# the Golden Candlestick

## THE ALTAR

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#### CHAPTER ONE

## REALIZATION, RECOGNITION AND DISCRIMINATION

Reading: Genesis 4:3-8.

I have been occupied considerably of late with the history of the altar as we have it in the Word of God, and I have felt that the Lord would have something in this connection said here at this time. And although the altar is not mentioned definitely by name in the passage which we have just read, it is quite definitely implied, and therefore this would be the first place in which the altar comes into view.

We are told that both Cain and Abel brought offerings unto the Lord. They must have brought them to some place; at some point they must have met and made their offering. Whatever that point was, that point took upon itself the character of the altar, if it was not definitely constructed as such. Offerings implied the principle of an altar, that is, something upon which the offering is made.

And so we begin with this chapter, the history of the altar upon the earth, so far as that history is given in the Scripture. And the first mention of anything in the Word of God is always interesting and significant, for you will always find in a first reference the larger principle in germ form. If you look closely enough you will discover that the principle of all which will subsequently be unfolded is there in the first mention of your reference to the matter in point. And so here with the altar in the life of Cain and Abel, you have the germ of all the truth of the altar right through to Calvary, to which every altar points — that is, every altar which is the Lord's altar, and of

which every other altar is but an imitation and a counterfeit.

And I want to bring the great truths which are implicit in this particular passage in a very simple way before you because we do know, I think, that the altar is basic to everything in the divine purpose and economy, and that there can be no realization now of any of the thought of God concerning man apart from the altar. That being the great comprehensive truth which binds us, which holds us in imprisonment, away from which we cannot get, no not one hair's breadth, for any thought of God in our lives, that being the thing which dominates every step in the will of God for us, it therefore is very important that we should understand and grasp quite clearly the significance of the laws of the altar.

We begin with the first, which is a very simple one, and yet it comes before all others, and upon which all the others hang. It is the truth of recognition. Quite clearly both Cain and Abel recognized something. How they came to that position we are not told; whether they had had instruction about it, whether the Lord had made it clear to them in word or not we do not know; or whether they came to it instinctively by the very nature of things; or whether they came to it by deduction from what had happened in the experience of their parents. We do not know, but this thing is perfectly clear, that they recognised that God had rights, and that God had rights to the first place. So they brought of the first fruits and of the firstlings of the fruits and flocks respectively. God occupied the position of having a right before all others and before all else, and God's rights laid their claims upon these men, and recognizing those rights they responded to, shall we say the instinct, the intuition, the deduction or the precept, as the case may be. The first law of the altar is the law of recognition, and that is the recognition of God's rights to the pre-eminent and first place. If you take that as a simple truth and carry it right through the Word of God, right up to Calvary, you find it to be the basic thing in relation to the altar. When you come to Calvary, the supreme altar whereon the supreme sacrifice is offered, the thing which governs the cross of the Lord Jesus and the offering of Himself, is the recognition of the supreme and universal sovereign rights of God. So far, both Cain and Abel were right. But that is not just a bit of doctrinal technique. We sometimes sing: "My all is on the altar."

Now what does that mean? It will have to come back to us as a challenge, and the challenge of that altar is this, that no one and nothing can come before the Lord, and that the Lord stands there to have the first and pre-eminent place, and that you and I have not only to give a mental assent to it, but to act in relation to that place which we recognize to be God's unique place. And everything has to be brought into line with that supreme place of the Lord in our lives. You see the Lord can never have the supreme place if there is at any point a challenge to Him. While in sheer sovereignty He may still maintain His pre-eminence, so far as our hearts are concerned if there is one reservation, one element of rebellion, one little bit of failure in obedience or surrender, then the Lord has not got the absolute place. For the Lord to have absolute place does mean that there is nothing which is not put down under Him and made absolutely subservient to Him and His will. He must have the first place, the supreme place, and nothing may challenge or hold that in abeyance or suspense.

Now that is very simple; it is drastic; it is important. And we as a company of the Lord's people will find that the Lord presses the law of the altar, the principle of the cross, right up to the end, and that there may never come a time in our lives when we are sure that the final battle of the cross has been won. But it is a good thing to recognize the law, to recognize it from the outset so that when we come to a new issue, a new crisis we know what it means, and to know what it means is to have half the battle won, for we simply stand before the issue and in our hearts we say to ourselves: "Well this is only a fresh application of that which I have initially accepted to the full, and the issue is perfectly clear; either the Lord is going to have His way or He is not, and if I have my way over this, then I immediately sacrifice the sovereignty of the Lord in my life and suspend its operation, go back upon my position of consecration and lose all that the Lord intends for me and through me, by this

way." And we are brought to that position very frequently. But as I said, it is a great thing to know what we are facing. It is an old issue in a new form. To know it is to be in a position of great advantage. It is the question of recognition all the way along, initially, continuously, finally; recognition that God has supreme right, God has supreme place, the Lord is first. And when that has really got a full grip of our hearts, when we have come through to a place of victory so far as we have gone, and virtual and potential victory for the future upon that matter, we have already gained the ascendancy.

Did you notice what the Lord said to Cain? "If thou doest well, shalt thou not be accepted; and if thou doest not well, sin lies at the door (or, a sin offering crouches at the door). And unto thee shall be his desire, and thou shalt rule over him." I know the difficulties that have arisen in the interpretation of those words, but it seems clear to me that it is a question of ascendancy here. The whole issue arose because Abel was preferred above Cain, when Cain felt that by right he should have had the first place, the uppermost place, and that it was his wounded pride, resulting in jealousy (for jealousy is always the fruit of pride) which led him to murder his brother — the question of the upper place. Abel took the upper place because he came wholly into line with God's thought. Although he suffered at the hands of his brother, violence, unto death, Abel was the ruling factor through time right on to the end of the age. It was Abel who took the first place after all. It was the place of spiritual ascendancy. And when we have come to the place where the altar is established fully and finally in our hearts on the principle of God's absolute rights, we have come to a wonderful place of spiritual ascendancy, supremacy and power.

