

## ESTABLISHING AN ALTAR TO ENCOUNTER GOD

Deuteronomy 30:11-20

February 13, 2022

Today everything is being shaken that can be shaken! This world is turmoil! Canada is in turmoil! Because of all this turmoil there are many prophetic voices saying that we are in the midst of another great spiritual awakening, which will awaken the sleeping church from its slumber and apathy. If that is in fact true, then along with this awakening will surely come the greatest attack from Satan that has ever been released, and every believer will need to be prepared for that attack, so they will not be deceived, and fall away when things get increasingly difficult. We need to understand that Satan doesn't want the church to come awake and become a serious threat to his work on this earth. Satan knows that a weak, divided and struggling church will never be a threat to him; however, a power filled, passionate unified church that knows the authority they have under Christ would be an unstoppable force in taking back marriages, families, and society from the devil's evil clutches. So, to prevent this spiritual awakening from taking place, our enemy has been at work in the church, quietly behind the scenes, causing us to struggle with hearing and discerning the voice of God. As a result, the church has been fighting the wrong battles, busy fighting amongst themselves over such things as COVID protocols, vaccines, lockdowns, and the LGBTQ+ agenda, instead of becoming unified to fight the real enemy, who comes only to steal and kill, and destroy. **Ephesians 6:12, "For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms."**

I believe that the church's greatest challenge and difficulty today is in the area of spiritual discernment – we are having trouble tuning into and hearing the Holy Spirit, so the church is getting confused in what the Bible is teaching us on a great many subjects, especially knowing what is the truth, knowing on which side of the issue we should be on. Nineteenth-century preacher Charles Spurgeon once said, *"Discernment is not about knowing the difference between right and wrong. It is about knowing the difference between right and almost right."* The lines between right and almost right are getting increasingly blurred, so we start misreading the Bible, we start compromising our faith and questioning what the church had believed for centuries. So, the church today desperately needs the gift of discernment to know when God is speaking in our midst and have a crystal clear

understanding of what He is saying, so we can proclaim the truth which will turn this world upside-down, like the early Christians did in the first few centuries. Today, people are searching for the truth like never before because they are confused, unsure of the future, many are without hope, wandering about without meaning and purpose. That's why people today need an encounter with a loving Savior, so we need to start telling the world that the church is still alive and open for business, where people can have a supernatural encounter with a life changing God and know the truth and the truth will set them free!

God has a challenge for us this morning – and it begins with these questions, “*Do you dare to continue where you currently are? Are you part of the problem or part of the solution?*” I have often said that I believe God has a purpose and destiny for every believer and wants to use us to change our part of this world for His kingdom, no matter how small or how large that task may be. While God needs people up front in leadership roles, God also needs people behind the scenes in supportive roles, especially in the area of prayer, and they are all equally valuable and equally important. We all have a divine calling, and our divine calling began the moment we were born and will not end until the moment we die, and during this period of time we are currently in, this “*dash,*” between our day of birth and our day of death, has been written in the books that God keeps in heaven. And one day God will hold us accountable for the time we spend in this “*dash,*” on how we fulfilled our God given purpose and calling in furthering His kingdom!

I also believe that our lives are a result of or consequence of the choices we make, so we need to heed the words that Moses spoke to God's chosen people, the Israelites, before they entered the Promised Land. After wandering in the desert wilderness for forty difficult and challenging years, Moses reminds them that each one of them now have a choice to make, will they choose to faithfully serve the God who brought them out of bondage in Egypt and provided for them in the wilderness, or not. “*This day I call the heavens and the earth as witnesses against you that I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Now choose life, so that you and your children may live and that you may love the Lord your God, listen to his voice, and hold fast to him. For the Lord is your life*” (Deuteronomy 30:19-20). Much like the Israelites, our current life, for the most part, is a result or consequence of the choices we have made up to this point, and to proceed further and grow deeper in our walk we need to listen to God's voice to make wise choices!

To help us in this process of making wise choices – we have spent the last 5 weeks on discipleship training. Learning to walk the walk and follow Christ as He leads us and guides us on our Christian journey towards godliness and holiness. Now, it's time for us to get practical and put into practice all that we have learned in the past messages, and the first place to begin is always with ourselves. I need a Holy Ghost revival to take place within me, and you need a Holy Ghost revival to take place within you to bring about real change, so that we would always choose life!

