

“ALL ON THE ALTAR”

(II Chronicles 29:27)

“And Hezekiah commanded to offer the burnt offering upon the altar. And when the burnt offering began, the song of the Lord began also with the trumpets, and with the instruments ordained by David king of Israel.”

Several years ago, during a missions conference in a large church, a missionary made an impassioned appeal for world missions. Immediately after the message, a missionary offering was taken. A young woman present did not have any money, but she wanted to give something to the Lord and to His world-wide cause. She took off her beautiful diamond ring and put it in the plate. At the end of the service the pastor brought the ring back to her, saying, “Dear sister, your action was beautiful, but there is more than enough money in the offering to meet the need. Here is your ring back.” The young woman replied firmly, “Pastor, I did not give the ring to you or to the church. *I gave it to Jesus!*” Our text in this study speaks to us of another very important offering made to God.

The message of the text is almost concealed in the camouflage of the Old Testament, but a careful examination of it will disclose great riches of Divine revelation and Christian experience. It reveals a scene which needs to be re-enacted a thousand times on the more private, personal altars of our hearts. To guide us in exploring the story, I have selected three guide words.

I. SILENCE

The first guide word is the word *silence*. We read in verse 27 that “the song of the Lord *began*.” The word “began” indicates that the song of the Lord had ceased in the temple. The temple had become like a body without a spirit, like an envelope without a letter, like a house without a family. Everything inside was still and silent. What had happened to make the song of the Lord cease in the temple? The preceding chapter shows us the cause of the silence. Before the righteous reign of King Hezekiah, an evil king named Ahaz reigned over Judah for sixteen years. In chapter 28, verse 1, we read, “And Ahaz reigned sixteen years in Jerusalem; but he did not that which was right in the sight of the Lord.” So he encouraged idolatry, the worship of false gods, in Israel. In verse 3, we read that “he burnt his children in the fire, after the abominations of the heathen whom the Lord had cast out before the children of Israel.” He reverted to the heathen practice of child-sacrifice to false gods. But the height of his sinful folly was reached near the end of the chapter, where in the 24th verse we read, “And Ahaz gathered together the vessels of the house of God, and cut in pieces the vessels of the house of God, and shut up the doors of the house of the Lord, and made him altars in every corner of Jerusalem. And in every several city of Judah he made high places to burn incense unto other gods, and provoked to anger the Lord God of his fathers.” So you see, before Hezekiah came to the throne, for sixteen years Ahaz had poisoned the spiritual life of the people. There was an *abrupt departure from God* early in his reign. Then came a *positive repudiation and defiance of God*. He “shut up the doors of the house of the Lord.” This was an announcement that all relations

had been broken off with God. And for sixteen years, Ahaz stumbled from one frustration to another, from one defeat to another.

But look under the surface a bit during those sixteen years. There was one gigantic symptom of what had taken place in Israel during those years: the “song of the Lord” ceased in the land. For sixteen years, the song of the Lord did not break from the throats of the people. The temple courts of the house of God, which were intended to echo ceaselessly with the praises and the worship of God, instead were silent and still. And Ahaz prevented any possible restoration. He put out the lights of the temple, closed the doors, took away the keys, and set the people adrift from God. Filthiness accumulated in the temple, and no one entered to worship. Anyone listening for the song of the Lord would have been greeted by dead silence.

Is there not a perfect parallel to this situation among Christians today? The temple courts of *that* day resemble the hearts of thousands of Christians today. Indeed, “You are the temple of God” (I Cor. 3:16). But many Christians are mocked by the dead silence of the inner sanctuary of their hearts. The “song of the Lord” has ceased! *Your heart was meant for music! Jesus Christ came to stir the Lord’s song in human souls.* In John 15:11, He said, “These things have I spoken unto you that *my joy might be in you*, and that your joy might be full.” *He came that “the song of the Lord” might reach full volume in your soul!* In I Peter 1:8, the Bible speaks of “rejoicing with joy unspeakable and full of glory.” *This is to be the normal experience of every Christian--he is to have a joy at the center of his life that is humanly indescribable!* The Christian is to be possessed by the Holy Spirit, and “the fruit of the Spirit is... joy” (Galatians 5:22). Fruit is natural. There is no effort about fruit. If the branch is properly connected to the trunk, it will bear fruit. If you are properly related to your Lord, joy will be as natural to you as singing is to a bird.