How did Joseph come to the place of universal power, authority and glory? Because he went down to the depth of the cross; because he went into death, shame and reproach. It is the same principle. He had intimated, or allowed to get out, the implications of his dreams, and his brethren said: "Shalt thou indeed reign over us? Or shalt thou indeed have dominion over us?" "No never!" But he did. It was a question of ascendancy again, the question of authority,

position, power. They made a bid for the upper position. Just as keenly, along the same line, because God's seal was upon the other, both Abel and Joseph came to the place of the throne spiritually and morally, and in Joseph's case literally, through death, by way of the altar. You and I are coming there literally that way later on, if we would go that way. At present we come there spiritually and morally. It is a great vantage position to have had the cross settled once and for all in our hearts, that is, on its first law, that the Lord has the pre-eminent place, comes before all else, and that there can be no rival to Him. Oh, how true it is about the rival will leading to unspeakable misery. For example, Moses was in the desolation of the wilderness for forty years because he sought to precipitate a divine intention by his own energies. And how many cases have we known, and do we know of those who saw in a moment of spiritual insight, or with a growing conviction, the way of the Lord for them; it became clear and then they grasped at it, laid hold of it and sought to bring it about, leading to years of misery.

I know one case of a young woman who came to believe that the Lord had chosen a certain young man for her partner in life, or to whom she was to be partner, and I believe that the Lord was in that, it was the Lord's thought, but when it came about, and was not without a certain amount of witness in its inception, there was an instant diving at it, laying hold of it, and then everything had to be so manipulated, worked, arranged as to bring it about, to realize it — yes, it was realized, but oh, at what cost; years of misery. The one blunder led to another until that whole relationship broke down. The only way out is to take that relationship back to the altar and hand it up, to bury it on the old ground of the flesh and ask the Lord to raise it in the power of resurrection in the realm of the Spirit. Now I have just illustrated this thing.

You see that is what Moses did. That is what Abraham did over Hagar and Ishmael. That is what Joseph was saved from doing! There may be a desire, an affection, a will, a purpose which does not counter the divine thought, but tries to realize it and becomes a rival in that way. God having His place to the full means not only His

purpose, but also His method; not only His method but His times; sometimes not only His purpose, His method, His times, but also His price. Many of the great intentions of God are costly things. (I am not speaking about salvation). There is something to be paid in life to reach that end and it is a costly thing. Do you think the men whom God has used most mightily, a Moses in the end, a Joseph, a David, a Paul have reached their spiritual eminence, place of usefulness and power, without a cost? Nay! There was a great cost, an unspeakable cost; and that is an essential part of the purpose of God because it is by the way of paying that price that the rival elements are dismissed, and such people come to the place where any thought of reputation or ambition goes to the wind, and they say: "Lord save me from this unless it is Your will; it is too costly." "I am only going on now with God if that be God's purpose; personal interests have died, personal ambition has been quenched; there is nothing here for me." "If I set out with thoughts of great things for myself, I have learned that it is not worth it — to have something for myself and pay this for it! I am not worth it." "No, my greater good, if I am looking for myself would be to be out of this and not in it." "If I am thinking of myself, the Lord deliver me from this line." Self has gone out, and you pursue a line where self is having a place of continual crucifixion. It is the way of God's purpose. God first. It is not position and influence, but God first, and God only.

There is no meaning whatever in the temptations of the Lord Jesus to avoid the cross if the implication is not this: "You would do Yourself a service by not going that way; this would be to Your own personal advantage; if You go that way You are most definitely destroying Your own interests." That is the implication in the temptation, to avoid the cross. And the fact that He went to the cross meant that He denied Himself. Yes, God first; that is the principle. God pre-eminent. It is the recognition of that.

The second thing here is discrimination. Recognition, then discrimination. There is a great difference between Cain and Abel even while their recognition may have been one. Cain made the fundamental blunder of ignoring the fact that the earth had been

cursed. He ignored the curse. He fell into that subtle, profound, age-long deception of the devil, that if man brought his very best God would accept him. And within that idea there lies this whole universal truth, that Satan's object from the beginning has been to build a world of man's best. Now I will not go far with that now, but you see the truth. Cain is attached to the earth and fails to recognize that the earth to which he is attached is cursed of God. And so he seeks to find his way through to divine acceptance by bringing to God things upon which God's curse rests. You see the impossibility of the position. What Cain was doing virtually was witnessing for the earth. Now follow that closely. Witnessing for the earth, testifying to the earth; in effect saying: "This earth is a good thing; this world is a good thing." Seeking to bring this earth into the presence of God as something worthy of divine acceptance. Oh, what a range is gathered up in that as you follow it through into the present age.

You understand the thing better along the line of discrimination when you look at Abel. The difference is that Abel testified against the earth. That is the principle of the cross all the way through. And that is why Cain, being of that Wicked One — now you have got the heart of the thing — slew his brother. Satan's whole scheme has been a world of man's best. The cross of Calvary and the offering of the Lord Jesus witnesses against the world, therefore against the whole purpose of the devil. Calvary stands in the most utter contradiction of the whole system of Satan in building a world on human virtues. The whole humanitarian system is satanic from centre to circumference when it is brought into the realm of things spiritual as a ground for divine acceptance. And mark you, humanitarianism is one of the big planks in the platform of modernism. It is one of the instruments by which the cross of the Lord Jesus has been relegated to a place of non-effectiveness. The good that is in man, the good that is in the world, the best of humanity brought up into a place acceptable to God and making men stand favourably to God, and it is a lie of the devil which has doomed multitudes of souls for all eternity. It is a lie. Man at his best, with the very firstfruits of his best labours of this earth, is rejected by God. Abel came, and

what was the end of Abel's offering? Ashes. "I lay in dust life's glory, dead ...". That is the end of humanity in the sight of God - ashes!Man's glory is ashes before God. God wants nothing of man. Death under judgment; cutting off from the earth. You see the reflection of Calvary through Isaiah 53 back there in Abel's offering. "Cut off out of the land of the living ...". Abel means: judgment; cut off. There is no cutting off from the earth on the part of Cain. Cain is wedded to the earth and he seeks to come with his earth. Abel in judgment seeks a cutting off from this world, and of that regime, a death to that relationship, and unless God comes in on the other side of death and in the power of resurrection realises something, nothing will be realized. God will have nothing. But that is where Abel's faith came in; by faith he offered. His faith was ultimately in the God of resurrection, and resurrection only has a meaning when death has utterly taken place. Abel's was not a testimony for the earth but a testimony against the earth, and that is why he was murdered.