Where I want to take us this morning, is in helping us to establishing an **ALTAR** in our lives to encounter God in a meaningful way on a daily basis. You will notice that the entire Bible is grounded in God's desire for us to completely surrender and submit our lives to Him and to get to know our Heavenly Father in an intimate, real, and powerful way, and to come against and resist the devil. In other words, choose each day who you will follow – God or the devil – Life or death, for God is life and the devil is death. Each decision we make is basically a decision between life and death! Who we will follow! Who we will surrender our lives to! **James 4:7-10**, spells this surrendered life beautifully, *“So then, surrender to God. Stand up to the devil and resist him and he will flee. Move your heart closer and closer to God, and He will come even closer to you. But make sure you cleanse your life, you sinners, and keep your heart pure and stop doubting. Feel the pain of your sin, be sorrowful and weep! Let your joking around be turned to mourning and your joy into deep humiliation. Be willing to be made low before the Lord and he will exalt you.”* A surrendered life to God requires Godliness and holiness!

You also need to realize here that this surrendered life is dependent on us making the first move towards God. God waits patiently for us to draw close to Him before He will draw close to us, so if God is distant in your life, you are the problem, not God. In order to come closer to God, James calls us to take our sins seriously, to feel the deep pain that sin causes our Heavenly Father, and the best place to sacrifice our sins is on an altar where they can be totally consumed. You will find throughout the Old Testament, that God always showed up whenever His people built an altar, or where His people rebuilt a broken-down altar after they had drifted away from God into idolatry. Altars were a place where people encountered God!

The very first altar recorded in the Bible –was built by Noah. When Noah and his family exited the ark, the first thing Noah did was to build an altar, on which he

made a sacrificial burnt offering in thanksgiving to God for sparing their lives through this world-wide flood. This offering is recorded for us in **Genesis 8:20-21**, which tells us that the altar Noah built caused God to draw near, softening God's heart towards mankind and His creation after wiping-out most of His creation in a global flood, with the result that God made an everlasting covenant promise to never destroy mankind and all living creatures by a flood ever again, ***“Then Noah built an altar to the Lord and, taking some of all the clean animals and clean birds, he sacrificed burnt offerings on it. The Lord smelled the pleasing aroma and said in his heart: ‘Never again will I curse the ground because of humans, even though every inclination of the human heart is evil from childhood. And never again will I destroy all living creatures, as I have done.’”*** The result of Noah coming near to God was that God blessed Noah and his sons, telling them to be fruitful and increase in number and replenish and fill the earth again, and then sets His rainbow in the clouds as a sign of this everlasting covenant made between God and every living creature on this earth, ***“I establish my covenant with you; never again will all life be destroyed by the waters of a flood; never again will there be a flood to destroy the earth”*** (Genesis 9:11). God showed up because Noah built an altar to encounter God. Once Noah drew close to God, God drew near to him!

There are many other examples in the Bible of God encountering His people by way of an altar – so we need to see the altar as an important place to have a significant life-changing encounter with God. Many churches have an altar, and coming to the altar is an important public testimony that you want to get real with God and experience significant breakthroughs in your walk. While the physical altar in a church is an important place to come publicly before God, I want to also suggest that you can have an altar experience anywhere you happen to be as well. You can have a life changing altar experience in your home, outside in nature, sitting behind the wheel of your vehicle, and even in your workplace, because an altar is not only a physical place, but also a spiritual place. Your altar is any place where you have an uninterrupted encounter with your Heavenly Father, without distractions so you can meet with God, talk to God, and listen to God. So, I am suggesting that we all need both those physical and spiritual altars where we can have an intimate meeting with God.

This altar will become a special place where you will have significant encounters with God – but be warned, an altar always means surrender. You will always have to battle the pride of self and die to self whenever you arrive at your altar, so that

your spirit can come to life, and the distracting voices of this world can be silenced. The importance of the altar throughout the Old Testament, especially at the Temple in Jerusalem, was for sacrifices, where innocent animals shed their blood so that God would forgive the people's sins. When the very first humans Adam and Eve sinned, there was separation between God and mankind, and God required a sacrifice to bring them close to Him once again. God made that initial sacrifice by shedding the life blood of an innocent lamb to clothe the very first sinful humans to take away their guilt and shame, because it's only by the shedding of blood that our sins can be covered. The attempt by the first humans to hide their guilt and shame by their own efforts in sewing fig leaves together was totally inadequate, because it didn't involve sacrifice, which is another aspect of coming closer to God. God want to know how serious and committed you are to following Him. God wants to know how much you are willing to sacrifice in following Him. Are you all in or not!

The Apostle Paul in **Romans 12:1-2**, also speaks to us about an altar, similar to the altar of sacrifice in the Temple, but at this altar we become the sacrifice.

