

# Why We Do It - Altar Calls

I've had several conversations lately about what I would call "false salvation" that Christians and the church are responsible for. We have this message of hope that a dying world needs to hear. And many believers share it, but to what extent? Do we just get someone to repeat a prayer or to get baptized? But then what?

There are so many times where the message of the gospel is used to just bring that temporary peace to a hurting person. "I said the prayer, now I'm saved" But has there been change in the person's life?

There is a decision to be made. If one wants to be saved, it takes more than repeating a prayer or taking a dip in the water, and it takes more than showing up to church from time to time or even every week. The decision must be made to FOLLOW JESUS!

The decision to follow Jesus is a constant one. It's a decision you make once but then you make it constantly afterwards. It requires an inward change. The church has made it about outward actions....which are ok, good even....if done WITH inward change.

Today I'm continuing in the series "Why We Do It" and the focus is altar calls. Altar calls have a bad reputation with some people and they are even to blame for some of this "false salvation" I referred to earlier. So why do we even do them. Is our motivation to say X number of people gave their lives to Jesus today? How do we even know that? Is it to get people to repeat a prayer? How do we know they actually mean it?

I think altar calls can be a good thing. We do them often here....but why? What is the purpose? What do we hope will happen at the altar?

First we need to know what an altar is - a structure upon which offerings such as sacrifices are made to God. That is what is done at an altar....sacrifice. But an altar is also a place of consecration, a place of setting yourself apart from sin and committing your life God!

In the OT they would often build altars to commemorate an encounter with God! Abram, Isaac, Jacob, David, Gideon all built altars and worshipped after having a unique encounter with God. It was a place to remember this encounter, a place of consecration.

We call this area at the front the altar. It is not a physical altar, but a spiritual altar. It represents a place where we can come and sacrifice to God and commit ourselves to Him. Jesus already sacrificed His life for yours. He paid the price for your sins and IF you place your faith in Him, you will be saved..... Jesus' sacrifice was once for all.

**Romans 6:10 (HCSB)**

10 For in light of the fact that He died, He died to sin once for all; but in light of the fact that He lives, He lives to God.

Praise Jesus, no more sacrifice for your sins. Jesus paid it all. But that doesn't mean there aren't still sacrifices to be made in life.

**Romans 12:1-2 (HCSB)**

1 Therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, I urge you to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God; this is your spiritual worship. 2 Do not be conformed to this age, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may discern what is the good, pleasing, and perfect will of God.

We are to be a LIVING sacrifice...what does that even mean? When they sacrificed animals on the altar, they had to kill them, right? When you get saved you are making a decision to die to self and live in Christ but sacrifice by definition does not necessarily mean death, but it does mean to offer something or give something up.

We are told to present our bodies as a living sacrifice. But how can I live without a body? The body is our flesh. Remember there is a war which we are all in and it's a spiritual war. It's the war of our dying sinful flesh against the living Holy Spirit!

God wants our body, our flesh as a living sacrifice. He wants us to offer our body up to Him, give it up, in this sacrifice we submit to the living Spirit!

It's pleasing to God when we follow the Spirit instead of the flesh. This means instead of doing the things that please our sinful nature, we seek Jesus and do things that please Him! See He wants all of you. When it says present your bodies, it really means your whole being. If you are saved then your spirit is already renewed, but what about the rest of you? Give it all to Jesus!

That is your act of consecration, it is spiritual worship! If you can do this then you will not be conformed to this age but instead you'll be transformed by the renewing of your mind. If you sacrifice your wants and desires to God and seek His will, you will have a mind committed to the standards of God's Kingdom!

I already mentioned a couple briefly but what is the altar for today?

## The altar is a place for sacrifice

You may know the story of Abraham and Isaac. God told Abraham to sacrifice his son Isaac on the altar as an offering to Him. They make this journey up the mountain, and then....

**Genesis 22:7-9 (HCSB)**

7 Then Isaac spoke to his father Abraham and said, "My father."

And he replied, "Here I am, my son."