Now, what is the fundamental factor in all this? The fundamental factor is God's satisfaction. I am so glad to have discovered the literal Hebrew words of Genesis 4:4: "And the Lord had respect", it says here, "unto Abel and his offering; but unto Cain and to his offering he had not respect." The Hebrew says quite distinctly: "The Lord had satisfaction in Abel and his offering but unto Cain and his offering He had not respect." You see the fundamental factor is God's satisfaction.

Now then you get to the heart. What is God's satisfaction? After the fall, not a cursed world, sin ruling, and all the rest. Wherein is God's satisfaction? God's satisfaction is in His Son, the Lord Jesus, and nowhere outside. Now, God can only have satisfaction as He finds His Son in a thing, and God looks to find His Son in a thing for His own satisfaction, and anything and anyone only satisfies Him in so far as His Son is in it or in them. Now look at Abel and his offering and you have got the Lord Jesus foreshadowed, prefigured, and you have all those eternal elements of God's redemptive method in and through His Son, typified in Abel and his offering, and because God, in the light of the larger and the ultimate, saw His Son in Abel and

his offering, God had satisfaction; and because God did not see His Son in Cain and his offering but He saw only *man*, yes, man at his best but still man, He had no satisfaction in Cain and his offering.

What is it that governs the altar? It is that it displaces man and gives place to Christ. That is the altar. The whole meaning of the cross for any child of God is this. The setting aside of man, all he is and all he has at his best and fullest, and giving place to the Lord Jesus, a large place; and there is God's satisfaction. You see how true it is, what we said at the outset; we cannot get away from the altar. It governs every step in the life of the believer, and from first to last it is a question of God's satisfaction; and God's satisfaction means that man is put away and Christ takes his place. It is no longer "I" but Christ because I have been crucified. That is the altar.

That is perhaps all very simple, but it is constructed upon even greater and more momentous things. The background of all this is tremendous when we get into the realm of spiritual things. But it is sufficient to take it on the surface for the moment. Will you sing as earnestly and heartily again, or more so than you did, or will you sing with reservation and bated breath: "My all is on the altar"? The Lord give us grace to give a large place to God's Son, the Father's fullest satisfaction.

## POSSESSION BY IDENTIFICATION

Reading: Exodus 12:1-14.

We shall continue our meditation on the altar from where we left off. Our particular points were those of realization, recognition and discrimination; now we shall be occupied mainly with possession by identification. These, as we pointed out, are the spiritual laws of the altar. Firstly, recognition of God's rights; secondly, discrimination, which is represented in the difference between Cain and Abel in their offerings.

Now we come to this further spiritual law of the altar, possession by identification. And here for a moment it is necessary for us to go back a little over what we have said in connection with discrimination. You remember that we were saying that Cain brought of the first fruits of the field and offered them to the Lord; the Lord rejected him and them, and the rejection was because Cain ignored or overlooked the fact that the earth was an accursed earth, and that none of its fruits therefore could be acceptable to God. Abel was accepted with his offering because spiritually that offering represented the great abiding truth, that in judgment and death one whole creation under the curse is set aside and is resolved in the eyes of God into ashes, and that faith looks through to God for acceptance purely and solely upon the ground of resurrection. When one sees everything in ashes, then it requires faith to believe that God can have anything. Thus we are told much later in the history of the world that: "By faith Abel offered a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, by which he obtained witness that he was righteous ..." and his faith was the faith which won through ashes, to

God. Now although it was true, and it remains true, that the line of Cain can never reach God, and that man can never find acceptance on the part of God for himself upon the ground of his own works, or himself as his best product, and that that work at its highest form of development can never be received by God, it is equally true that the earth is the Lord's, and the fulness thereof. And here we seem to touch a contradiction, but it is no contradiction, and it is a very important thing to recognize that while God rejects the earth, He claims it. That is a paradox but contains a great truth. The earth is the Lord's and He has a right to it, and to all of it, but He will not have it under the curse. As we have seen, the line of Cain has ever been to present by development, improvement, a world, a creation, a humanity that lies under a curse, without taking the fact of the curse into consideration; to build a civilization without the curse in it being set aside, because the curse is ignored. That is the devil's program and has been all the way through. And mark you, there is an attempt made to get God associated with that, or to associate that with God, and so deceive the race into believing that in its improvement, its development, its civilization, its wonderful fruitfulness, it can get through to salvation (using that word), get through to a place of standing in favour with God. That, we have said, is a great deception and a lie. It is the easy way. Now on the other hand, God, in and for His Son the Lord Jesus Christ, is going to have the kingdoms of this world and all the fulness of the earth, but not in that way, and He utterly closes the door to that, and at the same time says: "I will have every bit of it, but I will have it in My way, and My way is the way of dealing with that curse, and removing that curse through judgment and through death, and on the ground of resurrection!"

It is the old thing into which the Adversary sought to bring the Lord Jesus by a subtle and cunning move. "All these things will I give thee, if thou wilt fall down and worship me", which, mark you, was set over against the object for which the Lord Jesus had just come under the anointing. He had been into Jordan in baptism, placing right at the beginning of His public life and ministry the

features of Calvary, death, burial, and resurrection. He began His career initially on the very basis of the cross typically, in principle, and now the Spirit of the Lord had come upon Him as the anointing Spirit to carry Him right through to the literal and actual fulfilment of that which was typical at the beginning. The end of the Spirit's work with Him would be Calvary, for there He would, through the Eternal Spirit, offer Himself. The enemy had some knowledge of what that anointing would lead to. He knew what the anointing meant in the Old Testament, and now he knows the anointing is upon This One, and what it means, and so he tries by this subtle move to get him to divert on His way to Calvary, and his method is to give Him the kingdoms without the shedding of His blood to purchase them, and to give Him a world dominion, but with the curse in it still. Remove the curse and you remove the devil. Accept world dominion without removing the curse and the devil is still lord.

The altar says two things. God rejects the earth under the curse, and claims it, free from the curse; so that the altar is a testimony against the earth, but it is a testimony in the earth that the earth will be the Lord's and the Lord has a right to it and He will possess it but in His own way, on His own grounds, under His own conditions. This is possession by identification.

