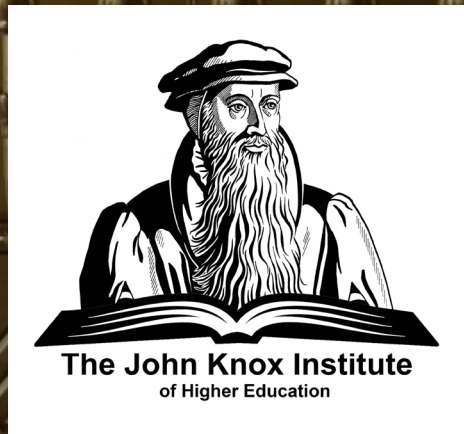


# The Tabernacle of Moses

Video Lecture Series  
by Rev. A. T. Vergunst

*Lecture 7 ~*  
**THE BRAZEN ALTAR—part 2**



**John Knox Institute of Higher Education**

*Entrusting our Reformed Inheritance to the Church Worldwide*

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# The Tabernacle of Moses

## Video Lecture Series

by Rev. A. T. Vergunst

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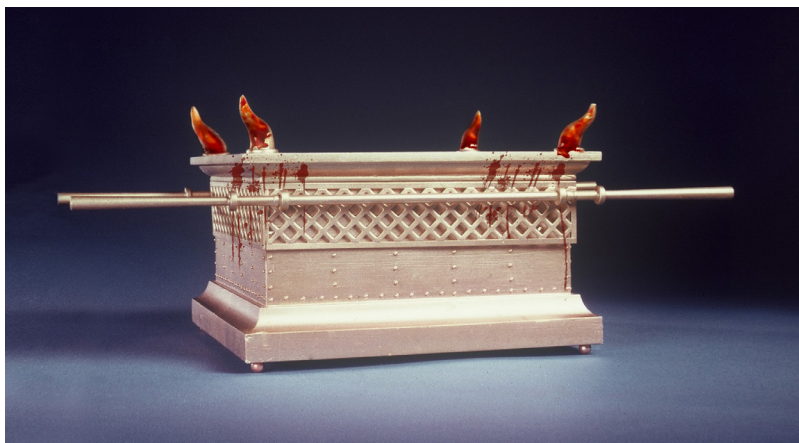
by Rev. A. T. Vergunst

Lecture 7 ~

### THE BRAZEN ALTAR—part 2

Welcome again to the seventh session in our study on the Tabernacle of ancient Israel. And once more, we will consider the Brazen Altar in this session, and the extremely important message that God is bringing us in this crucial part of the Tabernacle. So it's good to re-read the scriptural passages that describe this Altar, found in Exodus 27, verses 1 to 8, and Exodus 29, verses 36 to 46.

In the previous session, I proposed to cover four truths God reveals to us in this Altar. We



have reviewed the revelation of his way of atonement, or reconciliation. We've also explored how the wood and the bronze pictured the very essential glory of the Lord Jesus Christ. And now in this session, let us review two more truths that are pictured in this Altar, namely, first, the nature of justification of the sinner through Jesus Christ. And then, secondly, we'll look at the role of

faith in the justification.

Now to understand our second main teaching on the Brazen Altar, let's for a moment recall what Shema observed. Remember that he saw some people who came into the Tabernacle—and they looked really visibly burdened as they went. But it looked like they were unburdened and refreshed as they exited the Tabernacle structure. So what did they do? Or what did happen? Well, what happened is what the New Testament refers to as justification of the ungodly, through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. That is illustrated in the Altar. In order to grasp the glory of this, let me seek to frame this first with you. Let's begin to remind ourselves of the truths in Romans 3:23. That truth applies to all of us, but it's the question of whether we experience it so.

