

Brad Jordan / General Adult

Exodus: Delivered By God, For God / Worship / Exodus 30:1–10

This sermon examined Exodus 30:1–10 and the significance of the golden altar of incense. It highlighted the altar's construction, purpose, and placement in the tabernacle as typological of Christ's mediation. Drawing from the example of Nadab and Abihu, it warned against worship that is unauthorized and self-willed. The message emphasized that true worship must be continual, grounded in the finished work of Christ, and conducted according to God's Word. It concluded with a call for self-examination and a renewed commitment to worship the Lord in spirit and in truth, offering only what He has commanded and accepting no substitutes.

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## Introduction

In our previous labor through Exodus we spent much time working through the various implements that God instructed Moses to have the people of Israel build for the Tabernacle. As you may recall, this consisted of the Ark of the Covenant, the Table of the Bread of Presence, the Golden Lampstands and the Brazen Altar. As we come to the next section in our text we will be introduced to two additional items that God will instruct Moses to have made, the Golden Altar and the Laver. Before we dive into the text for this morning, which will center around the Golden Altar, it is necessary that we set the context for these items and address a couple of issues that often arise when we begin to study them.

One of the first questions that often arises is why these two items were not included in the initial listing of the implements that God gave to Moses. There are a couple of different thoughts on this particular matter. The first of these is the idea that this was not original to the text but was a later addition since the earlier text did not contain these descriptions. First of all there is no evidence that this is factual, nothing in the original manuscripts that have been found to suggest that this is the case. Secondly, when we begin to entertain such notions what we are actually doing is one of two things, either we are assuming that God does not know what He is doing as He reveals His word and His will to His people or we are hearing the same question that Eve fell subject to in the Garden when the serpent asked

“Did God really say...”.

The second thought, which carries much more weight and merit, especially when we look at the overall structure of the instructions that Moses has been given is that as God completes the institution of the priesthood, as we saw in the last part of chapter 29, He begins to deal with the everyday work of the priests. Moreover, if you will recall, we stated that as God gave Moses the instructions regarding the tabernacle they were done in an order that moved from God out to the people in order to dwell with them. Once the priesthood has been introduced, the focus is bringing the people in to God, through the work of the ordinary priests, but especially through the work of the High Priests.

It is within this context that we will take a look at our text for today taken from Exodus 30:1-10. Take your copy of God’s word and turn there, once there...

## Text

Please stand for the reading of God’s Holy, Inerrant, Infallible, Authoritative, Sufficient, and Complete Word

### **Exodus 30:1–10 LSB**

“Moreover, you shall make an altar as a place for burning incense; you shall make it of acacia wood.

“Its length *shall be* a cubit, and its width a cubit; it shall be square. And its height *shall be* two cubits; its horns *shall be* of the same piece.

“You shall overlay it with pure gold, its top and its sides all around, and its horns; and you shall make a gold molding all around for it.

“You shall make two gold rings for it under its molding; you shall make *them* on its two side walls—on opposite sides—and they shall be holders for poles with which to carry it.

“You shall make the poles of acacia wood and overlay them with gold.

“You shall put this altar in front of the veil that is near the ark of the

testimony, in front of the mercy seat that is over the testimony, where I will meet with you.

“Aaron shall burn fragrant incense on it; he shall burn it every morning when he trims the lamps.

“When Aaron trims the lamps at twilight, he shall burn incense. *There shall be* continual incense before Yahweh throughout your generations.

“You shall not offer any strange incense on this altar or burnt offering or grain offering; and you shall not pour out a drink offering on it.

“Aaron shall make atonement on its horns once a year; he shall make atonement on it with the blood of the sin offering of atonement once a year throughout your generations. It is most holy to Yahweh.”

Almighty God, as we bow before Your throne of mercy and grace, we give thanks for Your word, for the instruction and guidance that we find there and for the work of Your Holy Spirit in illuminating its truths to our hearts. We pray that as we study this text together this morning that our hearts would be pierced, that we would meditate on it and be forever changed by it. We give thanks that we may gather in this place to bring Glory and Honor to Your name. Father we are thankful for Christ’s work on calvary’s cross, making it possible for us to enter into Your presence with thanksgiving and into Your courts with praise. We ask all of this in the precious name of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, Amen.