We are familiar with that word 'identification' but for the most part it has one association with us, that is, our identification with the Lord. It is important for us to recognize that there will be no identification of us with the Lord if the Lord had never identified Himself with us, and our identification with the Lord is a consequence, and not a cause. It is the result of something that He has done. That is, He has identified Himself with us.

Now that altar is always identified with the earth, and yet it embodies the principle and the truth that it is apart from the earth. (I want you to get that clearly; you may have to follow closely). Let us turn over to Exodus 20:24,25. The first altars were altars of earth. The Lord said: "An altar of earth thou shalt make unto me ...". That is the first thing about an altar. He does not forbid that man should advance upon that and build an altar of stone, but if man

does advance upon that, the Lord puts some very definite strictness upon that advance, that movement, and those two halves of the whole represent two laws. An altar of earth; what is that? That is the simple, definite, clear identification with the earth. It is, as it were, a part of the earth. Carry that thought through your Scriptures and you find the altar is always identified with the earth, as a part of it, as one with it.

We have left Noah's altar for the moment; the earth has been judged and overwhelmed, sin has been dealt with, now after the judgment there is an emerging of a little company onto a renewed earth, typically a sin purged earth, a cursed, judged earth. The first act in alighting upon that renewed earth is the building of an altar, and in effect it is the declaration that this earth, renewed, the curse removed, is the Lord's, and the altar is placed upon that earth as a testimony by it's oneness with the earth, that the earth is the Lord's. It is a part of the earth you see, in principle. And an altar of earth simply means that close, vital relationship with the earth to secure it for God. But then there is the other half, that while there is that identification with the earth, there is the embodiment of a law that it is altogether something other than the earth, that it is in another sense, not of the earth. That is why altars were in elevated places; that is why Calvary is a lifting up. It is identification, it is one with the earth, and yet it is apart from, it is different from in principle. Now that principle is here in this second part of Exodus 20:25: "And if thou make me an altar of stone, thou shalt not build it of hewn stones: for if thou lift up thy tool upon it, thou hast polluted it." What is that? That is the natural man bringing his mind to bear upon divine things. "Thou shalt not make unto thee any likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth." Why? That is your putting a fallen man's judgment upon holy things when it comes to worshipping God. The charge against Israel, you remember, was that they made the likeness of God into the image of a molten calf. That molten calf was just man's mind playing upon God; man giving his own ideas to express God.

And here in the cross of the Lord Jesus there is something of God which the natural man cannot comprehend, and immediately the natural mind begins to take hold of the deep meaning of the cross of the Lord Jesus, and seek to intellectually define it, he robs it of its deepest secret of power. Look at all the literature that has been written on the cross out of the minds of men; the distortion of Calvary; the human, mental construction of the atonement; begin to touch that without the Holy Spirit's revelation and it will not be long before you have gone astray and have robbed Calvary of its deepest meaning. It takes the Spirit of God to reveal the inward meaning of the cross. We may have all the doctrine of the atonement; yes, we may have all the truth of our identification with Christ in His death, burial and resurrection as taught in Romans and elsewhere, and yet with all our knowledge the day will come when the Holy Spirit shines into our hearts upon that thing and we are smashed and broken before God. Yes, we knew it, had been teaching and preaching it, but there is something more required to make it active, energetic, and when He does that, we come down before God. If you put your tool upon it you have polluted it; the tool of your own brain, intellect, imagination, sentiment, aesthetic feelings, ideas or artistic conceptions. If you put that tool upon this thing and you have polluted it and the spiritual power is gone. And you may sing your oratorio, your 'Messiah' until there is a sob in your throat and tears on your cheeks, and yet it makes no difference to your moral life. It is a beautiful conception, a great emotion, and yet it lacks the power of the Holy Spirit to bring you down before God and break you to pieces and make a new man or woman of you. While you speak about the ennobling of it, the elevating of it, it is only a passing thing, the passing of an hour of emotion; the inner life is unchanged. And yet the devil is deceiving multitudes into believing that that is salvation and acceptance with God. There is something in the cross which is not of man and not of this earth, which is apart. He truly does identify Himself by that cross with a cursed earth, but in order to separate it from the curse. And to separate it from the curse, that altar must contain something

absolutely separate from the curse, and that is your Christ. He is made a curse, but there is something in Him which is not the curse, which is altogether apart, separate. And it is only on that ground and because of that, that He can possess. He purchases. It is not given to Him by man or devil as a gift, and Cain cannot get the Lord to accept it as a gift. God says: "No, seeing it is now what it is, it has got to be purchased at a great price." And so He possesses by redeeming, and redeeming means identifying Himself with it.

Let us turn to Exodus 12, part of which we have read. It is the story of God purchasing a people through blood. It is the story of the only way for a sinful world to come into living relationship with God. It is the story of a great civilization, not without a deep religious life, but without redeeming blood, falling under judgment and destruction. But note, even in Egypt God declares His rights. It is a universal declaration of God's rights, not only in Israel but in Egypt as well. The firstborn are not only the firstborn of Israel, they are the firstborn of Egypt who are in view, and God claims both. The firstborn represent all the rest. They stand representative of the whole family. The household is bound up in the firstborn. God is claiming all in the person of the firstborn. With Israel He has the firstborn in life through the blood. In Egypt He has the firstborn, and all represented by the firstborn, without blood, in judgment and death. It is a universal right of God, but it is a question as to who can stand with God in acceptance, and only those who have come into that fellowship with God, through the precious blood in the altar, can abide. God has them for ever. The others — declared to be His by right, and yet lost.

Beloved, no man or woman will ever be lost eternally because they were not as much God's by right, as those who were saved eternally, but they will be lost because they did not come God's way to be His possession.

Now notice, the altar; where was the altar in Israel on that Passover evening? It is not mentioned but it is implied. The lamb has to be slain, the blood has to be shed, some place has to see that accomplished; that place will be the altar. Where was it? It is

here, but unfortunately not in our translation. That word 'basin' (Exodus 12:22) so translated in our English is the word 'threshold': "... the blood that is in the threshold ...". That is why no man shall go out of his house until the morning. The blood is in the threshold; the threshold of the house was the altar. Now you understand the meaning of the Lord's Passover. It was not that the Lord passed by, as so many have thought; and it was not that the Lord spread over, as many say. It was the Lord passing over the threshold into the house, figuratively. This is the figurative background. It is that of a monarch visiting a certain part of his kingdom which has been in revolt against him, and he has sent messengers to say that if he finds certain tokens on his arrival, he will have mercy, but if those tokens are not found the executioner whom he will bring with him will go in there and express his wrath and his judgment. That is the background. The angel of death is coming to the land. The Lord of Life is coming to the land as well. The tokens of His favour are the blood marks. As He reaches this house, the angel of death, the executioner as it were by His side, He sees the blood in the threshold, around the doorway, and He says to His angel of judgment: "Stay outside; I am going in here. It is a place of reconciliation, a place of peace, a place of surrender"; and He passes on, and here is a way without the blood and He says: "You go in there; I go on" and that is a house of death.