But something is wrong in many lives. The song of the Lord has ceased. The mechanics of the Christian faith have become a drudgery to many. It is an ancient tradition of the Jews that in heaven there is trumpet music every morning. And one of the most pathetic legends in the world is an old Jewish legend which refers to that. It is about “Lucifer, son of the morning,” who for pride was cast out of heaven into the pit. And some one asked him what he missed most about Paradise. Lucifer answered, “I miss most the sound of the trumpets in the morning.” In contrast, when Bunyan’s Mr. Valiant-For-Truth died and entered heaven, the story (Pilgrim’s Progress) says, “So he passed over, and all the trumpets sounded for him on the other side.” But the trumpets will only sound *for* the believer in heaven if they have first sounded *in* him on earth. For many, the sound of the trumpets has ceased in the temple of their hearts. What is the reason? There is but one reason--*sin*. Jonathan Goforth said, “All hindrance in the church is due to sin.” But sin is never merely an *occurrence*; it is always also a *sequence*. The sin is followed by the silence.

The story of the *song-stopping sin* in this account is not hard to trace.

A. There was *the crowning of an evil king*. Hezekiah was one of the best kings in the Old Testament records, even as his father, Ahaz, was one of the worst. Ahaz was so vicious and wicked that the people loathed him. When he died, they refused him a sepulcher among the kings of Israel, so he had to sleep in a dishonored grave. All sin begins with the crowning of a

wrong king in the human heart. Oswald Sanders spoke of “the wicked King Self.” When this king is on the throne, the first big step has been taken to silence the song of the Lord.

B. Then, there took place *the corrupting of the people by wicked practices*. A rapid succession of degrading sins began to be practiced throughout the land.

C. Then *the Temple doors were closed* against God and His people. When there were no sacrifices on the alter, no sweet incense in the Holy Place, no blood on the Mercy-Seat in the Holy of Holies, there was no song of the Lord in the Temple. The lamps were no longer lit (proclamation ceased); and the incense was no longer burned (prayer ceased).

D. Then came *the cluttering of the temple with debris and filth*. The birds built their nests, the spiders spun their webs, and the mice played in the neglected courts of the Temple of God. Because of this, the joy was missing, and the song of the Lord had ceased. For the same reasons, there is *dead silence* in the souls of many today. Silence prevails because sin prevails, and that “loud silence” fills the hearts of multitudes today.

II. SURRENDER

The second guide word for this message is the word *surrender*. When Ahaz died, and Hezekiah succeeded him to the throne, a change immediately came to the nation. In chapter 29, verse 3 and following, we read, “In the first year of Hezekiah’s reign, in the first month, he opened the doors of the house of the Lord, and repaired them.” The nation is on the highroad toward Divine blessing--the church doors have been opened again! “And he brought in the priests and the Levites, and gathered them together into the east street, and said unto them, Hear me, ye Levites, sanctify now yourselves, and sanctify the house of the Lord God of your fathers, and carry forth the filthiness out of the holy place. For our fathers have trespassed, and done that which was evil in the eyes of the Lord our God, and have forsaken Him, and have turned away their faces from the habitation of the Lord, and turned their backs.” Hezekiah called for a special service in the temple that hadn’t been used for sixteen years. The service was to be nation-wide in scope and influence. The keyword of the service was “surrender.” Verse 24 says, “The king commanded that the sin offering and the burnt offering be made for all Israel.”

The people were called upon to surrender two things. First, Hezekiah charged them to surrender their *sins*. He said, “Carry forth the filthiness out of the holy place.” This is *always* the first step toward Divine blessing. The formula sounds wonderfully similar to the words of the New Testament in II Corinthians 7:1, “Let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit.” And in verse 16 we read, “They went into the inner part of the house of the Lord, and brought out all the uncleanness that they found.” Then in verse 23, they offered a sin-offering, which was the means of their forgiveness and reconciliation with God. Let this be said to Hezekiah’s everlasting credit: he lost no time in hedging or compromising. He put first things first. He promptly called the people to repentance—to put sin away. *Today, many Christians have forfeited the song of the Lord from their lives because the inner shrine of their hearts has become full of sin.* Look into your own heart. Perhaps you didn’t deliberately reach out to bring the sin into your heart. Maybe the sin just accumulated over a period of time when your heart went without regular cleansing. But, however it happened, the dust and filthiness of the world

has accumulated in your soul, and has stifled the song of the Lord. Now, you must deal with your sins. Open the doors today, admit God to the inner sanctuary, let Him search your soul, and show you the unclean thing therein, and then, by a decisive commitment of the will, surrender that sin to God!