## The Golden Altar

As our text opens up we see immediately God moving from the daily sacrifices to the fabrication of the altar of incense. The altar itself was to be approximately 18” square and stand approximately 36” tall. It was to be made of acacia wood covered in gold. You may recall that acacia wood was readily available in the region making it very practical, but that it also has unique characteristics that gave it the distinction as being incorruptible in nature. The wood itself being a type or shadow pointing us to the human nature of Christ. The gold, that most precious of metals, that was used to cover the wood speaks of Christ divine nature. If the altar itself is a type or

shadow of Christ, then surely these two materials coming together call our attention to the two natures of Christ. The reality that He is both wholly God and wholly man.

Like the brazen altar in the courtyard, this altar also had horns that were fabricated from one piece. Just as the horns on the brazen altar these represented a place of refuge, specifically the refuge that is found only in Christ. Just as with the Table and the Ark it had rings for transporting from place to place as the people moved throughout the wilderness. Also, just like the Ark and the Table it had a golden "crown" fabricated around all four sides. This has been suggested to be typological of the crown of Christ in His roles as King and Great High Priest.

## The Purpose

As the details regarding the way in which the altar closed, God shifts to its location. As I stated earlier we have seen in the previous instructions regarding the tabernacle a movement from the holy to the profane. You may recall that as God revealed His instructions to Moses, He started with the Ark of the Covenant, then came the rest of the implements within the holy place, then the fabrication of the curtains of the tabernacle, the brazen altar and then the outer wall surrounding the tabernacle compound. In each of these we moved a step further away from God until we were outside of not just the tent of meeting, but the entirety of the tabernacle. Once we arrived at that point, it was then that the instructions move to the installation of the priesthood. The priesthood that provided a way to return to the interior of the tabernacle to a place where God would both meet and dwell with His people.

Each of the instructions regarding the priesthood took place at the doorway of the tent of meeting, in the presence of God, bringing His people to this doorway. Again, we are reminded continually throughout these instructions of the one way. Recall there is one entrance point into the tabernacle compound, one entrance point into the tent of meeting and one entrance point into the holy of holies. The priest were another one way, it was only through the work of the high priest that the sacrifices made were deemed acceptable to God. Those sacrifices made it possible for the priests to enter into the one door into the holy place for the purpose of daily ministering before the Lord.

It was there, in the holy place, up against the veil, just before entry into the holy of holies that this golden altar was to be placed. As we saw in the daily sacrifices last week there was to be incense burned on this altar every morning and evening, a continual offering before the Lord God. The morning burning is tied to the work of the priest trimming the lamps. The word we see here in the original language speaks not just of trimming the wicks, but of making the lamps new, which typically speaks of the work of the Spirit within the lives of believers.

This altar served one purpose and one purpose only, to be the place where the incense was burned daily before God.

## Application and Understanding

Having covered the basics of its construction and its purpose, we now come to the place where we seek to understand the full meaning of this to us. It is one thing to be able to look at the beauty of this item in reference to ancient Israel and see the purpose and meaning that it held for them, it is yet another for us to begin the process of applying this to our lives and understanding what this particular item has to say to each of us here this morning. Most people are familiar with this altar in reference to the story we find in Leviticus chapter 10. You may recall that chapter 8 of Leviticus is that which we read alongside Exodus 29 as we worked through the ordination and consecration of the priesthood. However, if you continue along in chapter 9, as I referred to last week, you will find a very similar effort undertaken by the priest to consecrate the people of God. As you come out of chapter 9 and into chapter 10 you read these words:

### **Leviticus 9:22–24 LSB**

Then Aaron lifted up his hands toward the people and blessed them, and he stepped down after offering the sin offering and the burnt offering and the peace offerings.

And Moses and Aaron went into the tent of meeting. Then they came out and blessed the people. And the glory of Yahweh appeared to all the people.

Then fire came out from before Yahweh and consumed the burnt offering and the portions of fat on the altar. And all the people saw *it* and shouted

and fell on their faces.

**Leviticus 10:1-3 LSB**

Then Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron, took their respective firepans and put fire in them. Then they placed incense on it and offered strange fire before Yahweh, which He had not commanded them.

And fire came out from the presence of Yahweh and consumed them, and they died before Yahweh.

Then Moses said to Aaron, "It is what Yahweh spoke, saying,

'By those who come near Me I will be treated as holy,

And before all the people I will be glorified.'"

So Aaron kept silent.

This particular passage has been rightly used regarding worship, but before we address that, I think there is one other truth here that we need to be sure we do not miss. If you look at the beginning of chapter 9 you will see that these events occurred on the eighth day. This is the day immediately following the seven day period of time of ordaining the priests. Unlike the priests, this ceremony only lasts for one day and in it we see God's approval of the priesthood and their work, this is what we read in verses 22-24 of chapter 9. As chapter 10 opens, we are either on the same day or the next day, either way we are at the very beginning of the priestly ministry. In their zeal to conduct their duties we have this account of two of the sons of Aaron.