Isaac said, "The fire and the wood are here, but where is the lamb for the burnt offering?"

8 Abraham answered, "God Himself will provide the lamb for the burnt offering, my son."

Then the two of them walked on together.

9 When they arrived at the place that God had told him about, Abraham built the altar there and arranged the wood. He bound his son Isaac and placed him on the altar on top of the wood.

Talk about uncomfortable....thankfully God provided a ram caught in the brush to be the sacrifice.

Abraham was being tested, more specifically, his faith was being tested. Do you trust God, would you even give up your son for God? If you remember, Abraham waited a long, long time for a son. God asking him to sacrifice his son was a big deal!

What God was asking in this test is not only do you trust Him, but is God really above all things in your life...your most cherished possessions...even something that maybe you have prayed about for years and then He gave you. Do you love Him more than anything else?

Abraham had a decision to make at the altar...but it took faith to even begin the journey up the mountain. Abraham had to take the first step in obedience...he had to make a decision, either I give ALL to God or do I not.

See God does want our burdens laid at the foot of the cross but he wants everything else on the altar, your family, friends, job, possessions, wants, needs, hopes, dreams. It all has to be placed before Him at the altar. In doing this you are making a statement that you offer it all up for Him.

It's a sacrifice....

**Tobymac - Steal My Show**

My life  
My plans  
My heart  
It's all Yours, God  
Take it away  
My dreams  
My fears  
My family  
My career  
Take it away  
Take it away  
It's all Yours, God  
So take it away

Take it away  
It's You I wanna live for

He's not really wanting God to literally take those things away, but he's saying God, You are in control. I want Your will for my life, no matter what it costs me.

The altar is a place of sacrifice.....sometimes it's hard to make that first step to the altar, but we have got to trust that God has something good for us there....that He will provide what we need.

## The altar is a place for worship

Everyone has heard of Noah's Ark right? God told him to build an ark to save his family and some animals because God was going to flood the earth..... What we fail to remember in this story is that Noah had just been through the darkest time in all of history up to this point. The world was wicked to the point that God was going to destroy all flesh.

But God spared Noah and his family because they were found righteous in His eyes. So they build this ark and the waters come. I don't think we understand the magnitude of this storm. It was unlike anything Noah had ever seen, I would think there had to be some fear as the water keeps rising.

But God brought Noah through the storm and then:

### **Genesis 8:20 (HCSB)**

20 Then Noah built an altar to the Lord. He took some of every kind of clean animal and every kind of clean bird and offered burnt offerings on the altar.

This was an altar of worship. God had brought Noah through the storm and He set up an altar to praise and worship God! Consider Noah's prayers during this time, it was probably full of thanksgiving, God had saved Him from death and guided him through the storm!

Just as Noah did we should come to the altar praising God not only when we are in the storms but absolutely when we are on the other side of the storm. We ought to praise God for all that He has done and all that He is going to do!

## The altar is a place of dedication to prayer

### **Exodus 30:1 (HCSB)**

30 "You are to make an altar for the burning of incense; make it of acacia wood.

### **Exodus 30:6-8 (HCSB)**

6 “You are to place the altar in front of the veil by the ark of the testimony—in front of the mercy seat that is over the testimony—where I will meet with you. 7 Aaron must burn fragrant incense on it; he must burn it every morning when he tends the lamps.8 When Aaron sets up the lamps at twilight, he must burn incense. There is to be an incense offering before the Lord throughout your generations.

Aaron had to continually burn incense every morning and evening upon the altar that took dedication. This altar of incense symbolizes daily prayer to God. We have to be dedicated to the Altar of God forever sending up the incense of our prayer to Him.

The Priest was to burn the incense continually throughout all generations, so should be showing our dedication to the Lord day in and day out, year in and year out being dedicated to the Lord upon the altar.

When we offer to pray with people at the altars, our hope and desire is to petition the Lord for whatever your needs are. Church this is something we MUST pass on generation to generation. It's a wonderful thing when an adult brings a child to the altar for prayer. They need to know that this is a safe place!