Then, Hezekiah called upon them (indeed, he “*commanded*” them) to surrender their total *selves* to God. In verse 27, we read, “And Hezekiah commanded them to offer the burnt-offering upon the altar.” Now, the “burnt-offering” was one of the five Levitical sacrifices in the Jewish sacrificial system. You can study the burnt-offering in the very first chapter of the book of Leviticus. In Leviticus 1:3, we read, “If his offering be a burnt-offering, let him offer a male without blemish: he shall offer it of his own *voluntary will* at the door of the tabernacle of the congregation before the Lord.” Then in verse 9 (*listen carefully!*): “And the priest shall burn *all on the altar*, to be a burnt-sacrifice, an offering made by fire, of a sweet savor unto the Lord.” In the other four Levitical sacrifices, only part of the sacrifice was consumed on the altar as an offering to God. The key is found in the phrase, “*All on the altar.*” Those old sacrifices, the “sin-offering” and the “burnt-offering,” have long since been abolished, but the deep truths which they stand for abide permanently in the purpose of God.

Can you picture that scene in the temple on that day long ago? The vast assembly of people has filled the temple courts. The sacrifice has been laid upon the high altar, waiting for the fire. No part of it has been withheld. It is *all on the altar*. The people stand, hushed and expectant, for they know what that burnt offering represents—it represents *themselves!* It stands for their total life-dedication, as they offer themselves, body and soul, a willing, eager sacrifice, to the God whom for years they have forsaken.

May I speak directly to your heart for a moment? We talk about offering to God our time, and talents, and tithes. May I say that *this may be an abomination to God*. God doesn’t want your time, talents, money—*primarily*. Many Christians have bribed God with the surrender of parts of themselves, while withholding the reins of their lives from His hands. The *great danger* is that we think only of offering our *gifts* to Jesus on the altar. God doesn’t want *any part* of you, however valuable you may think it to be! He wants a burnt-offering, which means “*ALL ON THE ALTAR.*” Now, I would not have you to misunderstand me. When the burnt-offering was placed “all on the altar,” it was then divided into parts—the head, the inwards, the fat, the legs (Lev. 1:8-9). You should be sure that your total commitment includes a careful dedication of the parts—your time, your talents, your energies, your speech, your money, etc.

May I offer a “step by step formula” for the recovery of the lost song?

- A. *Replace the wrong king*, wicked King Self, *with the right king*, King Jesus. The king who caused the silence must die, and the king who will bring back the song must be placed on the throne.
- B. *Re-open the doors of the Temple*. Get alone in a quiet place and meet with God.
- C. *Remove all the known filth from the temple of your heart*. By self-examination, confession, and repudiation, be clean of all the filth which has accumulated through months and

years of neglect. II Chronicles tells us that in eight days they had cleansed the Temple, and in eight more days they had cleansed even the courts of the Temple.

D. *Restore the worship of God to its proper place in your heart.* There is a sequence in sanctification just as there is in sin. Though we have only mentioned the burnt-offering, a careful study of the story will reveal that, in fact, three offerings were made in the Temple that day. Let the anointed eye observe this carefully. First came the *sin-offering* (II Chron. 29:21, 23). Then followed the *burnt-offering*, the placing of all on the altar (verse 27). And finally, there was a *thank-offering*. This order will always be followed when an individual Christian gets right with God today. First, sin is dealt with and settled in the heart. Second, the total self is surrendered to God. Third, the believer expresses thanksgiving for the provision that has been made for him. When you thus yield your total self to God, this surrender will open the way for the final stage.

