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Go and make disciples!

E-votional 85

Altar of Incense (Hezekiah Solution Part 8)

2 Chronicles 29:7 (ESV),

and have not burned incense

The altar of incense was located right outside the veil that separated the inner sanctuary from the Most Holy Place. This was the place where the priest offered up incense in his ministerial duties. The significance of the altar and the incense on it is absolutely remarkable. But first, we must understand that when Hezekiah came into his reign as King over Judah that this among the other things already mentioned had not been kept up with. As we noted earlier, the doors of the vestibule had been shut, and the people were not tending the lamps, so the light went out. From there, we see that the incense was also not being tended to or offered anymore on the altar. For this reason, among the other reasons being discovered in this book great tragedy befell the people of Judah. In short, as we have learned, God's people turned their faces away from true worship.

The incense in many areas of Scriptures is directly tied to the prayers of the saints. One passage in particular points to the father of John the Baptist, Zechariah, in Luke 1:8-10 (ESV),

Now while he was serving as priest before God when his division was on duty, according to the custom of the priesthood, he was chosen by lot to enter the temple of the Lord and burn incense. And the whole multitude of the people were praying outside at the hour of incense.

So, Zechariah, as mentioned by name in Luke 1:5, was called by lot to offer incense at the hour of prayer. This is important that this took place at the hour of prayer as it directly eludes to the notion that incense is linked with prayer in the Bible. Now, this is not the only reference to the idea here of the incense found in Scripture. Another important one is found in Revelation 5:8 (ESV),

And when he had taken the scroll, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb, each holding a harp, and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints.

By far my favorite passage of Scripture that alludes to prayer as incense is found in David's Psalm 141:2 (ESV),

Let my prayer be counted as incense before you, and the lifting up of my hands as the evening sacrifice!

Praise God! David's offering of prayer is directly related to as being as incense before God.

With this being said, we can better understand the need and also the context of this teaching as being something that was neglected when the Temple doors were shut. This is important to realize because where people stop praying, by necessity God is not obligated to inhabit and bless them. Now, what do I mean by not praying? I ask this question for a reason. Just because we are making the motion of prayer and offering up words to God, does that necessarily make it prayer?

With this being said, let me explain. For this, I will look to 1 Peter 4:7 (NIV),

The end of all things is near. Therefore be alert and of sober mind so that you may pray.

For this passage of Scripture, I used the New International Version of the Bible. The reason, I did this is because it portrays the meaning of this passage in an easy to read way. For example, the part that says, "*so that you may pray.*" What it is saying then, is that one needs to be both alert and of a sober mind so that when one prays it will be effective. In short, this reference is saying that alertness and sober-mindedness are a necessity to godly prayer.

I would have to say this, if I were not alert and clear in my thinking, and in my spirit, I would surely pray very self-centered and ineffective prayers. I would like to add, that if I were the devil, I think one of my strategic strategies would be against the Christians prayer life. I say this because prayer is truly something of great force and power in the earth. By it, I fully believe an authoritative Christian could call heaven to earth for God's will and purpose to be done.

With that being said, wouldn't you agree then that it is necessary to safeguard our prayer life from distraction and any attempt of satan to deceive us out of our God-given inheritance to beseech the King of kings by faith and draw down His

provisions to this earth?

Prayer is many things to the believer and cannot be understated to any degree. However, many can see prayer as a forceful labor or as a free pass to anything they desire. I personally, see prayer as a two-way communication line with the God of heaven and earth. Through this delightful communication line, God draws me to Himself and then through it employs me to His service and also enables me by His Spirit to do whatever it is He is calling me to. Therefore, it is wise to be as Peter said, '*alert and of sober mind so that you may pray*'.

To be alert and of sober mind, we must also recollect something that Jesus told His disciples in Matthew 26:41 (ESV),

Watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak."

Note the part where Jesus says, '*The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.*' This is of great importance because we can pray according to the flesh and we can pray according to the Spirit. What do I mean here? Really, it is broken down and dissected in two ways. For one, we need to pray fervent and effectual prayers because if not we can become weak because of the flesh although the Spirit is willing. Second, if we do become weak because of our flesh, our prayers could become self-centered and not Christ-centered. Much in this way, we would fall into the pattern that James describes in James 4:3 (ESV),

You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions.

Personally, I am starting to see a connection with prayer and the leading of the Holy Spirit. In fact, I know all too well, that when I operate in the carnal mind or in the flesh I tend to be only focused on my will and not the will of the Lord. Peter experienced this tragedy in Matthew 16:23 (ESV),

But he turned and said to Peter, "Get behind me, Satan! You are a hindrance to me. For you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man."

Very simply, Peter, when confronted with the possibility of Jesus being given over to His eventual death told Jesus that this should never happen to Him (Matthew 16:22). For this reason, we read the rebuke of Jesus to Peter for setting His mind on the things of man, or in other words the things of the flesh or carnal mind. This is rather interesting and details a symptom that we have all

experienced when we come to God in prayer. For example, we may come to God and ask why He let something happen. A prayer like this is not the end in and of itself, however, it shows the lack in our trust that He knows what He is doing. I know this is a very vague illustration but I think you get the point nonetheless. But also for an added hint of clarity, I would like to say that just asking the question to God is not where the lack of trust lies. It is in the area of asking that questions God instead of relinquishing to God or simply trying to understand to be better equipped at submitting to His will.

Anyways, the importance of having a clear and alert mind for the sake of our prayers, I am sure is something that Peter learned in his walk with the Lord through trial and error. After all, Peter was there when Jesus told them to watch and pray that they would not enter into temptation. This point brings us into the idea of falling prey to temptations because our prayer life is lacking. Again Peter must have learned some valuable lessons in his walk with the Lord, as we see later on in his life when he writes first and second Peter, he has a bit of wisdom to offer to others. This wisdom surely must have been taken from a page in the life of Jesus as he walked and talked with him but was eventually realized in the many mistakes that he made. Namely, when Peter eventually denied Christ.

I think if we are all honest with ourselves as I am sure Peter must have been after the fact, we might say, "*why did I not watch and pray so that I would not enter into temptation as Jesus said?*" Now, this is not saying that we just won't be tempted if we pray really well. However, it is a promise that if we are those who watch and pray and I mean really devote ourselves to it in the right manner then we should not cave into temptation. After all, didn't Jesus' death and resurrection mean more than buying a people who will just live in and fall into sin continually?

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In Christ's Love,
Chris and Jeanne
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