But that threshold; who may pass over that threshold where there is blood? It is the threshold of the Lord; it is the altar of the Lord; it is the place of the Lord's blood; it is the place sacred to Him, He only can pass over there, and no man can go out over that until the morning, until everything is done and the work of judgment is accomplished, virtually. In that night death has raged in the place where there was no token; judgment is accomplished. Life has come where the tokens of the precious blood were. It is all done by the morning and they can go out. No one may go across that threshold while this great work is going on; it is the Lord, and only the Lord who may. That is the Lord's Passover unto a covenant of life through precious blood, to those who have exercised their faith

by that means. What has the Lord done? Through that blood He has taken possession of the people. They are His people, in a covenant now with Him, His own purchased possession, purchased with precious blood. They are His, He has identified Himself with them through the blood and made them His. That is their deliverance from death. That is the covenant of life with the Lord of life. Where that blood is not, where that altar is not, where that threshold has not been made the altar of the lamb, the Lord's claims have had another outworking altogether, an outworking in judgment and death. He is Lord of all, but that is an awful thing for some people. Yes, unto Him every knee shall bow of things in heaven, things in earth, but some knees will bow under compulsion, with awful terror; other knees, like ours, will bow with deep, unspeakable gratitude. He is Lord of all but there is discrimination, and it is the blood that makes the difference. The altar, the threshold there represents the Lord coming in and possessing His own, and how He does it; how the Lord gets His object through all the meaning of that death, that shedding of blood. So He possesses by identification in redemption. There is something about it that does not lend itself to the judgment of man.

Nothing but that can satisfy the Lord. There might have been some Israelites that night who said: "Well I do not see the idea of that blood at all, and I do not like the idea; it is not a pleasant thing; we can do better than that." And they might have sought to provide the Lord with something according to their own ideas, their own minds, as a substitute for the blood, which to them was a better thing. "You know this phraseology of the blood, it is not nice at all; let us leave that out and put something else in its place." Well, it would have gone ill with such Israelites that night. There is no substitute for the blood, and God never intended His great truths to find a response in the aesthetic likes and dislikes of man. God is establishing infinite laws, and God has His way, and His way is the way of the precious blood; and there is no other way. It is not by works of righteousness which we have done, it is not by the good we can produce in mind, hand, or thought. All the good is in

the One who is offered a Lamb, without blemish, and that alone satisfies God. Something apart from man, and yet given to men to offer. Identified with man, and yet distinct from man; as something sinless.

I think you see the principles of the cross, the altar. We in these days must come back more and more to the inner meaning of that precious blood, because it is the background at the end time perhaps more than ever it has been. Beloved, only as you and I stand upon that ground with every ounce of our faith, our God-given faith, shall we get through. Oh, what a battle is raging, and what a fight the Adversary is putting up to diminish the value of that blood, to set it aside. He will offer any substitute for it, and he will seek to cause the people of God who in their heart of hearts believe in it, to make less of it then they should. He has many ways of doing it. And remember, every method of his is intended to malign and misrepresent God.

Do the children of God suffer? He will immediately insinuate their suffering is the result of sin. They take that on and before long they go down, they lose their joy, they lose their brightness, their effectiveness and lose their testimony. What has Satan done? He has made them accept the fact that Christ did not take the penalty of all their sin for all time, but they are bearing it themselves. Do we not suffer for our sins? Yes; constructively, not destructively. There is all the difference between chastisement and punishment. Chastisement is training and is always constructive. There may be a background of human weakness, human defects, faults, breakdown and failure. God builds upon that; He does not destroy. Satan jumps in at that time when God is seeking to construct upon our failures and says: "God is against you; He is smiting you down because of your sin." It is a lie! It is a blow at Calvary. It is a denial of the fact that Christ paid the penalty. I believe He has borne the penalty for every failure which will come into my life, which is not deliberate and persistent; He is able to save right unto the end in virtue of what He has done. The enemy is maligning and misrepresenting God, even in our suffering, and in so doing is taking away from the

value of that precious blood and getting us unconsciously to deny the blood that bought us, and to lose our testimony by weakening. He does anything to destroy the church's note of victory or to rob us of our power over him. Our power is in that blood, and in that blood alone. The fact remains that through that precious blood we are the Lord's. In a covenant of life triumphant over death, indestructible life, we are the Lord's for ever. The fight of the Enemy will be to undercut the value of that blood in our hearts and bring about doubt, and that question as to whether we are the Lord's. When he has gained the vantage of that doubt it is no longer the church triumphant singing, it is no longer the believer walking in victory.

I dare not go on further unless by multiplying words you lose the distinctiveness of the truth of the laws set forth. Our endeavour, by the grace of God in this message has been to add this further touch of unveiling, or emphasizing of this law, that the cross of the Lord Jesus, the altar, throughout the Word of God, on the one hand says "No" to man by nature; "No! Rejected!" On the other hand, it says that God claims everything, and between the "No" and the "Yes" there is the dealing with that which makes the "No" in order to make the "Yes" possible. That is what happens on the altar.

Which side of the altar are you on? On the "No" side, or on the "Yes" side? Are you on the side where the living stream comes down, or on the side where the ashes have been emptied? They moved round from one side of the altar to the other. One side was the death side; the other side, the life side, resurrection. You have to come to the one before you can get to the other, but do not stay there. If you recognize the fact that before God, in nature you are but dust and ashes, there is no need for you to remain there; that can be settled once and for all: "In my flesh there dwells no good thing", dust and ashes — but there is another side to the altar which is not "I" but now, "Christ", and all things possible, perfect acceptance with the Lord.

