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A sermon preached by the late Mr. J.E. Hazelton on Sunday morning, April 21st, 1907, from Exod 40. 5. "And thou shalt set the altar of gold for the incense before the ark of the testimony."

Continuing our Lord's Day morning subjects we invite your attention this morning, dear friends, to the golden Incense Altar, to the position it occupied, and to Him of whom it so beautifully and sweetly speaks.

The incense altar stood in the Holy Place, that place which is called in the 9th of Hebrews, the "first tabernacle", and which must indeed have been a part of the tabernacle of exquisite and wondrous beauty. Picture to yourselves a priest entering the first tabernacle to place incense upon that altar. There he stands. The walls on two sides are covered with pure gold, the ceiling consists of those curtains of blue, purple, scarlet and fine twined linen; the magnificent vail hangs in front of him, and behind him is the vail which leads into the outer court. There stands the golden incense altar. On one side of it is the golden candlestick shedding a soft and gracious lustre over the whole of the first tabernacle which otherwise would have been destitute of light. There is the golden table containing the shewbread, and the sprinkled blood upon the incense altar; everything speaking of Christ; everything testifying of the sinner's way to God; everything being a detail of a most wonderful picture of the stooping grace of Him who "though He was rich, for our sakes became poor, that we through His poverty might be made rich." But it is with the altar of gold that we have to do this morning, and I would point out in beginning, that it stood higher than any other vessel of the tabernacle of which the measurement is given, and therefore in many respects it was the most prominent of all the tabernacle vessels. There it stood before the very centre of the beautiful vail, and therefore, as our text expresses, before the ark of the testimony; - the golden altar this side of the vail faced the ark on the other side; - and faced the very centre of the ark. This golden altar was made of acacia wood covered with pure gold; it had four golden horns, one at each corner; it had a golden crown round about it, and two staves made of similar wood to the altar and covered with pure gold one on either side. But only incense of a special and divinely fragrant character was to be offered upon it, and the cloud that continually ascended from the golden altar was produced by the fire which had first fed upon the sacrifices offered on the brazen altar. And where did that fire come from originally? from the divine Shekinah cloud. When the ~~first~~ altar was first made, and when the wood was laid in order, and the sacrifice was placed thereon, then light from heaven, from the Shekinah cloud, kindled the wood and ever after the sacred fire was to be kept burning there. Coals from that brazen altar - setting forth the Cross of Calvary - were to be brought to the golden altar, incense was to be sprinkled upon them, and so the fragrance that pervaded the tabernacle arose from the sin atoning death of Jesus Christ our Lord. Hence the altar of gold speaks to us this morning of the person of our Lord Jesus Christ, the acacia wood typifying His pure and incorruptible humanity (wood which grows upon the earth); the pure gold representing His essential Deity. How? Can you explain the person of the God Man? I cannot. As Joseph Hart says

How it was done, we can't discuss,
But this we know, 'twas done for us.

For us God was manifested in the flesh! For us the pure and incorruptible

humanity of the Man Christ Jesus was taken into everlasting union with His Godhead! Such, dear friends, is the Saviour whom God sends! Such is the Saviour whom poor sinners need! A more glorious Saviour could not be - eternal God and pure and perfect Man joined in the person of the one Christ! A more glorious Saviour there could not be. Less than He would be nothing worth to us. Less than Christ Jesus the Lord thus set forth would be no Saviour to you and to me. The God Man only could redeem the sinner's soul. The God Man only, even Jesus, undertakes this work, and the God Man finishes the whole. And the God Man, Jesus Christ our Lord, has gone up on high, His heavenly intercession being typified by the altar of gold from which the incense was continually ascending.

You will notice that the incense on that golden altar is called "perpetual incense", just as the offering of the morning and evening lamb outside on the Brazen Altar constituted what God's Word terms the "continual burnt offering." The sin atoning death of our blessed Lord shall never lose its power; it is a "continual burnt offering", and His heavenly intercession is perpetual. "We have such an High Priest who ever liveth to make intercession for us." Once a year into the Holiest of all Israel's High Priest entered with a golden censer filled with burning coals from off the altar, which gave up its clouds of fragrance through the incense sprinkled upon it, but now that intervening Vail has been rent from the top to the bottom. Jesus Christ our Lord, our great High Priest, has passed into the heavens. The way is opened between poor distant sinners and Christ Jesus the Mercy Seat, so through Him we have access into the Holiest of all, and Christ our great High Priest continually presents the fragrance of His sacrifice in the courts of our God. The golden incense altar then sets forth a risen Saviour, just as the Brazen Altar sets forth the Saviour who died on Calvary's Cross. The risen Saviour is He with whom we have to do this morning, and may God the Holy Spirit cause us to apprehend the power of our living glorious Lord to Whom, if we are going to Heaven, we are joined by indissoluble ties. The four golden horns speak to us of His power and the efficacy of His ministry above. A risen omnipotent Saviour! A risen Saviour whose ministry is ever efficacious before God! The golden crown around the Altar reveals His royalty - "On His Head are many crowns" and the incense arising in clouds of fragrance, because of the burning coals underneath brought from the Brazen Altar, tell of the intercession of our Lord in Heaven which receives its life, power and vigour from the blood-stained Cross of Calvary. Prize then, dear friends, Christ Jesus the Lord, your Incense Altar. Delight in Him; use Him until you pass the Vail. His precious merits give efficacy to your prayers. His heavenly incense secures the acceptance of the breathings of your hearts

"Though thought be broken, language lame."

Is it not wonderful that poor creatures like you and me, who often do not feel as if we could put two words together in the way of expressing ourselves in private before our God, have a heavenly Intercessor, and that the groan, the inward striving, the thrill of heart, the unuttered desire, that which your soul is vainly struggling to express before God, comes up with acceptance into Heaven's courts! This is a fact, and not merely a

doctrine. The reception of our prayers, our desires and our unuttered longings is secured, because our risen Lord has gone up on high; every broken thought and lame word receives its interpretation, and is presented before His Father and our Father, His God and our God.

Let us speak briefly of three things. First, the Incense, secondly the fact that the Golden Altar was sprinkled with Blood on the Day of Atonement, and thirdly about the Living Christ.

The incense itself. You will find on a careful reading of all that refers to it in Exodus and Leviticus that it was composed of four ingredients:- frankincense, stacte, onycha and galbanum. These four ingredients were beaten small; they were of God's selection, hence the result was the most fragrant odour that has ever been inhaled on this earth. None was to be made like it. What can we say then to those misguided men who, even in Protestant England, and in many of our churches, fill the church with fumes of incense? What a sin they commit against God! No incense was to be compounded except that which God had ordained from these four ingredients, and it is always called pure and holy. Frankincense, which was a spice of unsullied whiteness and exquisite fragrance was its chief part, and the cloud which arose was largely impregnated with its perfume. This sweet scent arose from our blessed Lord when on earth, and how much more now that He has gone up into the heavens of our God! One may see on Calvary's cross the frankincense of our Saviour rising, the sweet odour of which attracted by its singular perfume the Roman centurion so that he said "Certainly this was a righteous Man!"

Stacte was another ingredient - balm, or balsam, something like what is called "the balm of Gilead". The word signifies a drop. Frankincense His purity and unsulliedness in His words, works and Person; stacte, the dropping - "All his paths drop fatness." Wherever He went during life on earth, truth, love, pity, sympathy flowed from His heart. How often we hear a child of God say "Such and such a word dropped into my heart." Yes, words drop. How? Literally the words are here in this Book. How can they drop into the heart? We mean the power, the grace and unction of the Word fall into our hearts like a drop of dew, a drop of holy oil, like a drop of this incense. Where do they come from? From Him who is above. How do they come? Guided to your heart and mine by the blessed ministry of God the Holy Ghost. The other ingredients of the incense were evidently used to enhance and bring forth the odour. Here then we have the incense representing the glorious merits and Divine worth of our blessed Lord. It was PERPETUAL incense, tempered together, pure and holy. A sweet fragrance always filled the tabernacle, typical of that sweet fragrance that is ever presented to God. Oh, here is the Man Christ Jesus. In His life incense ascended to Heaven:- "This is My beloved Son in Whom I am well pleased." In His death, oh, what a holy savour filled the heavens of God! Incense, fragrance, ascended from His Person. His words, they shall never die! His work, it shall endure for ever!

We have said there was no incense to be made like this. Our blessed Lord is not to be imitated by false humility, to gratify self conceit, by man attempting to imitate in monasteries, or by women in convents, the pure incense that rises for ever from Him. Here is what the Apostle says "Be ye followers (imitators) of God" - How? "as dear children". There is

the key to it all. Hold Him each one as an ensample because of His life in thy soul, - "as dear children". The incense conveys to us the thought of satisfaction, for the golden censer on the Day of Atonement was to be filled with burning coals (typical of the holiness of God) taken from the Brazen Altar, the holiness of God that had been satisfied with the offering of Christ Jesus the Lord. The priest's hands were to be filled with incense, and, when he came into the Most Holy Place the second time (it is evident he went in twice) already there was the golden censer with the burning coals. He then deposited that incense on the burning coals and immediately the Holiest of All was filled with the perfume which mingled with the Cloud of Glory. Our Lord has gone up on high. The holiness of God is satisfied. The hands of our Heavenly Aaron are filled for ever with His glorious incense, and on the ground of His perfect obedience unto death He says, "Father I will that all whom Thou hast given Me be with Me where I am, that they may behold My glory". O beloved, it is from the Cross of Calvary that all these blessings spring and whilst we would tarry at the Cross, we would also follow our dear Lord and see and inhale in our souls the fragrance of Him who has risen to die no more!

