

## The Good Smelling Prayer – Altar of Incense

**Vision Statement** – Positively change the world through a better me and a better we in 2023.

### Review

**1. The Bronze altar, where the sacrifice was made – represents justification.** For without the sacrifice, you don't make it to the laver. Christ's sacrifice washed away our sins and delivered us from judgment. (Cross)

**2. The Bronze laver represents the washing away of daily sins not from judgment but for worship and intimacy with God.** (Confession)

**3. The Table of Shew Bread Represents communion and fellowship with God. (Communion)**

**4. The Lampstand represents Christ as the light of the world.**

**5. The golden altar of Incense – Represents Prayer & Worship**

“Worshipping God is the highest privilege and the greatest responsibility of the Christian life, because God is the highest Being in the universe and the One to whom we must one day give account. Everything we are and do flows out of our relationship with the Lord. God created us in His image so we might love Him and have fellowship with Him, not because we have to but because we want to. God is seeking people who will worship Him “in spirit and in truth” (John 4:23–24).” Warren Wiersbe

**Purpose of the Old Testament Tabernacle (that God may dwell among them)- And let them make Me a sanctuary, that I may dwell among them.** Exodus 25:8

**The tabernacle was a shadow of something or someone better to come.**

For the law, having a shadow of the good things to come, and not the very image of the things, can never with these same sacrifices, which they offer continually year by year, make those who approach perfect. Hebrews 10:1

### Exodus 30:1-10

- The two Altars
  - Outer Altar (Bronze Altar)
- Made of bronze, Approach by sacrifice
- You must pass through the first altar to get to the second - Unless your sins have been atoned for, you cannot approach God
  - Inner Altar (Altar of Incense)

A contrast of the two altars at this point will throw light upon our subject.

“The altar of gold is where God dealt with a saint; the altar of brass is where He dealt with a sinner.

The altar of gold speaks of heaven; the altar of brass speaks of earth.

The altar of gold has to do with holiness; the altar of brass has to do with sin.

The altar of gold, as a figure, represented what Christ does for us in heaven; the altar of brass, as a figure, represented what Christ did on earth.” Unknown

Made of wood, covered with gold, Approach God in worship, Signifies the work Christ does for us in heaven

The altar of gold was the place where incense was burned. Sacrifice of any kind was forbidden, only incense could be offered. Made of shittim wood overlaid with gold, the altar was 1x1x2 cubits (1.5x1.5x3 feet). It relates to our and Christ’s prayers. It speaks of Christ. Incense is the symbol of prayer and praise, as several Scriptures assure:

Making the connection between the golden altar and prayer

Now when He had taken the scroll, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb, each having a harp, and golden **bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints**. Revelation 5:8

Then another angel, **having a golden censer, came and stood at the altar. He was given much incense, that he should offer it with the prayers of all the saints upon the golden altar which was before the throne. And the smoke of the incense, with the prayers of the saints, ascended before God from the angel's hand**. Revelation 8:3-4

David cried:

LORD, I cry out to You; Make haste to me! Give ear to my voice when I cry out to You. **Let my prayer be set before You as incense**, The lifting up of my hands as the evening sacrifice.

Psalms 141:1-2

Zechariah (concerning John the Baptist)- **So it was, that while he was serving as priest before God in the order of his division, according to the custom of the priesthood, his lot fell to burn incense when he went into the temple of the Lord. And the whole multitude of the people was praying outside at the hour of incense. Then an angel of the Lord appeared to him, standing on the right side of the altar of incense**. Luke 1:8-11

God wants His children to Pray! This is a large portion of our worship.

**Theme:** When we pray according to God’s Word and Will a sweet smelling fragrance enters heaven. (God loves it when His children pray)

How does that Happen?

**1. Power of Prayer vs. 3**

Located on the altar were four horns. Horns in scripture represent power, salvation, security and help.

The power of prayer cannot be underestimated in our day of trouble and temptation. Day by day we need the strength which prayer alone can bring. Horns are the symbol of power and from our prayer altar we get the strength need to conquer!

We need His power in our pain and anguish, loneliness and emptiness, temptation and sin, broken trust and desertion.

Elements of powerful prayer.

**A. Pure Heart** - Once a year, on the Day of Atonement, the priest had to apply blood to the incense altar in order to make it ceremonially clean before God (Ex. 30:10).

John Bunyan, author of *The Pilgrim's Progress*, said, "In prayer it is better to have a heart without words, than words without a heart." Coldhearted praying is not effective praying (James 5:16).

Confess your trespasses to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much. (James 5:16)

"If I regard iniquity in my heart, the LORD will not hear" (Ps. 66:18 NKJV).

One the way to the golden altar we need to visit the bronze laver of cleansing. We must confess our sins before a holy God.

**B. Position of our Heart** – The golden altar was placed right beside the veil entering the Holy of Holies. It was right beside the presence of God. You had the altar the veil and the ark of the covenant within a few steps of each other.

