of the believer to know the Spirit of the Lord governing the life from the inner sanctuary, the Spirit of the Lord speaking the mind of God in the heart. Now let us be clear, the Holy Spirit does not always come in a way which is like an audible voice although not an audible voice. He does not come with words and say to us when we seek the Lord, 'You shall do this, you shall not do that!' He does not do anything like that. The Holy Spirit in us constitutes a spiritual sensibility, for the language of the Spirit is a divine language, and a language in itself. It is not a language of human words (although the Lord has sometimes come down to spiritual children and communicated Himself almost in human words; at any rate, with such understanding and apprehension), but it is the cultivation of the spiritual sense that is needed. Although unable to say the Lord said such words to us definitely, we are able to say, 'I know quite well the Lord wished that, and did not wish that. It is as clear and plain to me as anything what the Lord's mind was or is about that.' That is the believer's privilege, and it is for us to grow from the immature forms of spiritual infancy to spiritual maturity, knowing in the heart what the Lord desires. It is more — if I may put it this way — according to divine preferences than according to divine statements.

By living with a person you do not need that person to say, 'I want this, and I want that' in words; you get to know the preferences of that person, and if you love that person and esteem them highly you become governed by what you know to be their desires, how they are disposed. It is an inner sense of their disposal towards this or against that. That is like the life in the Spirit. It is the cultivation of a spiritual sense which governs us. To have that we have to stand clear from every other influence. It is difficult very often when those we love and those who love us, and those who have our highest interests at heart bring their counsel to bear upon us and advise us. It is difficult not to be influenced; that is, not to be influenced to the point of making our decision according to what they say and how they react. But if we are going to be wholly governed by God we have to suspend that and say, 'That sounds like good, sound judgement', and we take account of the fact that it comes from one who has a love for God, is walking with the Lord and although we will not discount it altogether, we must go to the Lord about it. It is not to be done in a spirit of superiority, but we must maintain that position with the Lord. I do not

know what your experience is, but mine is that I have often been checked up afterwards by being influenced in my attitudes and decisions by the good counsel and judgement of other children of God, even servants of the Lord. As I have said, you can never be sure that there is not something there which comes from another source — not necessarily a satanic source directly but merely from a human source, and is not from God. If a thing is to be wholly of God then it means that it must be wholly separated from man; God requires that. Remember that the measure of the abiding value of anything is the measure of its having come from the Lord. Every bit that comes from man, even good men, will perish; sooner or later it will break down. Only that which is from God will stand, and we are not building and working for time. We have got a long, long time afterwards, and only that which comes from God will have a place there. We should extract ourselves from this domination of the time factor of this world, and stand all the time in eternity, and ask, ‘What is the value of this for eternity? What is the spiritual value of this? How much of God is there in this?’ If we can always be governed by these considerations, then there is going to be a large measure for eternity. We may have to suffer if we adopt this position of a walk with God. Be careful of spiritual pride that causes us to think no one else knows but ourselves and that everybody else may be wrong and may be influenced by wrong considerations. They may be right, this may be the voice of God; nevertheless we must have it confirmed, we must take it to the Lord and say, “Oh my soul, be thou silent unto God.” It may be that I do not like that thing, or it may be that I do like it. That does not matter. What we like or do not like is not the factor. “Be thou silent unto God” my soul, God alone has got to speak here if the thing is to work out to His own glory.

See Israel, and Israel’s history all in the balances of this inner voice of God. If Israel had lived according to the most holy place they would have got into the inheritance very much more quickly. We shall come into the fulness of Christ in the measure in which Christ is sanctified as Lord in our hearts, and that means what we have been saying, that there is one voice, and that is the Lord’s voice. We should give thanks that in virtue of the sprinkled blood we have an opened heaven — nothing between — and that to know the Lord for ourselves, growingly, is our privilege as His child, and that knowing is secured unto us in the sprinkled blood of Jesus in the presence of God.

