

The Blessedness of The Altar Part Four

The Potential of the Altar

Jesus Teaches Us The Way of True Increase

"Now some of those who used to come up to worship at the Festival were Greeks. They came to Philip, of Bethsaida in Galilee, with the request, 'Sir, we wish to see Jesus.'" Philip came and told Andrew: Andrew and Philip told Jesus.

His answer was, "The time has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. In most solemn truth I tell you that unless the grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it remains what it was--a single grain; but that if it dies, it yields a rich harvest. He who holds his life dear, is destroying it; and he who makes his life of no account in this world shall keep it to the Life of the Ages."

(John 12:20-25)

John 12:24 tells us that "unless a seed of wheat falls into the ground it abideth alone... but if it die it will bring forth much fruit". A little seed has the potential of bringing forth a huge harvest of increase, but only if it falls into the ground and dies. Our Lord shared this principle with Philip and Andrew after some Greeks had approached them desiring to see Jesus. Jesus' response probably seemed strange and unproductive to these disciples. The movement of Greeks seeking to know Jesus would have been a momentous occasion to Jesus' closest followers. When these Greeks approached Philip, he probably thought, "Praise God!!! More people are gathering to Jesus. Our movement is expanding unto the Gentiles! Look at how fruitful we are becoming. Our ministry is reaching the Greeks! This is the day we have all been praying for!" With great excitement Philip and Andrew must have rushed to share the praise report with Jesus. But rather than blessing the Lord with their tidings of increase unto the Greeks, Jesus responded with tidings of His altar and the way of the Cross in His followers. Jesus answered Philip and Andrew by sharing His version of what true increase is and how it would be accomplished.

It is obvious by Jesus' response to Philip and Andrew that He was not interested in the increase of man, but spoke of the increase of Divine Life that only comes through death. Here we are taught by Jesus Himself that the path of true fruitfulness involves the altar. Jesus knew that He was on the way to the Cross when He spoke those words to Philip and Andrew. He knew that He was about to personally walk down the path of fruitfulness, and had no desire to confirm or encourage an increase that was not true. Therefore Jesus would not rejoice with his disciples concerning the Greeks that were gathering unto Him; rather He had to focus His heart on the altar that was set before Him.

To Serve The Lord Requires The Altar

“He who holds his life dear, is destroying it; and he who makes his life of no account in this world shall keep it to the Life of the Ages. If a man wishes to be my servant, let him follow me; and where I am, there too shall my servant be. If a man wishes to be my servant, the Father will honor him”
(John 12:25-26)

Jesus did not end his response to Philip and Andrew by sharing principles of a Cross that did not reach unto them. In verses 25 through 26 Jesus begins to speak of the path required of all those who would truly serve and follow Him when He said, *“He that loveth his life shall lose it; and he that hateth his life in this world shall keep it unto life eternal. If any man serve me, let him follow me, and where I am, there shall also my servant be; if any man serve me, him will my Father honor.”* In these sentences Jesus is telling Philip and Andrew that if anyone truly wants to serve Him, they must also choose the way of the Cross as their path to fruitfulness and increase. Jesus said that if someone really wanted to serve Him, they needed to follow Him... and when Jesus spoke those words He was about to go die on the Cross. Remember, Jesus was speaking these things as an answer to their praise report concerning the Greeks. The context here is of utmost importance, lest we miss the true impact Jesus is trying to make in our lives concerning how we serve Him.

After Jesus spoke these realities to His disciples He began sharing out from His own situation saying, *“Now is my soul troubled; and what shall I say? Father, save me from this hour: but for this cause came I unto this hour. Father, glorify thy name.”* Here we see that Jesus is not asking of His disciples anything that He Himself is not willing to go through as their forerunner and Life. Jesus felt all the anguish of a human soul and knew the temptation to leave the altar to protect His own life. But instead of submitting to his fearful soul, Jesus knew that this very hour was His opportunity to glorify His Father and bring forth true increase. It was the hour He had waited for his whole life.