Commentators have disagreed regarding the "strange fire" that is offered, some pointing to the fire itself as being wrong and others pointing to the incense as being wrong, however, in all honesty it matters not whether it was the fire, the incense, the time, or the firepans that were used, what matters is that it was not according to what had been commanded by God. The first thing that this should remind us of is that even the most well prepared can quickly falter when not adhering to God's commands.

Repeatedly demonstrated for these priests over the preceding 8 days has been God's holiness and the care in which each instruction was to be

followed. Remember, Moses is told multiple times during the receiving of the instructions regarding the tabernacle, its implements and the priesthood to do everything, just as God commanded and we see from scripture that they did just as God had commanded... that is right up to the moment that they did not which was almost immediately, even after all the careful instruction, preparation, effort that had gone into setting up and ordaining these priests. It should serve as a reminder to us that knowing the commands of God are different than obeying the commands of God. Intellectual knowledge of God's word does not necessarily equate true practice of God's word and we need both in our lives as believers.

As I said a few moments ago, this particular passage is typically and rightly used to speak of the proper worship of God. It is a reminder to us of the seriousness with which God takes worship of Himself. Note what Exodus 30:9 ""You shall not offer any strange incense on this altar or burnt offering or grain offering; and you shall not pour out a drink offering on it." this is a direct command of God to take care in how you use this gift that I have given you. Moses speaking to Aaron, reminds Him of God's words in Leviticus 10:3 "Then Moses said to Aaron, "It is what Yahweh spoke, saying, 'By those who come near Me I will be treated as holy, And before all the people I will be glorified.'" So Aaron kept silent."

Multiple times as we have worked through these passages we have dealt with the modern viewpoint of the Old Testament and I certainly do not want to belabor the point to you, however, it bears mentioning once again what Paul writes to Timothy in 2 Timothy 3:16 "All Scripture is God-breathed and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness," This means that there is something here, not just for ancient Israel, but for God's people here today. The words we find in Leviticus 10:3 are not a command for a singular people at a singular point in history, this is true of all of God's people for all of eternity. In order to rightly understand this as being a principle that carries forth starts with a right understanding of God's nature, His immutability, or the fact that He does not change, He is the same in all of time past, in all of time present and in all of time future.

## Right Worship

There are three very specific principles regarding worship that we see at

play here in the final three verses of our text for this morning. These three principles are that worship is to be done continually, it is to be done properly and finally that it is to be done on the basis of the finished work of Christ alone. Although each of these is foundational, the final one of these is the most foundational of all and it is found in verse 10 where we read Exodus 30:10 ""Aaron shall make atonement on its horns once a year; he shall make atonement on it with the blood of the sin offering of atonement once a year throughout your generations. It is most holy to Yahweh.""

As we read these words we must take into account all that we have learned regarding the brazen altar, the sacrifices and their meaning. For the Israelites this spoke of their immediate ability to come to God, to be accepted by Him. For us, all of the sacrifices and the brazen altar speak to us of nothing less than the Lord Jesus and His vicarious sacrifice on our behalf. The atonement that is made to allow us to approach the throne of grace is completed in the life, death and resurrection of Christ. It is only because He took on the full wrath of God for the sins of His people that His people are allowed into the presence of God at all.

Just as in the tabernacle there was one way into the courtyard, one priesthood, one doorway into the tent of meeting and one veil into the holy of holies, so Christ is the one and only way that we can enter before God in any capacity. let alone worship. In John 14:1-6 we read:

**John 14:1-6 LSB**

"Do not let your heart be troubled; believe in God, believe also in Me.

"In My Father's house are many dwelling places; if it were not so, I would have told you; for I go to prepare a place for you.

"And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself, that where I am, *there* you may be also.

"And you know the way where I am going."

Thomas said to Him, "Lord, we do not know where You are going. How do we know the way?"

Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father but through Me.

Jesus speaking to the woman at the well in John 4 said to her in the 23 and 24th verse says: John4:23-24

**John 4:23–24 LSB**

“But an hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for such people the Father seeks to be His worshipers.

“God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth.”

Not only is Christ the only way to the Father, both in salvation and in worship, He is also quite literally the truth. It is by the Spirit that we have been regenerated and made new, our lamps tended, our lights flourishing and our worship made right. As we looked at the clothing of the high priest we talked about the gold plate on the forehead of the priest and that through the work of the priest even the things that were set apart as holy were cleansed of their iniquity. AW Pink is helpful here as he writes:

**Gleanings in Exodus 6. Its Use**

we also need to ponder this tenth verse from the practical viewpoint. Looked at thus its teaching is. parallel with that word in Exodus 28:38, “That Aaron may bear the iniquity of the holy things,”. Our prayers are so faulty, our praises so feeble, our worship so far below the level of what it ought to be, that even our “holy things” needed to be cleansed by the blood of atonement. How humbling this is!