We have covered familiar ground, old truths put in other ways, but let us mark the great reality of the meaning of that cross and let us abide by it. We will leave it there.

#### CHAPTER THREE

## THE CLAIM OF THE CROSS

Reading: 2 Tim. 3:1-12.

In earlier messages we were occupied with the meaning of the altar, an object which is so frequently in view in the Old Testament and which cumulatively heads right up to the great antitype, the cross of the Lord Jesus, and we have been taking account of some of the great governing laws and truths of the altar. Now we may touch upon all those things already mentioned, but we want to go on in our contemplation especially to consider one tremendous factor related to the altar invariably, and which is one of the most important and outstanding factors in the cross of the Lord Jesus.

When we were speaking of the offerings of Cain and Abel as being the time which, not in actual statement but in clear inference, the altar first literally came into view, we pointed out that one of the differences between the offerings of those two men was, that Cain sought in bringing of firstfruits of the earth to testify for the earth; that is, to make something of it before God, to testify to its good, its splendour. He sought to have of its product an acceptance by the Lord, ignoring the fact that the earth had been cursed, and he discovered that God rejected his offering, the curse being the cause, the reason. On the other hand, Abel's offering testified against the earth and not for it. It declared that the life of that earth, being unacceptable to God, death must take place, a slaying in judgment and an end must be brought about, and then, if there is to be anything for God at all. It must be something out from death, triumphant over death, with all that which occasioned death,

eliminated from it. And the blood shed by Abel in his offering was a testimony against the earth and not for it. Now the immediate upshot of that testimony was the death of Abel, because Abel represented that divine Seed through which eventually there would be One who in virtue of His own shed blood would condemn the world to death, then carry the judgment Himself, and in resurrection possess Himself of that which had been under the curse and the judgment of which He Himself had suffered, and He would become thereby Heir of the world. Abel was in that line and in order to frustrate that ultimate issue which the enemy had had intimated to him when the Lord said of the seed of the woman there should be One who should bruise his head, everyone who comes into the line of that testimony has to meet the power of the Enemy. That very blood, that very altar means that they set themselves directly and utterly against that whole order of things which had become Satan possessed and they stand for that order to be delivered from the power and authority of Satan into the hands of God's Christ. And that lies inherent in the altar all the way through history, and fundamentally in the cross of Calvary.

Let me just remind you that in the presence of the cross, the Lord Jesus made one or two tremendous statements in that very connection. He said: "... this is your hour, and the power of darkness." Then, He said: "... now shall the prince of this world be cast out." That is the meaning of the altar; that is the meaning of the cross. The onrush of the powers of darkness in one great rally to seek to hold, to maintain their control; the hour of darkness, their hour; and the issue as they rush on to overwhelm Him, to press Him out into death and to destruction, is that they are cast out and the prince of this world is cast out. That is the issue. Paul later put it this way: "... having despoiled the principalities and powers, he made a show of them openly, triumphing over them in it (the cross)." He stripped off principalities and powers, and for stripping off there must have been an imposing on their part. They must have gathered round Him, clung to Him, held to Him, and pressed upon Him like a garment, to bring Him down, but He stripped off like a

garment the principalities and powers. That was the cross; but that principle, that truth was inherent in the altar all the way through, and you will find that an altar is always a point of tremendous conflict. Did Abel erect his altar with a true testimony, with the ultimate meaning of Calvary there? Then that altar becomes the scene of a deadly conflict and there the murderer will emerge and Abel will be put to death. Will Abraham erect his altar with its inherent truth of God's ultimate triumph? This is what God is saying to him in Genesis fifteen as He shows him that his seed will be in bondage in Egypt but after four hundred years He will bring then out with a strong hand; the covenant is made there by God with Abraham. The altar is erected, the sacrifice prepared, and Abraham enters into an awful conflict and there is the horror of great darkness, and a horror of darkness is never of God. This is the hour of the power of darkness in relation to the ultimate victory. And so you carry the truth on through your Old Testament Scriptures, and you will find that the altar of God is the object of spiritual antagonism all the time. The overthrow of God's altars was a persistent objective of another spiritual system seeking to rule God out. Elijah cried: "They have thrown down thine altars" and were substituting other altars in the high places for the altars of the Lord. There is a spiritual significance behind that because of that inherent law of the altar, that that altar declares certain things. It declares that the whole satanic system is going eventually to be brought to an end through the cross of the Lord Jesus. It declares that the government and control of this world by Satan is going to be wound up through the cross of the Lord Jesus and that government and control is going to pass into His hand. It declares that eventually the whole system of lawlessness which came in at the beginning is going to be destroyed through the cross of the Lord Jesus; and those declarations are there implicit in every altar as pointing towards Calvary, and those declarations become, therefore, the provocative factors in the spiritual conflict.

It is true that whenever the cross of the Lord Jesus is proclaimed in the power of the Holy Spirit there always spontaneously arises conflict. You can preach the cross in certain terms and never arouse the devil. You can preach it with the wisdom of words and make it of no effect; there is no battle. But preach the cross in the power of the Holy Spirit and invariably there is a deadly conflict, and you find that the word of the cross, the meaning of the altar is a provocation to hell.

Now the central declaration and assertion of the altar, the cross, is, as we have been seeing in these gatherings, that the Lord by His cross is going eventually to be possessed of the whole range and realm of satanic historic control and influence. Therein then is the challenge of the cross. What then must the enemy do? He knows what the end will be and he knows the means by which that end will be brought about. What will he do? He will seek by every means in his power, and the putting forth of his enormous power to its last ounce to get God out of His universe, and to keep God out of this world. He will. And if you want to know what the mystery of lawlessness is, it is that. The mystery of lawlessness is the deep working of Satan back of this world's history, with one object, to get and keep God out of this world. You may say: "Forlorn hope", but you do not know very much about it if you say that lightly. Oh yes, it is a forlorn hope; it is true that ultimately he will never realise his object, but if he knows that he does not abandon the thing.

And the point beloved, is this, that one in a thousand of the Lord's people today, and less than that, know the actual facts as to what is going on in this world in that very connection. If you knew the facts you would be stirred to the very depths of your being. I have been making it my business of late to appraise myself of those facts. If we are to have a message, and if we are responsible for the spiritual wakefulness of the Lord's people, we have to make it our business to be alive to the facts. And I have been going over the history of lawlessness through the Old Testament into the New Testament, out of the Testaments in history subsequently, and I tell you quite frankly that but for the assurance of the Lord, but for the certainty in one's heart as to what the issue will be eventually, I should be in a state of unspeakable unrest.