The Father Confirms The Way of Fruitfulness

“Father, glorify Thy name. Thereupon there came a voice from the sky, I have glorified it and will also glorify it again. The crowd that stood by and heard it, said that there had been thunder. Others said, an angel spoke to him. It is not for my sake, said Jesus, that that voice came, but for your sake.”
(John 12:28-30).

In verse 28 a voice from heaven speaks forth as the Father answers His Son's cries with the assurance that He has and will be glorified through this Son who is committing Himself to the way of the altar. In verse 29 we find that there are people who were standing so close to Jesus while He prayed to His Father that they heard God's voice from heaven. The scriptures tell us that these people said what they heard was thunder, while others said it was an angel speaking. No one understood the voice of God when He spoke about the way of the Cross in bring Him true glory. The people could conceive of a mighty rumbling in the heavens like thunder, and even the voice of an angelic messenger saying something spiritual. Yet the idea of God declaring His glory through the way of the Cross was something

completely foreign to them. Has anything changed since that time? So many people's ears are receptive to mighty moves of God from above displaying His power, or a word from a messenger. But how many people have ears that are opened to the Father's deepest longing to glorify His Son through the way of the Cross? Jesus looked at those people who could not hear and told them that the Father spoke in this audible manner for their sakes (verse 30). God's heart is the same for us today. The Father wants us to hear and embrace the message of the way of the Cross so that Christ might truly be formed in us. God wants us to learn the path of true increase. Yet so many of us close our hearts and block our ears to anything that does not bless our flesh and make us feel good. Yet the Life of Christ within us will not go another direction. We may have many ways of doing things for God in our fleshly abilities, strengths, and programs... but if we want to function through the Spirit of Christ it will involve God's path of giving Himself for others through us.

Drawing Power

"And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me.

This he said, signifying what death he should die."

(John 12:32-33)

Later in this same chapter Jesus continues to declare the potential of the altar through these words, *"And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me. This He said, signifying what death He should die"* (verses 32-33). Once again, man seeks for methods of drawing people to their church or ministry based on something apart from Christ and Him Crucified. We have clever methods that appeal to people's needs or personalities. Yet our Lord declares that His drawing power comes from His laid down life... poured out for others. Jesus said all men would be drawn when He was lifted up on a tree to die. The Greeks who came to Philip were being drawn to Jesus before the Cross. Jesus' method of drawing people unto Himself pivoted on Him being lifted up in His Sacrificial Lamb nature, and not just in His teachings and miracles. People who are drawn to Jesus only for His blessings will leave when times get tough. People who are drawn to Jesus because of Who He is will remain through the hard-times. They will open their hearts to the Lamb and allow Him to live through them to others. They will become altars in Whom Christ can continue to give His Life for others and bring forth fruit. Jesus wanted people to be drawn to Himself, and not things external to His Divine Nature. Paul saw the different motivations working in people when He wrote this scripture to the church at Corinth, "For the Jews require a sign, and the Greeks seek after wisdom; But we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumbling block, and unto the Gentiles foolishness; But unto them who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God (I Cor. 1:22-24). We must ask ourselves; Is the way of the Cross foolishness to me? Is Christ Crucified the power of God to me and in me, or do I seek wisdom and empowerment in another way? Do I truly preach Christ or is my confidence in what the flesh can do for God?

Who Hath Believed Our Report?

“That the saying of Esaias the prophet might be fulfilled, which he spake, Lord, who hath believed our report? and to whom hath the arm of the Lord been revealed?”