God's Word there reads this: "For all have sinned, and [all have] come short of the glory of God." Now if that truth is recognized, you will feel burdened. Not only burdened about what you've done wrong, but you'll feel burdened and grief also about how deeply we have dishonored the great and glorious Creator with our sins. It's only when we have learned to acknowledge this is our personal sin, that it will stoop your heart. It will become a source of pain and sorrow as you realize what you have done. It will make us urgent to seek for the reconciliation. But how? And

where? Where can I find this redemption? And perhaps it is your question as well, “How can I, as a guilty sinner that is spiritually bankrupt, how can I ever satisfy God’s just demands for payment? How can I, who am actually also still corrupt, be acceptable in his holy sight, where holiness alone is required? How can I ever hope to dwell with this holy Being in sacred fellowship, and obtain the pardon of my sin, when each day, again and again, in thoughts, or in words, or in actions, I fail the

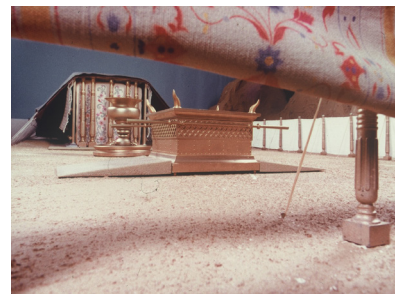


glory of God?” Well, the answer to that is the Brazen Altar. Let’s look at that. Let’s consider again. And may God use this to bring relief to your heart.

The fire that’s burning on that Altar pictures the very thing that’s drying up your spirit. It pictured something of God’s holy justice and anger against sin that you sense, I mean, you feel that in your conscience. And when that is burdening your heart, then you actually experience what Galatians 3:10 calls the curse of God. Let me read that verse: “Cursed is every one that continueth not in all

things which are written in the book of the law to do them.” Now, to be cursed by God is not what people do to people, or what people do to God. To be cursed by God is not to have a torrent of words heaped in anger upon your head. No, to be cursed by God is to be rejected, to be abandoned, to be left to yourself, to be forsaken, to be locked away because you are a sinner. The Biblical word describing that awful reality is “hell.” There’s no condition worse, especially if that becomes eternal. And it will be eternal, unless there is a way in which that debt to God can be satisfied. What that way is, God pictures for us in this Brazen Altar.

Remember that no one could go into the Holy, or Holy of Holies by bypassing this Brazen Altar. Everyone—common people, kings, priests, high priests could only approach God by using the Gate, and then they must make use of the Brazen Altar, and from there on, move towards the center. And this teaches us a very foundational and Biblical truth. God only can be reconciled to you and embrace you, as a guilty sinner, if you and I have satisfied his holy and his just law which we have broken. But, friends, that is impossible from our side. But God made the way through which reconciliation is possible. No, not through this continual offering of animals. They never could remove our debt and bring the great reconciliation. But it is made possible through the Lamb of God given for the sin of the world.



Jesus Christ is the provided substitute for sinners. And everything of the Altar and on the Altar continually sets him before us. Remember how Shema saw that the offerer put his hand upon the animal? What did that mean? Why did he do that? Well that action pictured transfer symbolically. By putting his hand upon the head of the animal, the offerer transferred himself upon the animal, and all the sins that he committed were, as it were, put upon the sacrifice. So he became identified with the animal, and the animal became identified with him. In other words, now the animal became the thief, the liar, the adulterer, the disobedient child, or whatever the sins were that the person had committed. The Bible has a different word for this transfer. In the New Testament, we often find the word “impute” or the word “credit.” That word is actually borrowed from the banking world. Now, when someone transfers money from his account to my account, then it is imputed, or it is credited to my account. And when that happens, it actually becomes yours.

So God required that every sacrifice animal that would be the substitute had to be in perfect shape. There could be no deformity, no sickness to be found on the animal. And only upon the inspection by the priest, the animal was found to be acceptable, then was it allowed to be sacrificed on behalf of the sinner. So, this requirement symbolizes another truth. No one could be our substitute who himself was guilty for their own sin. So if there is no Lord Jesus, there is actually no hope. He was holy, he was undefiled, he was separate from sinners. And did you notice that the Scriptures declared him seven times as innocent, as blameless? This is gospel. The Lamb of God was inspected, and he was found to be blameless. And since he was, therefore, he could suffer and die on behalf of others. He could take the guilt of sinners, and he could become imputed with their sin, and be their substitute. Isaiah 53 wonderfully expounds this truth in the well-known words of the prophet: “But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities:... and the LORD hath laid on him the iniquity of us all...for the transgression of my people, he was stricken...Yet it pleased the LORD to bruise him;...and he bare the sin of many” (Isaiah 53:5, 6, 8, 10, 12).