We need to position ourselves in a spirit of humble prayer. Especially now since the veil has been torn in two.

Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need. (Hebrews 4:16)

I have set the LORD always before me; Because He is at my right hand I shall not be moved.

(Psalms 16:8)

A powerful prayer will be pure and it will be position in confidence. Confident that God hears our prayer based on the work of Jesus Christ.

In prayer we are reminded of God's power in our weakness.

And He said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness." Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. (2 Corinthians 12:9)

Prayer goes up and His Power comes down

**2. Persistent Prayer vs. 7-8** - Aaron was instructed to offer a "perpetual incense" upon the altar. To burn it morning and evening.

This reminds us of the command from Paul to the Thessalonians, **Pray without ceasing** 1 Thessalonians 5:17.

**Then He spoke a parable to them, that men always ought to pray and not lose heart,**

(Luke 18:1)

Maintaining consistency in prayer can be difficult. However, when we shift our focus it becomes easier. Many times, our prayer is focused on smaller self-consumed items. Lord please help me to get through the day. Lord, please help so and so with their health issues. Nothing is wrong with those types of prayer God invites us to pray about everything. However, we are also invited to pray for things that are bigger than ourselves. Praying for missionaries, for the Lord to save people, for God to do a mighty work in our generation.

To have a persistent prayer we should focus on items larger than ourselves.

**3. Prescribed Prayer – vs. 9** Strange incense was forbidden to be offered. Also, the formula for the incense was not to be duplicated. The "strange incense" speaks of any attempt to worship God which is contrary to His Word. Duplication is equally as bad, for it speaks of trying to please man while trying to serve God. A dead ritual and a lifeless liturgy are an abomination to God and produce spiritual deadening to man.

### **Leviticus 10:1-10 Nadab and Abihu**

Prayer isn't simply a jumble of words we mix together with the hope they'll be heard by God and answered.

The Bible names some of the "elements" of prayer—

- 1) Adoration
- 2) Confession
- 3) Thanksgiving
- 4) Petition
- 5) Submission

(1 Tim. 2:1; Phil. 4:6)

and even gives us a pattern to follow (Matt. 6:5–15).<sup>2</sup> You can be sure that the priest didn't rush into the tabernacle, quickly burn the incense, and then rush out. No, he prepared himself and reverently approached the altar, knowing that he was in the presence of the holy God.

#### **4. Perfume of Prayer vs. 34-38**

Read verses 34-35

The constant sacrifice of animals would have left a horrible smell. The incense is used to counteract the smell.

When we live contrary to God's Word and Will we send off a foul odor before God and others. However, when we live in line with God's Word and Will we send off a sweet fragrance before God and others.

Prayer is sweet to God. The gratitude and trust of the heart are to God as a fragrant perfume of golden censers.

Scriptures for support.

**Now thanks be to God who always leads us in triumph in Christ, and through us diffuses the fragrance of His knowledge in every place. For we are to God the fragrance of Christ among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing.** 2 Corinthians 2:14-15

**Indeed I have all and abound. I am full, having received from Epaphroditus the things sent from you, a sweet-smelling aroma, an acceptable sacrifice, well pleasing to God.** Philippians 4:18

#### **Conclusion:** Different facts about smells

1. Humans Can Detect At Least One Trillion Different Smells

2. It's Possible to Smell Feelings

Amazingly, our sense of smell is so developed it has been discovered that we can smell fear, disgust, and happiness on other people. A 2012 study found that smell signals exist in our sweat, helping others empathize with us when we're experiencing certain emotions.

3. Women have a stronger sense of smell than men

4. Smell is Our Most Memorable Sense

It has been discovered that we remember smells for much longer than sights, sounds, tastes and feelings. Amazingly, people can remember smells with a 65% accuracy after one year, whilst visual recall is only 50/50 after a quarter of the time.

5. We Can Smell Before We Are Born

Smell is the first sense to develop, with unborn babies enjoying fully-formed and functioning smell. This sense then continues to play a major role in our early development, with the smell of crayons routinely noted as one of our earliest memories from childhood.

#### 6. Taste is Reliant on Smell

It's no secret that the smell of food massively impacts our taste perception, accounting for up to 95% of the flavour. However, did you know that without a sense of smell it would be almost impossible to tell the difference in taste between a potato and an onion?

#### 7. And Good Smells Make Us Happy

Perhaps the least surprising fact about scent. If we smell something we find pleasant, it can have a positive effect on the mind and help to lift our mood. So, we believe it's always a good idea to have a candle or oil diffuser to hand for when we need a little pick-me-up.

With all these amazing features concerning smell no wonder God Himself has compared our Christian life and prayer with a sweet smelling aroma. Let me end with a question today. Are you diffusing a sweet smelling fragrance before God?