(John 12:38)

Hundreds of years earlier the prophet Isaiah saw the unveiled glory of the Lord. Isaiah was astonished at what the glorified Lord looked like, and cried out “Who hath believed our report? And to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?” Isaiah knew that the glory men sought after and wanted God to have was not the glory of a slaughtered Lamb on His altar (Is. 53:3). Interestingly, Jesus quotes Isaiah in verses 38-41 of this same chapter and conversation. Jesus knew that all He was saying concerning the way He would be glorified and bring forth fruit was not what the people wanted to hear. He knew it was like a mystery to even His own disciples. He knew the Jews sought after miracles and power, while the Greeks were seeking for wisdom (I Cor. 1:22). People were willing to enlist in the service of One who would bring increase through mighty miracles or deep teachings. But to hear from the mouth of Jesus Himself that the power of God to bring forth increase is only gained through the foolishness of the cross would be astonishing. It is the same with us today. The Gospel Paul preached declaring Christ and Him Crucified is still unpopular because it involves the way of the cross. People may enjoy hearing the message of the Cross because it sounds deep and spiritual, but how many will actually follow Jesus in His way as servants of the Lamb (Rev. 14:3)? How many will base their lives and ministries on the principles of the Cross rather than the cleverness of the flesh? Is the increase of our ministry and lives more of Jesus or more of us doing things in His Name?

Paul’s ministry functioned by God’s methods, and not man’s. Look at outcome of Paul choosing the way of the Cross as His method of serving God. To this very day His writings and ministry are edifying the Church. Many good books have been written and sermons preached since his time, but only the ones soaked in the nature of the Lamb poured out for others are carried forth in the power of His Resurrection.

Practical Application

Once again, the altar we are referring to throughout this series is not our personal suffering in the midst of our trials, but the bearing about in our bodies the dying of the Lord Jesus (II Cor. 4:12). This altar involves the heart that yields to the spirit of the Lamb who desires to live through every believer. The Spirit of the Lamb (Christ) in us is the source of our reactions, attitudes and works. It is His nature at work in us. He is laying down His Life through us as we yield to His Lamb nature within. All glory to Christ Who is our Life, and not our own personal goodness or suffering. He alone goes the way of the Cross, and that is why it is so important for Christ to be formed in us (Gal. 4:19).

We have spoken some about the way of the Cross in many different applications, but what about the normal circumstances, the little altars of daily life? What is the potential of the altar in these things? It is the same potential of the altar in the big things... LIFE! Greater than a “workable solution” or “compromise to get along”, the way of the dying of the Lord Jesus in us will eventually inject LIFE into the situation or relationship. Yes, we will be required to forgive, to be longsuffering, to go the extra mile, to put up with things that are unjust and unfair, etc.... but it is Christ in us who is giving us the strength to respond in this way. He is God’s provision for every altar in our life. The Lamb within will fill you with His love for others and give you His ability to pour out, the just for the unjust. Just watch things change as you allow Christ to be your new way! Dying relationships will have His Life and Love injected into them. Impossible trials will become altars where Christ is given through us and increased in us. The potential is as endless as God’s heart is big, for those who choose the Lamb as their way.

Conclusion

The potential of the altar is beyond measure. God told Father Abraham that trying to fathom the increase of this Seed that dies for others is like trying to count all the stars in the sky (Gen. 15:5). Paul tells us in Gal. 3:16 that the Seed God was referring to when He told that to Abraham was the Seed which is Christ. In Col. 1:27 Paul said our potential to glorify God can only come through Christ in us.

Isaiah and Paul both knew that it would require God opening our eyes and hearts to be able to embrace their astonishing report. And so it is for us today. It is going to require God to open our hearts and eyes to Christ in His Eternal glory and way. Our view of Christ, our methods of serving Him, and our plans to bring His increase will all be in vain until we cry out for God to reveal His Son in us as He truly is (Gal. 1:15-16). May the Lord minister grace to the hearts of those who truly desire to hear. May our Father reveal His Son in us, that through Christ and His dying in us we might bring Life to so many. AMEN!!!

**This is a Fire Ministries article by Kelly Koshatka
meant to help draw your heart into a greater hunger
to pursue Jesus Christ as the One Who truly lives in you.**

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Personal Notes

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