# THE ALTAR OF INCENSE

*Reading: Exodus 30:1-10.*

In reading through the book of Exodus you will be struck with the strange break of continuity, that, passing from the most holy place into the holy place where three vessels are found, the table of shewbread, the golden lampstand, and the altar of incense, the account stops with the lampstand. Then there is the lapse in these chapters from 25 to 30 before the third vessel in that part is mentioned. So we have this considerable space between occupied by a great many things before that third vessel in the holy place is taken up. I think the order of things gives us the clue to this, for it is not an accident, not just that the writer omitted, forgot, and then came back again remembering, but there is government, and the very order of things here is full of valuable significance.

## **The order of things**

Let us note, then, the order of things as set forth by the Lord. The Lord began in the most holy place with the ark, and then the mercy seat. Then He passed into the holy place, to the table of shewbread, the golden lampstand; and then He took up the matter of the curtains of the tabernacle, and the coverings; then the boards, the sockets, the bars; then the veil; then the door of the tabernacle. From there He passed to the great altar, the altar of burnt offering. Then He dealt with the court, its pillars, its hangings, its sockets; then with the gate of the court. After that He spoke of the olive oil for the light; and then of the priesthood, firstly Aaron, and then Aaron's sons, the garments of the high priest, the garments of the priests, the breastplate of Aaron, the robe of the ephod to be worn in the most holy place; and then of the consecration of the priests; then of the daily offering; then the altar of incense.

It is remarkable to start right at the centre of things, the most holy place, and work outwards to the very circumference, taking up everything

as to the components, as to the ministry, as to the offerings; omitting only one thing, leaving it to the end: the altar of incense. No one who thoughtfully reads this account can fail to be impressed with that, and no one would ever think that it is because this altar of incense is of such insignificance that it can be left to the end. The reverse is the truth.

### **A priestly people**

All this of which we have been speaking as coming in between chapter 25 and chapter 30 is, on the one hand, a revelation of Christ in relation to man's fellowship with God. It all has to do with how God brings man into fellowship with Himself in Christ, how man's desire and man's need and the very object of man's being is to be realised, that is, fellowship with God. That is all set forth in this very comprehensive order in type. On the other hand, it is all a revelation of the church's vocation, the vocation of the people of God as a priestly people. It is a wonderful vocation. The priestly vocation of the Lord's people is to me one of the most wonderful things that God has ever revealed. It is amazing that God has brought man into fellowship with Himself in a priestly ministry in this universe, to embody and express in a spiritual life the wonder of redemption, of a redeemed universe by the blood of Jesus Christ. The church's vocation is to embody and express not only in doctrine or in word, but in spiritual power and influence, the great fact that this universe is redempto-centric, that redemption is at the heart of this universe. That is the essence of the familiar phrase, "hath made us a kingdom and priests (that is, a holy nation; that is, a holy church) unto our God". This is all, then, a revelation of the church's vocation in that capacity.

### **Grace and glory**

There is one little phrase in Scripture which gathers up all that this tabernacle and its system represents. It is the little phrase in the Psalm: "He will give grace and glory" (Ps. 84:11). The acacia wood always speaks of the grace, that is man in fellowship with God. The gold overspread, covering, encasing, is the divine glory. The two things are brought together, grace and glory. You find the whole system is shot through with that twofold blessing of God. You can take it as a key. The grace of God issuing in the glory of God! The glory of God resting upon us because of the grace of God!

## **The altar of incense**

Now we come to this altar of incense, and as it comes in where it does in this remarkable way after the whole thing has been comprehended and set forth, it shows one thing so very plainly and emphatically. It is almost as though the Holy Spirit had just suspended that and said, “Now then, we will just hold this for a minute. Let Me go over everything, touch on everything, and give you a full revelation. That is tremendously important, and it shall come in when I have set out everything else.” So it comes in there, and declares its own emphatic message, that everything is carried on and made effectual through prayer. That is, in prayer which is in virtue of the precious Blood, for the blood of atonement is sprinkled upon the horns of the altar and the altar itself. There is a very clear prescribing of that here in this account, and it is prayer in virtue of the blood of Jesus which touches everything, affects everything, makes everything of living value, and causes everything to be effectual. Paul’s phrase is “everything by prayer”.

You see how everything in these chapters is made to lead up to this altar. Everything is taken hold of and eventually leads to this altar, and then you see the immediate association of this altar of incense. Look again at this account, and you will find that it is before the veil that is by the ark of testimony; it is before the mercy seat that is over the testimony; it is beside the table of shewbread beside the lampstand.