So after the offerer had transferred himself and his sins upon the animal, then the priest would methodically butcher the animal, flaying it piece by piece. And then the animal would be lifted up upon the burning altar. And as I said before, the smell would not be sweet, but it would rise up towards heaven, and though to us it was a pungent smell—a burning smell, it says in the Bible, to the Lord, it was a sweet smelling savor. Actually in Leviticus 1, verse 13, it says that. And Ephesians 5, verse 2, Paul described Jesus giving “himself for us an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweetsmelling savour.” Now the Hebrew word for sweetsmelling, it has nothing to do with the nose. It has the meaning of “rest-giving.” To us it was a pungent smell. To God it was a rest-giving smell. It settled, or it puts rest to the demands of his justice. The sacrifice opened the way for reconciliation between God and the sinner.

And this is wonderful news! This is the great news of the Bible! On the basis of the Lord Jesus’ sacrifice on the cross, the way back to God is open for us. Or, to speak in Tabernacle terms, the way into the Holy of Holies is open. Shema noticed that the downcast and the solemn-looking face of the offerer was lit up with joy and relief after the officiating priest returned from the Altar. Why was that? What brought him this joy? It was because the priest assured him that in this way that he had just seen, in this way of exchange, all of his sins were really, really forgiven him. In Leviticus 4:35, after sacrificing the sin offering, we read, “And the priest shall make an atonement for his sin that he hath committed, and it shall be forgiven him.” In the New Testament language, that is said as, “and he shall be justified.” Justified—that means that someone is officially and legally declared to be free. It means that his or her sins are put away forever. It means, friends, that God now sees this person as if they had satisfied for all their sins. Yet, to be justified on the basis of Christ’s merits actually goes one step further. God not only sees such a one as having paid for all his transgressions, he considers them also as if they have always been obedient. He considers now that their whole life is unblemished, for Christ’s sake. In other words, he considers them in Christ, as if they always observed and obeyed the commandments of God during all their life. I can think of no truth that is more glorious, more freeing, and more amazing than the teaching on justification by faith in Christ only.

Paul wrote about this in Romans 3, verse 24, where we read, “Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.” Or, if I may paraphrase it with the Tabernacle imagery—being declared holy and innocent through God’s gracious provision of Jesus Christ, pictured in the Brazen Altar, and in the sacrificial lamb. And the reason that the believer is declared

justified is twofold. First, it's because his or her sins were transferred to Christ. And secondly, a transfer also went the other way. The unblemished character of Christ is transferred to the believer. So, can you see now how that the burdened soul exited the Tabernacle rejoicing? Having understood and believed God's way of peace, he rejoiced. He was released. And the entire transaction at the Brazen Altar declared his salvation from the curse that was upon him.

As we read, for example, in Galatians 3, verse 13: "Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law"—how?—"being made a curse for us: for it is written, Cursed"—rejected—"is every one that hangeth on a tree." Do you still struggle to believe what the gospel declares? And is the reason you find it so hard to believe is that you still feel so sinful? One reason for this struggle is that we tend to mix up the Brazen Altar with the Laver, which stands behind it. In our next study, we're going to study the Laver, and the Laver is where the priest needed to wash himself daily.

The Laver pictures God's work of sanctification. And though sanctification is twin with justification, they are still distinct. Never confuse these two, as often is done. Don't reverse the order of them either, as often is done. For we are not justified because we are holy, but being justified



through Christ's merits, we will be made holy through Christ's Spirit. So the chapter on justification by faith in Christ Jesus is a big chapter in God's gospel, and one in which we are to seek clarity. For if we err in the understanding of the necessity of the Brazen Altar, or the cross of Jesus Christ, and omit using it by faith, we cannot be reconciled with God, and we cannot experience peace with God.

