

IN PURSUIT OF THE ALTAR THAT ALTERS

Today, we are continuing with the series we began 8 weeks ago, titled **FROM RUBBLE TO RADIANCE**, and today, we are doing part 9. This series is anchored in the story in the book of Ezra, which speaks of God's faithfulness to His people.

Those of you who have been with me since we began, I believe something must be slowly shifting in your hearts, where your faith is growing regarding God's faithfulness towards you. If you are not there yet, please don't miss another service, because God has been busy reminding us that He can restore any brokenness you might have experienced in your life. In other words, God turns rubble into beauty and shame into glory

- Whilst God is pursuing after us, for our good and well-being, you will discover that it is in human nature to pursue everything else but God. You can agree with me that we are drawn to what satisfies our appetites and propensities, what excites our emotions, and tickles our ears.
- I believe something needs to shift regarding our pursuits in life. If you are to lay down your life for something, it must be something that impacts eternity.
- This morning, I want to talk to you on the subject **IN PURSUIT OF THE ALTAR THAT ALTERS**.
- Without realizing it, we have pursued and built altars for ourselves. Our jobs can become altars upon which we sacrifice ourselves, and family can be an altar that we will sacrifice everything for.
- But there is a call for us to pursue another altar that alters everything in your life.
- So, where we read, we find the children of God now back in Jerusalem. After they had settled in their homes, the Bible tells us that they came together in unity under the leadership of Jeshua and Zerubbabel to begin the work.
- They could have forgotten about the building project, but their hearts were set on re-establishing temple worship.

Ezra 3:1 And when the seventh month had come, and the sons of Israel were in the cities, the people gathered themselves as one man to Jerusalem.

- They came together in unity to re-establish worship. They were desperate to worship God that they did not need to be coerced to come together.
- The things of God must become such a priority that everything else plays second fiddle to that pursuit.
- Everything around us is asking for our attention; there is a great contest for your time, money, and obsession.

Colossians 3:1 Since you have been raised to new life with Christ, set your sights on the realities of heaven, where Christ sits in the place of honor at God's right hand. 2 Think about the things of heaven, not the things of earth.

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- Paul is reminding us of what we need to prioritize in those moments of contestation. Learn to prioritize God in your finances, in your time, and in your commitment.
- It will take effort and discipline to major on the majors of life because the enemy wants you to sweat over the minor issues. Every time you major on the minors, you place your peace (with God) at risk.
- We have a lot to learn from these Jews regarding what we should pursue. Yes, they had a big mission before them, and yet they still needed to know where to start.
- The task before them was massive compared to the previous temple (Solomon's temple). Solomon had built a glorious temple for the Lord.
- They needed great skills and plenty of resources to restore that temple. One would expect them to start engaging the best contractors in town and to enter into supply arrangements with stone suppliers, timber suppliers, gold suppliers, and the like.
- Instead of pursuing all those nice-to-have things, the people sought after the one important thing – the altar.

Ezra 3:2 And Jeshua the son of Jozadak stood up, and his brothers the priests, and Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, and his brothers. And they built the altar of the God of Israel in order to offer burnt offerings on it, as it is written in the Law of Moses the man of God.

- Why was it so important to establish the altar first before setting the foundations of the temple and the like?
- The Brazen Altar was the first piece of sacred furniture, situated in the center of the tabernacle courtyard, acting as the first point of approach to God's presence.
- At this altar, the blood of a spotless, blemish-free animal was shed, portraying the necessity of substitutionary sacrifice.
- The people made sacrifices that God accepted as atonement for their sin, making them holy and acceptable before God.
- The altar functioned as a focal point for worship, without which no one could fellowship with God.
- In other words, without the altar, there could be no worship taking place. Without the altar in place, you can have a beautiful structure, but no proper worship can take place.
- At the altar, animals died, and the person was accepted by God. There are things that need to be brought to the altar for true worship to take place.
- For the Jews, the altar was a place of consecration and commitment to the Lord.
- The altar was a site where God manifested His presence and met with His people to commune.