## **The value of prayer**

Prayer in virtue of the blood of the Lord Jesus touches the deepest things, touches everything, is associated with everything. It is as though the Lord were saying, “Yes, there is an atonement; in the most holy place atonement has been made. Yes, there is a mercy seat for communion. Yes, there is every provision. But for a daily value of that a prayer life is essential. All this is ministry by prayer, is entered into by prayer. There is nothing — however great and comprehensive the divine provision may be — which can be known independently of prayer. Find a prayerless life, and all the great, wonderful meaning of God’s provision in Christ is of little real value. There is no entering gloriously into God’s great provision where prayer life is at low ebb. Whether it be communion with God, that communion is in prayer; whether it be in testimony to the world, that testimony is made effectual through prayer; whether it is in feeding upon

Christ, the Living Bread, that is by prayer. You say, The Word! Yes, but what is the Word without prayer? If you divorce your Bible from your prayer life you simply have a Book of laws and instructions, a manual, and you become merely theological or doctrinal. But prayer in association with the Word makes the Word live and makes it of spiritual value.

Notice what the Lord said: “When Aaron dresses the lamps in the morning, he shall offer incense” (verse 7). What does he do in dressing the lamps? He takes the snuffers. Some wick has got a bit dry and used up, and it is smouldering and smoking and filling the atmosphere with something that is not pleasant, and that is the flesh. This old man does get up, and this flesh life does manifest itself from time to time. Even though we have the Spirit, the flesh becomes unsteady at times, and there is always the possibility very near at hand of the flesh and the self and the old nature filling the air with something obnoxious, unpleasant, smoky and smouldering. That has got to be trimmed every morning by prayer: “Lord, trim the smouldering wick of my fleshly lips, of my fleshly doing; trim my nature, Lord, this morning. Cut off that which is me, which if not cut off today will make for much that is regrettable, and fill the day with cloudy, smoky, smouldering flesh.” Aaron trimmed the lamps with prayer every morning, and every evening when he lit the lamps he offered incense (verse 7-8). There is always darkness about, ready to encroach and overcome the heart which is God’s sanctuary, and it has got to be withstood lest the light which is in us become darkness.

### **The lamps — the testimony**

So the lamps have to be lit against the darkness, the light has to be maintained as a testimony against darkness. How? By prayer. The light of a testimony; to use the words of Paul about this world: “... in the midst of which we shine as lights in the world”. Our testimony, the testimony of Jesus in us, can be overpowered by darkness around us, but it has to be maintained by fresh supplies of the oil of the Spirit continually. How are the fresh supplies of the Spirit received? How is the light of testimony maintained against the darkness? By prayer.

Now you see the testimony is in view here: “When he trims the lamps ... when he lights the lamps”. That lamp is the lamp of the testimony of Jesus in the believer, in the church, so that the testimony of Jesus is always in view. Prayer is related to the testimony of Jesus. That is the basis of prayer, the maintenance of a clear witness, a clear testimony to Him in our

lives. As we have said, if the prayer life is weak, then the revelation of the Lord Jesus in us will be weak, and rather than being a revelation of Him it will be a manifestation of ourselves, and that is the thing the Lord says has got to be trimmed.

### **The horns — power and strength**

Then we read: "... the horns thereof shall be of one piece with it" (verse 2). The more perfect translation of the phrase would be, "the horns shall be itself". "*One piece*". Of course, that is what it means; not something made apart and joined on, but as wrought of one piece. But the literal translation is very emphatic: "the horns shall be of itself". The point is this. You have prayer in view, and this altar, and the horns in Scripture are always types of power, strength, and the strength is of itself, the strength is of prayer; prayer is strength. Power is not something apart from prayer, not something made in itself and given to us. Power is a part of prayer, and prayer is power. It is *one thing*. We have to learn more and more the power of prayer, and the prayer of power.