***“Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God – this is your true and proper worship. Do not be conformed to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what Gods’ will is – his good, pleasing and perfect will.”*** We live our lives in a sacrificial way when we stop being conformed to the patterns of this world, stop having worldly thoughts, stop speaking worldly words and carrying out worldly actions. Paul calls this a living sacrifice because we often crawl off the altar, and then need to repent and crawl back on the altar, rededicating our lives back to serving God rather than serving ourselves, and being conformed to the world.

Another altar of importance that is a good example of a living sacrifice was located at Mt Moriah, the place where Abraham was asked by God to do something unthinkable, to sacrifice his son of promise, Isaac, as a burnt sacrifice. This is where God tested His servant Abraham's faith to the highest degree, and Abraham passed God's test with flying colours. This is a great picture that pointed to what God our Heavenly Father did for us at Calvary (the exact same place that Abraham was directed by God to sacrifice Isaac), was where God provided His Son as the spotless lamb to be sacrificed as our substitute. Thankfully, as Abraham reached out his hand and took the knife to slay his son, an angel of the Lord stopped him,

with these words, ***“Do not lay a hand on the boy. Do not do anything to him. Now I know that you fear God, because you have not withheld from me your son, your only son”*** (Genesis 22:12). Abraham passed the test! God now knew how committed Abraham was in following Him whole-heartedly, by how much Abraham was willing to sacrifice. Abraham held nothing back from God – He was all in! And then the Lord provided Abraham with a ram caught by its horns in a thicket for a burnt offering instead of his son. God always provides for those who are completely surrendered to Him!

Abraham meet God at this altar and God greatly blessed him, ***“I swear by myself declares the Lord that because you have done this and have not withheld your son, your only son, I will surely bless you and make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and as the sand of the seashore. Your descendants will take possession of the cities of their enemies, and through your offspring all nations on earth will be blessed, because you have obeyed me”*** (Genesis 22:16-18). Satan tempts us to bring out the worst in us; however, God teats His followers to bring out their best, and those closest to God often find themselves in the midst of the biggest tests. Whenever you are tested, be thankful, consider yourself worthy to be a son/daughter of God, your Heavenly Father!

The altar of sacrifice has always been the place God has used to bring life out of death, and that’s why, when Jesus was trying to get His disciples to understand His purpose for coming to earth, He said, ***“Very truly I tell you, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds. Anyone who loves their life will lose it, while anyone who hates their life in this world will keep it for eternal life”*** (John 12:24-25). We have to die to our selfish desires, plus the things of this world that draws us away from God, to live for Christ, and we do that best by becoming a living sacrifice, crawling on the altar and dying to self!

In Old Testament times – an innocent lamb had to shed its blood as a substitute for the sins of the people. The innocent lamb took the full weight of God’s judgment, while the guilty person making the sacrifice would receive forgiveness and set free. So, the altar became the place where people could get free from their burden of guilt and shame; however, the problem was that mankind needed an ultimate sacrifice because the blood of animals was only a temporary solution. Only an ultimate sacrifice by an ultimate innocent Lamb could save the world from the sins of mankind once-and-for-all-time. Mankind needed a perfect sinless sacrifice to

do away with the old covenant and establish a new covenant, and that ultimate innocent Lamb's name is Jesus. In Old Testament times, for thousands of years mankind waited for a Savior to rescue them from the lies and grip of Satan, and then one day, the Son of God laid down His glory and became a seed that was planted into a virgin's womb, and nine months later was born in a lowly stable, and then it took another thirty-three years for Jesus to fulfill what He came for – willingly climb on His altar of sacrifice, a wooden cross and there shed every drop of His precious blood.

Today, Christ is our altar – becoming our sin offering, so that you and I could experience complete freedom in every area of our lives and live victorious lives as we come near to God by way of the cross. And the church becomes the place where those outsiders of our doors can also come to know that God's altar is open to everyone, no one will stand in their way in coming to the cross. Because Christ is our altar! We don't have to travel to the Temple in Jerusalem, right here and right now, anyone and everyone can hear Jesus' words of invitation, ***“Are you weary, carrying a heavy burden? Come to me. I will refresh your life, for I am your oasis. Simply join your life with mine. Learn my ways and you'll discover that I'm gentle, humble easy to please. You will find refreshment and rest in me. For all that I require of you will be pleasant and easy to bear”*** (Matthew 11:28-30). My hope, as your pastor, has always been that when anyone comes here to worship, they would encounter Christ, and not leave here the same as when they came. However, if you leave the same as you came, or possibly even disappointed and unsatisfied, then I'm suggesting that you need to follow the example of God's people in the Old Testament and build an altar. In building an altar – here are the five aspects of an altar experience that are key to encountering God:

1. We need to first come to the altar of forgiveness – confession of sin is the first stone to find restoration and continuous unbroken fellowship with God. It cleanses the conscience and removes every obstacle from having communion with our Redeemer Jesus Christ. Confession doesn't gain us God's acceptance, for that was already won for us forever by the sacrifice of Christ, causing us to be adopted as children of God. And it's on the basis of being His dearly loved children that our intimacy with God is restored through confession. But there is also a warning for us according to **1 John 1:8-9**, ***“If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us for all unrighteousness. If we claim to have not***

*sinned, we make him out to be a liar and his word is not in us.”* The first stone in building an altar is confession, dealing with sin!

2. Then, the next stone is prayer, we need to come to the altar of prayer – in a life of prayer the old falls away as the new comes, and we are transformed into His new creation according to **2 Corinthians 5:17-18**, *“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come. The old has gone, the new is here! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and gave us the ministry of reconciliation.”* This reconciliation includes our old identity, our life of sin, the power of Satan over us, the religious works of trying to please God, our old relationships with the world, and our old mind-sets – ALL GONE! And it’s important to realize that we are not refurbished like an old chair; we are made completely new by our union with Christ and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit.
3. The next stone is our calling to be set apart from the world. The altar is the place where each one of us encounters the living God, and as we continue to draw close to God, He will continue to draw close to us, and in His presence, we are washed clean and consecrated (set apart) to serve Him obediently and sacrificially right where God has placed us to be His kingdom people. We already looked at **James 4:8**, *“Draw near to God and he will draw near to you.”* Setting us apart to carry out His will right where He has placed us!
4. The fourth stone is our faith community. It is also at the altar that we join with the faith community that is called the body of Christ, the community of saints, so that together as a family we can encourage and spur one another on to good works every time we meet. **Hebrews 10:23-25**, *“Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful. And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another – and all the more as you see the Day approaching.”*
5. The final stone is our commission to take the Gospel message and share our faith. At the altar we receive our commissioning for ministry to go out and witness, to replicate ourselves by making disciples, so that the body of Christ will grow into a powerful church that breaks down the strongholds of Satan within their community. **Matthew 28:19-20**, *“Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey*

***everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”***

Hopefully this message – has helped you to understand the importance of establishing an altar to meet with God and have a God encounter as a lifestyle. If you don't currently have an altar where you can meet God, then start building one today and then if you had one in the past and it has been neglected or abandoned, then you need to rebuild that broken down altar that was left in ruins.

If you don't think you need an altar in your life – then hear Paul's warning to his understudy Timothy that is very relevant to our present situation, ***“Don't be naive. There are difficult times ahead. As the end approaches, people are going to be self-absorbed, money-hungry, self-promoting, stuck-up, profane, contemptuous of parents, crude, coarse, dog-eat-dog, unbending, slanderers, impulsively wild, savage, cynical, treacherous, ruthless, bloated windbags, addicted to lust, and allergic to God. They'll make a show of religion, but behind the scenes they're animals. Stay clear of these people”*** (2 Timothy 3:1-5 the Message). It's getting increasingly difficult to be a Christian as the world is constantly trying to get us to conform to the ways of the world, so we need God's help, and we also need to constantly keep meeting together to encourage and build each other up in the faith.

And remember, as a child of God – this is not your home. You are aliens, foreigners, and exiles on this earth, and while YES, you need to be in the midst of the world to make a difference, you are to stay clear of worldly trappings and the temptations of Satan. You need to choose your battles carefully and always be on the side of truth that brings life. Then also remember, as a child of God – you are supernaturally empowered by the Holy Spirit to shine your light in the darkness, to bring peace into difficult and stressful situations, to give hope to the hopeless, and to do what Jesus did when He walked the earth and even greater things. And as a child of God, you must throw-off and be completely free of any weight or burden that tries to hold you down from fulfilling your God given calling and fulfilling your destiny, so you can receive your full reward once you get to Heaven!

But the choice is up to you! So, choose wisely, according to the words of Moses, ***Deuteronomy 30:19-20, “This day I call heaven and the earth as a witness against you that I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Now choose life, so that you and your children may live and that you may love the Lord your God, listen to his voice, and hold fast to him. For the Lord is your***

*life.*” There are only two choices available to every person on this earth – life or death – to follow Christ or to follow Satan!