So that brings us to our concluding question: What is now the role of faith in the justification of

a sinner? Do you remember how the offerer's hand was laid on the animal's head? As he held it there, that hand pictured the act of faith. Laying the hand on the animal, that did not save him, but it connected him to the animal which would take his place. Or, to say it in a different way, this hand united him to the animal. Now, they shared everything. The animal shared his sin. The offerer shared the animal's innocence. Now all this visual, is a visual picture of the promise of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Christ has promised that whosoever believes in him has everlasting life. We read, for example, in John 5, verse 24, this beautiful truth: "Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life." So, friends, faith was not a work that earned that salvation. Faith is the means God works by his Spirit in our heart, by which we receive this salvation. And what a glorious and simple message of salvation is that. We don't need to work our way to heaven by good deeds, or by a perfect repentance, or by a perfect faith. No, no, reconciliation with God is never based on what we do, or what we bring it, or what we are. It is only on the basis of him on whom I lean, in whom I trust, to whom I look. And even though our faith is imperfect, or weak or trembling, that will not affect the blessing of God's promise. Perhaps the hand of the offerer trembled with fear, as it was laying on the head of the animal. Or perhaps the priest needed to encourage him, or maybe even guide his hand. Perhaps the pressure of his hand was a mere touch. Maybe, maybe the doubts were not all cast out after the priest spoke the words after the sacrifice was made, and maybe he was still filled with doubts and fears. But one thing is sure—whosoever believes in Jesus Christ, as lifted up on the altar for sinners, shall not perish. Because he has already received everlasting life. It is not our faith that saves us, but the Savior whom we trust.

Well, let me draw your attention to a parable that Jesus spoke in Luke 18, verses 9 to 14. At the time of prayer, prayer time always included a sacrifice on the Brazen Altar. After that, the priest, that we will see later, will take some of the hot embers in a bowl, and take them into the Holy place, where he would pray. So, at that time of the day, there's a Pharisee, and there's a great sinner joined with the people in the Temple. The Pharisee stands way at the front. He's super confident about his own goodness. He had no problem lifting up his eyes and his hands toward heaven directly, for God was sure to be pleased with his good record. As he rehearsed it before God, the great sinner hardly dared to come to the gathering. Discretely, he stands as far to the back as possible. He did not feel he belonged among these good people. He was no good person. His life has been a huge mess—broken promises, he's messed up, he's not worthy a look, after a life of sin. So he didn't even dare to lift up his eyes to heaven, as he felt so ashamed before God. Smiting himself on his chest, all he could pray, "God, be merciful to me, a sinner." Now Jesus ended this parable with informing his hearers of something that happened in heaven at that moment—something that the publican may not have realized, and therefore, he may not have tasted the comfort of it, but it was true, nonetheless. The truth was true for him, whether he knew it or not. Hear what Jesus said about that man. He says, "I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than [that Pharisee], for everyone that exalteth himself shall be abased; but he that humbleth himself shall be exalted," and who trusts in the sacrifice. Now, did Jesus speak here as the priest would have spoken to the offerer? Indeed he did. He, as the Prophet and the Priest, declared that the great sinner was justified, forgiven, restored, reconciled with his God, on the basis of the sacrifice. For that's how. He didn't do anything, he didn't bring anything. He did not bring anything, but his eye rested upon the burning altar with the smoke going heavenward. And in that act, just like he laid his hand upon the sacrifice before him, and while he held his eyes upon that Altar and on that sacrifice, he pleaded with God for mercy, for Christ's sake, and God granted his request instantly, completely, freely, for Jesus' sake, pardoned. And so it will be, if every one of your who turns to God while looking at Jesus Christ and his sacrifice as the only way back.

So this concludes our review of the Brazen Altar and all it pictures of the need and the provision of God's sacrifice for sin. And may the Lord bless this study to us all.