### **The blood of the sin offering**

Finally, the blood of the sin offering shall be sprinkled on the horns of the altar (verse 10). That blood is always in the Scripture a witness against what is of the old creation, to cut it off, and to bring in a new creation; a witness against the earthly, the worldly and the fleshly, and therefore the satanic; a witness unto the heavenly, the spiritual, and that which is of the Lord. It means here that the blood of the sin offering being sprinkled on the horns and on the altar makes everything heavenly. Our prayer life has got to be on a heavenly basis. It is not enough just to be praying for our earthly affairs. It is so easy to get up in the morning and hurry through a few words asking the Lord to bless us and ours, and our earthly things for the day, as though these things of this life were all. Oh, no! The Lord would have prayer touching things heavenly, things spiritual, related to that which is not of time but of eternity, not of this world but in relation to His eternal, heavenly intentions. He would have us separated from the merely temporal. There is a place for bringing those before the Lord, but they have got to be lifted in relation to the heavenly and not be dealt with as things in themselves. The blood makes everything heavenly, separating from the old creation. There is a very great deal of the old creation in our

prayers; it is our convenience, our deliverance from inconvenience and discomfort, our salvation from what would bring us a great deal of trouble and sorrow. That is the motive behind a good deal of our praying. “Lord, don’t let anything happen today, because it would spoil our life today!” But supposing the Lord would lift us into something altogether new through sorrow, are we then going to pray that prayer? No, our prayer must be: “Today, Lord, I want that which is of greatest account in relation to spiritual values and if that must be by way of trial and adversity I do not pray to be delivered from it. I say, “Lord, there is power to carry me through, and by prayer I come into touch with that power to carry me through the trials of every day in relation to the meaning of the trial.” That is heavenly praying. That is praying with your heart in heaven. “If ye be risen with Christ seek those things which are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your affections upon the things which are above, not on the things which are on the earth, for ye are dead and your life is hid with Christ in God” (Col. 3:1-3). “Our citizenship is in heaven.” Now the life of the believer is to be, therefore, one with heavenly interests always in view, and our prayer life is in relation to those interests.

### **Warfare in the heavenlies**

Where prayer counts most vitally and effectually is in the heavenlies. Ephesians makes that perfectly clear: “Our wrestling is not against flesh and blood, but against principalities and powers ... the spiritual hosts of wickedness in heavenly places.” Then, providing for that warfare, he gathers it all up, “Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit ...”. The warfare is in the heavenlies, and the prayer is most effectual there. That is where the power is indeed against the spiritual forces, and that blood brings us out there as our protection for a realm which is spiritual and therefore counts for most.

The place of the altar of incense, the holding of it to the end till everything else has been brought in, gives to prayer tremendous significance.

Now one closing thought. There was to be a crown of gold round the top of this altar of incense (verse 3), and that crown speaks of the glorifying of the Lord Jesus as the Victor. “But we behold ... Jesus, because of the suffering of death crowned with glory and honour...” (Heb. 2:9). The crown of the Victor over sin and death and the reason for that victory in this connection is in Isaiah 53: “He made intercession for

the transgressors.” The implication is that by His intercession for the transgressors in His cross He won. There were transgressors doomed under judgement, and His cross was a great work of intercession for the transgressors — and we were among them. By intercession in His cross, His great ministry of intercession in giving Himself, He saved us. You and I are today in Christ, saved men and women, because of the intercession of the Lord Jesus. He triumphed in intercession for us, and as High Priest He ever lives to make intercession, and every day we are living in the benefit of His continual intercession. That is the point in the crown of gold, the crown of glory. Now the Lord is calling us into that ministry. It is not only to share the travail, but to share the glory, not only to share the humiliation but to share the crown, and the crown is not just some objective thing given to us but for the Lord to come and crown our lives. That is to be His seal upon us, and He will say, “Well done! As I have overcome so you have overcome; share with Me My throne.” If that can be because my life was a life of prevailing prayer, that is the glory of it; and even now to know what it is to prevail in prayer is glory; it is the crown of glory.

Now you see there is a glory connected with prayer. The Lord calls us, then, to consider our prayer life, because everything depends upon it. It must be the time for trimming the wick, the works of the flesh. It must be the means of keeping the light clear and strong against the darkness and it must be the means of power, the ground of power, and of prevailing.

The Lord use His word, then, to bring us back, if needs be, to the strength of a full prayer life.