It is one of the Adversary's most clever and most successful

movements, and certainly one of his constant tactics, to keep people in ignorance of what he is doing, and then suddenly, what he has been doing so much behind the knowledge of multitudes of the Lord's people, in a very fully developed stage, breaks upon them and overwhelms them and they do not know where they are.

What would you think if I told you that there is an organized movement and society now at work on this earth which has as its program anti-Bible, anti-religion, anti-Christ, anti-God, anti-morality, anti-marriage, anti-home life; seven things definitely set as its program; having a membership of thirty million already enrolled. Its slogan is 'Down with God', and it has a doxology which I am not able to remember in its exact rhyming, but its terms are along these lines: For every wreck at sea when lives are lost, blame God. For every starving child, blame God, and so it goes on, for every evil in this world, and finishes up with: Blame God. Of its enrolled number, eighteen million are under eighteen years of age; you see what it is capturing. And one of its most prominent leaders said this: "We will harden our hearts and kill sympathy and compassion within our breasts until we swim in the blood of Christians", speaking for the Movement. One of its cunning methods is pacifism, the ending of war. Yes, but with what object? Disarmament! It is standing strongly for disarmament, but when all its millions of members in every nation rise to impose their regime upon the world, there will not be a fighting force to stand against them; no government will be able to call out its army against that thing. You see the subtlety? Anti-God, anti-Christ, anti-religion, anti-Bible, anti-morality, anti-marriage, anti-moral training. Why, when I read the program the other day I thought I was reading Paul to Timothy. Listen: "But know this, that in the last days grievous times shall come. For men shall be lovers of self, lovers of money, boastful, haughty, railers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, without natural affection — (We will slay compassion in our hearts) — implacable, slanderers, without self control, fierce, no lovers of good, traitors" (2 Tim. 3:2-4). That is the program for the world by that organised movement. I have only given you the mere fringe of it. If I stayed here for an hour to give you data you would go away shuddering.

Do you remember that the French Revolution was one of the first blows of this movement. The French Revolution was the product of a society called the 'Illuminati' — enlightening the people, and a subsequent society, a little older society, 'Concorde de la Paix', 'Fellowship of the Peace' carried on its work and produced the French Revolution. The French Revolution was not a political thing, and it was not what it appeared to be on the surface, merely the common people against the royalty or the aristocracy; there was a deeper thing than that. It was a religious movement, and the upper classes were the object of the assault because they were associated with organized religion. The outcome of the French Revolution was atheism in France, the dethronement of the Church.

Now the tenets of that movement which produced the French Revolution were exactly the tenets of this society of which I have been speaking. And then Karl Marx came in with his great philosophy of this world revolution, and these two things joined forces and they were the foundation of the present Communist Movement worldwide, and their program I have just outlined to you. The French Revolution saw the streets of Paris flowing with blood, but that was mere child's play with what has within recent years taken place in another part of this world. Actual figures to hand show that three million have been actually put to death in Russia on the ground of anti-religion. On one occasion, outside a great building were drawn up a stream of lorries, and into that building were taken men, women and children, who would not accept that system, mainly on religious grounds, and they were tortured, and then killed, and their corpses taken out and piled on to that stream of lorries — and so they were kept going continually carrying corpses. Get God out of this world and keep Him out; that is the program. That is a mere touch of the situation. I said you do not know anything about it. One in a thousand of God's people know anything about what is going on in this world today. That society is determined to destroy religion in every nation of this world, and it is working in every nation; and it is the seething leaven behind industry and politics in every nation; in

this one and in every other one. And some of them the nations are putting up a desperate fight to keep their end up against that. The battle in Germany is against that. Karl Marx came from Germany.

Well now, forgive me; it sounds to be getting somewhat out of the spiritual realm, but beloved, we have to know what is going on. This is the mystery of lawlessness. It is lawlessness at work with one object: - God must never have His end, and Christians are the greatest menace to the devil's determination to get and keep God from possessing this world. Go anywhere you like in this world and preach the cross in the power of the Holy Spirit and you will immediately find you meet something which is not natural, not normal; something rises up from the unseen and herein is the necessity, for the Lord's people knowing experimentally, livingly, the power of Calvary's victory. If you are going into the nations in these last days you will have to know that victory in a very real way.

The great menace of China is that of which I have been speaking: the Red menace. It is not meeting heathenism merely — pardon me for using the word 'merely' in connection with heathenism — it is heathenism, plus other active antagonistic elements, something else; a new menace in every part of the world. It is the explanation of the upheaval in Spain. It is all from the same thing.

The message of the cross has got to be known in a living way because it involves in something, but blessed be God, that cross is not declaring something which in any sense is a speculation or a chance. There is One now at the right hand of the Majesty on high who holds in His hands the final issue. And that is said with this further object. You and I have to have a mighty faith, in the Victor Himself as well as a living knowledge of the victory. The victory comes by a knowledge of the power of His cross as an inwardly wrought thing. But there has to be such a hold upon Him as already reigning till all His enemies are made the footstool of His feet. It is the Christ who has conquered. And yet this thing goes on and on. And it will develop, it will grow, and the Freemasons will be thrown into the vortex of this great lawless system of things; few, if any will escape.

Ah, but that brings me to the point which has been in my mind as the point for this message. What is to be the issue? The Coming of the Lord!

Now let me retrace my steps. I pointed out that in the altar two factors are seen. One is that the altar is always identified with the earth. The other is that there is always in the altar something which is apart from the earth. The altar in the first place was a thing of the earth; it could be of stone, but it was a thing of earth or stone, always identified with the earth, and the declaration of that identification was, and is that the earth is claimed for the Lord, as the Lord's rightful possession. And the cross secures that, the cross represents, as it is planted in this earth, that this earth is to be the possession of the Lord. His blood secures it. He is identified in that cross with it. And yet, there is always that in the altar and in the cross which says: "Not of this world". We went on to see the Lord saying to Moses that if they built Him an altar of stone, it should not be of hewn stone for: "... if thou lift up thy tool upon it, thou hast polluted it." It says, although this altar is so closely related to the earth along one line, with one significance, there is something here which man's judgment cannot take hold of; immediately man puts his tool upon it, he is expressing his own thought about it, doing something by which he is giving effect to his ideas and transfers to that thing his own mind through his tool, and God says: "No". This thing is, on the other side, related to something which is altogether apart from and transcending man in his thought, in his judgment! It is a heavenly thing, a holy thing, an eternal thing; something here which is not of a cursed earth and a cursed humanity.