True worship can only come on the grounds and basis of the finished work of Christ, apart from this we are incapable of truly worshipping. This altar is a type that points us to the continual work of Christ on behalf of His people. He sits at the right hand of the Father but does so in such a way as to be in continual intercession for His people, if our worship is not on the grounds of Christ, if our faith is not truly in Him, then our best efforts at worship are faulty. Take the case of the two sons of Aaron, if in fact the incense that they used was exactly as God prescribed and the fire that was used was taken just as God prescribed in Numbers 16:46 “... “Take your censer and put in it fire from the altar, ...” and Leviticus 16:12–13 ““And he shall take a firepan full of coals of fire from upon the altar before Yahweh and two handfuls of finely ground fragrant incense...” then the problem lie elsewhere. Again we aren’t given and further details and to speculate would be foolishness, the point is that even the right actions, the right

songs, the right liturgy, etc. can lead to false worship if the worship is not first and foremost based on Christ.

The second truth that we see regarding worship here is that it is to be continual. The language in verse 8 is very similar to the language we saw regarding the sacrifices from last week. The incense itself is representative of the prayers of the people of God. Psalm 141:2 "May my prayer be established as incense before You; The lifting up of my hands as the evening offering." Matthew Henry writes in connection with this:

**Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible: Complete and Unabridged in One Volume** Exodus 30:1–10

As the smoke of the incense ascended, so much our desires towards God rise in prayer, being kindled with the fire of holy love and other pious affections. When the priest was burning incense the people were praying (Lu. 1:10), to signify that prayer is the true incense. This incense was offered daily, it was a perpetual incense (v. 8); for we must pray always, that is, we must keep up stated times for prayer every day, morning and evening, at least, and never omit it, but thus pray without ceasing.

In addition, the burning of incense in conjunction with the dressing or lighting of the lamps speak to us regarding the accompaniment of prayer with the reading of the Word, our light and lamp. These are the devotions of the people of God. His word directs our prayers, Christ intercession on our behalf turns those prayers into a sweet aroma before God. As we come to the end of scripture we read in Revelation 5:8 "And when He had taken the scroll, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb, each one having a harp and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints." but note that these are just prayers, when we include what we read in Revelation 8:3 "And another angel came and stood at the altar, having a golden censer; and much incense was given to him, so that he might add it to the prayers of all the saints on the golden altar which was before the throne." we find that the incense offered on the altar makes the prayers a sweet aroma.

There is a warning, however, regarding our lives and our hearts and this incense. We find it in the words of the prophet Isaiah as he speaks to the people the words of warning from God. In fact, it maybe even answers the question regarding Nadab and Abihu, that it wasn't the fire or the incense but rather the heart and life of these men. Isaiah writes in Isaiah 1:13

“Bring your worthless offerings no longer, Incense is an abomination to Me. New moon and sabbath, the calling of convocation— I cannot endure wickedness and the solemn assembly.” and then later in Isaiah 66:3 “But he who slaughters an ox is the one who strikes down a man; He who sacrifices a lamb is the one who breaks a dog’s neck; He who offers a grain offering is the one who offers swine’s blood; He who offers a memorial offering of frankincense is the one who blesses wickedness. As they have chosen their own ways, And their soul takes pleasure in their detestable things,” both of these passages warning of one whose heart and life and not prepared, and preparation only occurs through faith in Christ alone and worship according to that faith.

Finally, the third truth that we see here, that worship is to be done properly, or more aptly stated, only as it has been prescribed in the revealed word of God. We have spent much time on Wednesday nights discussing the regulative principle of worship and here again we see this principle displayed to us. Note the words of Exodus 30:9 “You shall not offer any strange incense on this altar or burnt offering or grain offering; and you shall not pour out a drink offering on it.” These are all specific commands of God. The only way that the incense that is consumed on this altar is acceptable and pleasing is if it is done in accordance with the commands of God. All through out scripture we see demonstrated for us the directions of God regarding His worship. Of course this does not mean that we are to use these specific items in our worship, that is not the command, rather the principle found is that our approach is based on the foundational work of Christ and in accordance with what God has commanded. Think back for a moment on what Moses said to Aaron in the immediate moments after the death of his sons in Leviticus 10. He says Leviticus 10:3 “...,” “It is what Yahweh spoke, saying, ‘By those who come near Me I will be treated as holy, And before all the people I will be glorified.’” ...”