Acceptableness is another truth attaching to this incense. The Jewish Rabbis say in some of their old books that the odour of this incense was so wonderful that it was even perceptible as far off as Jericho from Jerusalem. Whether that is true I know not, but this we know, that the whole of the tabernacle was always filled with this odour, and with the fragrance of this incense. Whether that incense was perceptible, as to its fragrance, as far as Jericho or not, we know that the fragrance of a precious Christ reaches to the outcast; it reaches to those at the very ends of the earth, those who are the most distant from Him. What sets a poor penitent sinner longing after Jesus? It is the fragrance of Christ. The Name is fragrant, the Person and the work. "He is the Saviour I want" says the sinner, "will He save?" And so the poor sinner draws near. That is a lovely word, is it not, in the 141st Psalm, where we read "Let my prayer be set before Thee as incense?" We can pray that, can we not? How can this be? The 8th chapter of the Revelation shows. There the Angel, a figure of the Lord Jesus Christ, stands at the golden Altar holding the golden censer. He offers the incense with the prayers of all saints upon the Golden Altar which was before the Throne, and the smoke which came up with the prayers of the saints ascends before God out of the Angel's hands. My prayer is worthless in itself; put it, O Lord, into Thy censer, and let it come up with the smoke out of Thy censer before my God. Can you have anything more encouraging than the thought that the Lord Jesus Christ imparts to our prayers and praises a charm and attractiveness which they could never have in and of themselves? O that upward look, that sigh, that tear, that groan! There is one Voice with ready welcome to bid thee draw near.

Love's redeeming work is done,
Come and welcome, sinner come

for the Angel, the Messenger of the Covenant stands at the Golden Altar.

Secondly, the sprinkled Altar. This Altar of Incense which we have

been attempting to describe was to be sprinkled once a year, on the great Day of Atonement, sprinkled with the blood of the bullock and the goat, and the blood was also to be placed upon the horns of it and sprinkled seven times upon it. Why? Leviticus 16 tells us - "to hallow it from the uncleanness of the children of Israel." This does not mean, of course that our Lord Himself needed hallowing, but that He was the Sin Bearer, that He bore our uncleanness, that which must have sunk us into eternal wrath; and that now He stands free from all the sin imputed to Him before God, hallowed, holy, sin gone and annihilated for ever. Thus the perfection of His work is designated by the sevenfold sprinkling of the golden altar. O, I am a poor sinner! You are bidden to come near, dear friend. There are the horns of the altar sprinkled with blood, and Blood says, "Sinner come!" I will lay hold of the horns of the Altar, for they were to be anointed with the blood of the Sin Offering. Always from that golden altar the curling smoke and the holy perfume of the incense was ascending from those coals of fire, and so Christ Jesus our Lord "ever liveth to make intercession for us". He has fully answered for sin by the sacrifice of Himself, and His intercession covers every failure of which we are guilty as children of God. His intercession is the source of all the renewing which we daily need, and which we would more and more receive of God the Holy Ghost. Well may the Apostle ask in the 8th chapter to the Romans, "Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect? The golden Incense Altar is there, "it is God that justifieth," and the proof of it is that Christ stands before that Altar. "Who is it that condemneth? It is Christ that died. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?" He knows the worst of us. His intercession covers all our defects. His holy fragrance pervades every part of heaven and provides access into the Holiest of all. All this is the LIVING CHRIST, and with this we close. Satan often whispers that our prayers are weak and worthless, that they are not much more than insults to God. It is too often true, but it is in Christ's intercession that our acceptance stands. We ask amiss, but the Lord knows our hearts, and "if there be first a willing mind (or heart) it is accepted according to that a man hath and not according to that he hath not (2 Cor. 8.12), The Lord looks down there is a willing-hearted sinner, made so by divine grace, and that willing-hearted sinner is just stumbling and blundering in prayer, and address and approach to God, but His intercession causes the acceptance of the real desires of that grace-touched and grace-taught heart. Our praises are often dull and like smoke; that is our sin, our shame, a proof of our base ingratitude, but the Gospel is that Jesus' merits are made ours, and on wings of swiftly flying love He draws nigh so that we are enabled to draw near to Him. "He made intercession for the transgressors". He did it when on earth, did He not? He did it in the parable when he said "Let us dig about it and dung it" - there is the earthly intercession - and on the Cross we have the heavenly intercession, "Father, forgive them for they know not what they do". Pentecost was the answer to that prayer. But now He is in the glory. The golden harps of heaven are all ringing around Him, and saints and angels adore Him, but still He remembers us in our low estate. "I have prayed for thee that thy faith fail not." He prayed for us when we never prayed; He prayed for us, and prays for us when we dare not pray, and He prays for us evermore.

"Give Him, my soul, thy cause to plead,
Now doubt the Father's grace."

The Incense Altar is fragrant to us because of the value of a Saviour's death; it witnesses to us of His compassionate heart; He bears the names of all His saints

"Deep on His heart engraved,
Attentive to the state and wants
Of all His love has saved.
In Him my weary soul has rest,
Though I am weak and frail,
I read my name upon His breast,
And see the Father smile".