Now carry those two things on. The cross of the Lord Jesus carries those two principles with it. Yes, identification with the earth as God's rightful possession, and yet detachment from the earth, meaning that the earth has got to be lifted out of its present condition and related to God's thought in character; delivered from man, delivered from the devil and made a heavenly thing in nature. The coming of the Lord is the consummation of Calvary.

Now see two things. The first coming of the Lord will not be to

this earth (1 Thess 4:14-17). The Lord does not come to the earth, He is coming into the air, and we have to be caught up to meet Him in the air to be with Him. That is a consummation of Calvary, but it is the declaration and the fulfilment of that side of Calvary which says there is something here not of this world. After that things are going to be let loose in this earth, the end of which will be its final judgment, and purging from all iniquity, and then the Lord will come to the earth and claim what is His. That is the other side of Calvary. It is the outworking of the deep spiritual truth of what the Lord said in His prayer in John 17: "... they are not of the world, even as I am not of the world." Why are they in it? As a testimony that eventually it will be the Lord's. They are not of it so that when the Lord does that which eventually makes it possible for Him to possess Himself of it, they will be out of it. These things are going to run through the earth, this working of lawlessness, to an awful degree. It is going to be so bad, that the Word of God says that unless those days be shortened no flesh will survive. But think not that is your prospect; I do not take that on. No! Before then, for you and for me, whether we be alive or those who sleep in Jesus, that side of Calvary which has separated us from the cursed earth and world, and its consequent judgment, will have been made good to us; we shall have found ourselves together with the Lord, in the air, out of it. And then the fires will burn; then this world will be spiritually and morally a veritable Gehenna, and when those fires have done their work the Lord will come, not for His saints but with His saints. Then will be fulfilled the Word: "Behold, the Lord cometh." with ten thousands of his saints ...". There is another side.

Now what I want to fasten upon in closing, is this. We are here on this earth as not of it, as a testimony by the cross of the Lord Jesus, that this earth is by rights our Christ's and that testimony has got to be planted in the nations. Just as Abraham when he, the first one, entered into the land of Canaan as the promised land of God's people, immediately built an altar in the land, and thereby typically said: "This land is the Lord's." The devil started to rage and drove him down into Egypt, and when he discovered that it was

all out of the plan and purpose of God — and when you get out of the will of God you get into an awful mess — he came back to the land and rebuilt his altar and reaffirmed his testimony: "This land is the Lord's in spite of the stampede of all evil powers to drive me out and keep God out (who is represented by me); it is the Lord's". That is what we are here for, to establish the testimony of Calvary, that this (ground) belongs to the Lord. It may be on a spot, and all around the Adversary may rage, govern and control, but there in the midst is that which says that eventually the Lord will have the whole; it is the earnest. This testimony prophecies the day of the Lord's complete possession. We are here for that. That is the battle which is raging around every one who is in a living testimony of the Lord Jesus. We are here for that. That testimony has to be kept, maintained right on to the end, and it will be. And then the Lord will come and we shall have the joy of knowing while we have been in the world, this was not our home, and of going to our true home and being taken out of this. Then when the Lord has done the purging work by His fires of judgment here on this earth, and His seven bowls have been emptied, and the last trump sounded, we shall descend with the Lord, not to be located alone here, but to govern this earth with Him. We come with the Lord.

Yes, but you see the wonder of it is we shall have been here before, and I do not know whether we shall find our localities then, but in effect it will amount to this I think: "This is where the Lord by His Spirit energized me to maintain the testimony that it would one day be the Lord's; this is where the battle was fought; this is where the Lord triumphed in me for that testimony, and now, it is the Lord's and there is no rival." Coming back to the place of our testimony; now not in spiritual victory while there is the conflict, but now literal victory without the conflict. That is what is going on. Beloved, the coming of the Lord draws near. I say that not as something to say. I am growingly convinced, reticent as I always am to say anything that would be like fixing of dates, but with a growing and deepening conviction inwardly, and by reason of what we are seeing, and coming to know of what is going on in this

world, the Lord's coming is drawing very, very near. Earthquakes and seaguakes, as well as lawlessness are multiplying; there never was such a fulfilment of prophetic signs on such a scale as there is today. The Lord is coming! Ah yes, but: "He that hath this hope in Him purifies himself." Are you a child of the day or of the night? Are you awake? Are you alive? Are you watching? Are you ready? "We are not of the night, nor of darkness. Therefore let us not sleep as do others; they that sleep, sleep in the night." "But ye, brethren, are not in darkness, that that day should overtake you as a thief." "Ye are all the children of light ...". Are you? Are you looking for Him, waiting for Him? Have you come at last to that position that the most glorious thing that could possibly happen in the history of this world is that the Lord should come, and come quickly? Let us be watchful. The word 'watch' in the New Testament has three Greek words behind it. One means, be awake; do not be asleep. Another means, be in action. Not only be awake but be in action, actively. The other means, avoid 'narcotics' that would get you to sleep. It is translated be 'sober' but it is the same word, the same root: watch, be sober. That is, do not allow yourself to be doped so that you lose your watchfulness. There are three stages: be awake; be actively awake; and watch against anything that would put you to sleep. That is the state for the Lord's people in view of His coming.

Now I do not feel the Lord wants me to say any more. Let us be awake, eager, active, buying up the opportunity, watching for every occasion for completing the work which is given to us which has to be done unto His appearing. Oh, may the Lord, as a result of this time together, bring us to the place where we know Calvary's victory, and where we know the Victor in a very real way so that we can in Him maintain the testimony.

The purpose of this publication is to encourage God's people to lay hold on eternal life, the hope set before them, knowing that Jesus Christ, their Saviour, will soon return to establish His eternal Kingdom, "so that the name of our Lord Jesus may be glorified in you, and you in him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ" (2 Thess. 1:12).

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