God will be treated as holy and He will be glorified. Jesus’ words to the woman at the well should be ringing in your ears that true worship will be “in spirit and in truth”. In the opening words of Isaiah chapter 6 we see Isaiah’s vision that served as his call into the work of prophet. He says in verse one that it began in the year that King Uzziah died. Uzziah, according to 2 Chronicles 26:4–5 “And he did what was right in the sight of Yahweh, according to all that his father Amaziah had done. And he continued to seek God in the days of Zechariah, who had understanding through the

vision of God; and as long as he sought Yahweh, God made him succeed." However, as we continue to read of this king who did right in the sight of Yahweh we find these words:

**2 Chronicles 26:16–22 LSB**

But when he became strong, his heart was so proud that he acted corruptly, and he was unfaithful to Yahweh his God. And he entered the temple of Yahweh to burn incense on the altar of incense.

Then Azariah the priest entered after him and with him eighty priests of Yahweh, men of valor.

And they stood against Uzziah the king and said to him, "It is not for you, Uzziah, to burn incense to Yahweh, but for the priests, the sons of Aaron who are set apart as holy to burn incense. Get out of the sanctuary, for you have been unfaithful and will have no honor from Yahweh God."

But Uzziah, with a censer in his hand for burning incense, was enraged; and while he was enraged with the priests, the leprosy broke out on his forehead before the priests in the house of Yahweh, beside the altar of incense.

And Azariah the chief priest and all the priests looked at him, and behold, he *was* leprous on his forehead; and they hurried him out of there, and he himself also hastened to get out because Yahweh had smitten him.

So King Uzziah was a leper to the day of his death; and he lived in a separate house, being a leper, for he was cut off from the house of Yahweh. And Jotham his son *was* over the king's house, judging the people of the land.

Now the rest of the acts of Uzziah, first to last, the prophet Isaiah, the son of Amoz, has written.

Uzziah's zeal was to worship, but in so doing, he worshipped wrongly. This, again, should serve as a strong warning to us here today, God desires His people to worship Him in spirit and truth. To do this means that our worship is based on the foundational work of Christ, it is offered continuously before the Lord and that it is accomplished in accordance with

His word ALONE.

## Conclusion

As we bring our time in this text to a close, we are reminded that worship is not a mere formality or expression of personal creativity—it is the sacred approach of sinful man to a holy God. The golden altar, standing just before the veil, testifies to the privilege of drawing near to God, but only through the means He has ordained. Incense was to rise perpetually, not haphazardly, but precisely and properly, under the direction of God’s command. It is a powerful image of our prayers, our praise, and our presence before the Lord—all acceptable only through the mediation of Christ.

The lesson of Nadab and Abihu lingers as a solemn warning: zeal without obedience is not worship—it is rebellion. The same fire that consumed the offering in blessing consumed them in judgment, for they did what was not commanded. And yet, how often do we presume to offer God our “best” while neglecting His will?

God’s standard for worship has not changed. He is still holy. He is still to be glorified. And He still calls His people to worship Him in spirit and truth—on the grounds of the finished work of Christ alone. We must ask not only *whether* we worship, but *how* we worship.

So I ask you, as we close: **Is your worship grounded in the work of Christ, shaped by His Word, and offered in humble submission to His holiness—or have you brought strange fire before the Lord?**

This question is not rhetorical. It demands a response. Not in word only, but in life and in worship. May we never offer what God has not commanded, and may our worship forever be a sweet aroma—pleasing and acceptable before His throne.

## Closing Prayer

Gracious and Holy God,  
We come before You humbled by the truth of Your Word and the weight of Your holiness. We thank You for revealing to us the seriousness of worship and the great privilege it is to enter Your presence through the finished

work of Christ our Lord. Forgive us, O Lord, for the times we have worshipped according to our own desires, offering that which You have not commanded. Cleanse our hearts, sanctify our minds, and conform our wills to Yours.

May our prayers rise before You like incense, made acceptable only through Christ's intercession. Teach us to worship in reverence and awe, with hearts that love truth and minds that are yielded to Your commands. Help us to guard our worship, to keep it holy, pure, and pleasing in Your sight. Make us ever mindful of the altar where Christ once for all bore our sin and opened the way for us to come boldly before You.

And may our lives be continual offerings—living sacrifices, holy and acceptable—set apart for Your glory. In the name of Jesus Christ, our Great High Priest, we pray.

Amen.