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- The altar was a personal matter – every time one became aware of their sin, they would bring a sin offering to the priest. In other words, it was for you to acknowledge your sin, which would lead you to come to the altar of sacrifice.
- The Jews valued their relationship with God, making it very important to keep in place. This could only be made possible by the atoning sacrifice.
- The altar was therefore a key component of worship, which could not be neglected.
- However, it was not perfect in its workings because they had to consistently return with the sacrifices.
- The blood of those bulls could not take away their sins; the best it could do was to cover them.
- Therefore, this Altar functioned as a foreshadowing, a type, a symbolic preview of the ultimate sacrificial altar, which is the Cross, where the sinless Lamb of God offered Himself once for all.
- There, on that final altar, Jesus bore our sins in His body and accomplished what no animal sacrifice ever could.
- The Jews of old pursued an altar that temporarily changed their state, but we are pursuing an altar that alters permanently.
- They were consumed by a need for a living relationship with Yahweh and were prepared to do whatever was required to get that connection. How much more should we pursue the altar that changes everything?

Hebrews 10:1 For the Law which has a shadow of good things to come, not the very image of the things, appearing year by year with the same sacrifices, which they offer continually, they are never able to perfect those drawing near. 2 For then would they not have ceased to be offered? Because the worshipers, when they had been once for all purged, would have had no more conscience of sin. 3 But in those sacrifices there is a remembrance again of sins every year.

- What the blood of animals could not do on the altar of sacrifice, Christ came and accomplished in His body on the cross.
- His body was the ultimate sacrifice on the altar of the cross.

Hebrews 10: 9 Then he said, "Here I am, I have come to do your will." He sets aside the first to establish the second. 10 And by that will, we have been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.

- The Jews were committed to an altar that was limited in its power but in Jesus, we have an altar that alters eternity.

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- Without the Old covenant altar, the Jews were disqualified from approaching God, and now, without Jesus, the ultimate altar, there can be no relationship with God.

Ephesians 2:17 And He came and preached peace to you who were afar off, and to those who were near. 18 For through Him we both have access by one Spirit to the Father.

- Jesus came and paved the way for us to access God. He entered the temple in heaven that was not made by human hands and offered His own blood and not the blood of animals.
- We must redirect our obsessions and pursuits towards Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith.
- When the Jews built the altar, they did it according to what was written in the law of Moses. *Ezra 3:2...And they built the altar of the God of Israel in order to offer burnt offerings on it, as it is written in the Law of Moses the man of God.*
- They were committed to doing right by consulting what was written by Moses on how to build the altar and how to offer the sacrifices.
- You cannot love Jesus in the way you want; you must love Him the way He is presented in the scriptures.
- Jesus, the ultimate altar, should not be pursued with the same zeal and effort as other altars in your life.
- We can't pursue Jesus with the same intensity and zeal with which we pursue our hobbies and livelihood.
- Jesus must take the preeminence in your heart – He is the image of the invisible God, He is the firstborn of all creation, He created everything, and everything was created for Him.
- Moses dictated how the altar should be erected; building it in any other way would make the sacrifices unacceptable.
- Let the word dictate the value you place on Jesus and not pop culture, human opinions or your own preferences.
- The Bible calls Him the only way to the Father, He is called the bread that satisfies, the true vine, the light of the world, the good shepherd, and the soon-coming king.
- There is another level of loyalty and commitment to Jesus that is expected of us.

Hebrews 13:12 And so Jesus also suffered outside the city gate to make the people holy through his own blood. 13 Let us, then, go to him outside the camp, bearing the disgrace he bore.

- When Jesus is central in your life, your value system changes and your loyalty lies with Him.
- In conclusion, let us pursue Jesus with a greater sense of urgency, of priority and commitment. When we do that, our worship is altered, our destiny is altered, our source is altered for the better.