III. SONG

The final guide word in our study is the word *song*. “When the burnt-offering began, the song of the Lord began also.” When this happens, the very heavens must stand still to listen! The long-lost joy is restored. Throats long silent break into song. *A self-centered, sin-filled life is a miserable life.* I heard about a man who was so selfish that on his birthday *he sent his parents a telegram of congratulations!* And I can almost add as a postscript, Yes, and he was miserable! *But when SIN and SELF are surrendered to God, heaven’s happiness fills the heart and soul.* Hearts are lifted, shadows flee away, victory comes, “when the burnt offering begins,” when the self is placed “all on the altar.” Nobody who has ever faced this issue, and paid this price, has ever regretted putting his all on the altar.

Nehemiah 8:10 says, “The joy of the Lord is your strength.” One wise saint said, “Joy is the infallible sign of the Presence of God.” But what is joy? What is this “song of the Lord?” It is a lifting sense of gladness and delight. It is a free happiness. It is an inner celebration flavored with purpose and accomplishment. Someone described it as “holy hilarity.” A recent convert testified, “Jesus really takes the gloom out of you, doesn’t He?” Oswald Chambers defined it in these words: “Joy is God in your blood.” It is this joy that is the strength of a believer’s personal life and the strength of the service he renders for Christ. Sam Shoemaker was right when he said, “The amount of good a person can do depends greatly on how much pleasure he gets out of it.” One of the important reasons for the rapid growth of Christianity at the beginning was the joy which was characteristic of the early disciples. This joy is poetically called “the song of the Lord” in our text.

It is this joy that is often missing from Christians’ lives today. Billy Sunday said, “Many Christians seem to have just enough Christianity to make them miserable, and they don’t seem to be willing to get any more.” One cynic said, “Why, I *keep* a song in my heart. I pick up the Grand Ole Opry on my pacemaker!” And he is probably about as full of the joy of the Lord as multitudes of believers are today—not at all.

“The Bread of Life and the Water of Life cannot be recommended to people by those who look as if that food and drink disagreed with them.” Andrew Murray was surely right when he

wrote, “My first business in each new day is to get my own soul into a happy relationship with God.” So today, at this moment, I humbly claim from you in the name of Jesus a burnt-offering of your total life and self, placed all on the altar. And I can promise you this, that when all has been put on the altar in your life, in your heart God will put a new song. You will enter into a new liberty and a new kind of joy. And as long as you *leave* your all on the altar, that song will *continue*, and will *deepen* as the years go by.

Think of Mary, the mother of Jesus. She drew back when the angel told her that she was to be the mother of a supernatural son. But at last she bowed her head and said, “Behold, the handmaid of the Lord; be it unto me according to Thy Word.” That’s the burnt offering; she surrendered herself; she placed her *all* on the altar. And listen to her next words: “My soul doth magnify the Lord, and *my spirit rejoices in God my Savior.*” *There’s the song of the Lord!* “When the burnt offering began, the song of the Lord began also.” You see, *surrender and song are Siamese twins*. If you have lost the song of the Lord, you can have it again. But before the song of the Lord can begin, at some sudden, decisive moment like this one, you must surrender all of your sins and all of your self to God in a crucial act of your will.

Think of Jesus. At the last supper, He shared with His disciples the broken bread and the cup of wine, picturing His Body broken and His Blood poured out on the Cross. *This is the burnt offering*. Then we read, “And they sang a hymn.” *This is the song of the Lord*.

A concert violinist named Benno Rabinoff accepted the dinner invitation of a violin enthusiast who arrived at the restaurant carrying a violin case which he opened after dinner. Inside was a genuine Stradivarius violin made in 1734, what experts would consider one of the three greatest violins in the world. It had once been owned by Fritz Kreisler and had been played by Kreisler in concert at Carnegie Hall. The violin fan gave it to Rabinoff there in the restaurant. “Why are you giving this to me?” Rabinoff asked in astonishment. The donor replied, “*I want to hear it sing again. It has been silent too long.*”

Dear Christian, how long has it been since the Master’s music rang in your heart? Has your heart been silent too long? Pick yourself up and place yourself on the altar before God, make a full surrender there, and the song of the Lord will sound again in the temple of God, “Which temple you are” (I Cor. 3:17). One final verse: “And Hezekiah rejoiced, and all the people, that God had prepared the people: for the thing was done *suddenly*” (II Chron. 29:36). The change in the inner temple from *silence* to *song* can be made *suddenly*, but it must be made by *sacrifice*, the total *surrender* of yourself to Christ. Why wait a moment longer?