But they also ought to see YOU at the altar. They will model much of their lives after adults that they trust. Don't let your pride keep you from coming down to the altar when you are in need. Come pray and be prayed for!

If you have come down for something before and you haven't seen God respond...come again....be dedicated to the altar of prayer!

## The altar is the place of forgiveness

### **Leviticus 1:3-5 (HCSB)**

3 “If his gift is a burnt offering from the herd, he is to bring an unblemished male. He must bring it to the entrance to the tent of meeting so that he may be accepted by the Lord. 4 He is to lay his hand on the head of the burnt offering so it can be accepted on his behalf to make atonement for him. 5 He is to slaughter the bull before the Lord; Aaron's sons the priests are to present the blood and sprinkle it on all sides of the altar that is at the entrance to the tent of meeting.

There is no forgiveness of sin without the shedding of blood. But thank Jesus that He paid that price for us. He died once for all. Today you don't have to bring any kind of sacrifice to the altar....just yourself.

While prayer is important at the altar it doesn't take a magic prayer for forgiveness. It takes a change of heart and mind....repentance of sin and faith in Jesus.

**John 3:16 (HCSB)**

16 “For God loved the world in this way: He gave His One and Only Son, so that everyone who believes in Him will not perish but have eternal life.

Here, today, you can receive that forgiveness through the blood of Christ!

## The altar is the place where our needs are met

In the story of Elizabeth and Zechariah, they were without children. In that day it was not a good thing to be childless. Children were considered a sign of God’s favor, and no children was considered a sign of His displeasure. But we know this wasn’t the case, we are told they were righteous in God’s sight.

**Luke 1:11-13 (HCSB)**

11 An angel of the Lord appeared to him, standing to the right of the altar of incense. 12 When Zechariah saw him, he was startled and overcome with fear. 13 But the angel said to him:

Do not be afraid, Zechariah,  
because your prayer has been heard.  
Your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son,  
and you will name him John.

Zechariah was a priest, it was his duty to be at the altar of incense. But just because he was doing his job, don’t let that belittle the move of God.

Remember the altar of incense symbolizes prayer. I imagine big Z, at the altar of the Lord in prayer over their childlessness. And all of the sudden their needs were met. Barren no more, the well aged Elizabeth will bear a child!

See when you have a need the answer is at the altar of God, not out in the world. Why do we tend to go to every other thing before we go to God. Bring it to the altar, offer up your needs before the Lord no matter how impossible they may seem.

Give it to the one who knew you from the beginning, even when you were stuck in sin, He died for you and rose again that you may have peace in Him!

## The altar is the place where God dwells

**Revelation 8:1-3 (HCSB)**

8 When He opened the seventh seal, there was silence in heaven for about half an hour.  
2 Then I saw the seven angels who stand in the presence of God; seven trumpets were given to them. 3 Another angel, with a gold incense burner, came and stood at the altar. He was given a large amount of incense to offer with the prayers of all the saints on the gold altar in front of the throne.

Church our prayers are the sweet incense that go before the altar and the bible says that the altar is before the throne of God. If the altar is before the throne then why wouldn't we come and meet Him there with our sacrifice, our worship, our dedication, our needs, and just to talk with Him?

#### WORSHIP TEAM

At the cross we were given free access to the throne. No longer do we need to go to a priest and petition the Lord....we come to the altar and the altar is before His throne.

This is a symbolic altar up here, we ask people to come forward and sacrifice, worship, and pray because here at the altar you are before God Almighty and Jesus is a God who supplies all your needs! Jesus is the answer!

God can certainly answer prayer right where you are at. He is the one with the power to do so, but I believe there is power in coming to the altar, it requires humility, a public declaration that you need Jesus!

#### **Matthew 10:32 (HCSB)**

32 "Therefore, everyone who will acknowledge Me before men, I will also acknowledge him before My Father in heaven.

#### **Romans 10:9 (HCSB)**

9 If you confess with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved.