

INTRODUCTION

*“Follow the way of love and eagerly desire gifts of the Spirit...”
(1 Corinthians 14:1, NIV, emphasis added)*

- God has called us to eagerly desire (from the Greek word *zēloō*, meaning to pursue with zeal) the spiritual gifts He gives, but this call is in the context of walking in His love (*agape*) as defined in 1 Corinthians 13.
- God wants us to be informed and understand the gifts of the Spirit (1 Cor. 12:1). Learn more from previous sessions’ notes which are available at evidentlife.org/eagerlydesire

God, who is the Spirit (2 Cor. 3:17), is calling us to draw near to Him (Jam. 4:8), and to enter into His holy presence through Christ Jesus with thanksgiving and praise (Ps. 100; 118:19-23). He has given us the pattern of the Tabernacle to better understand our identity in Him (1 Pet. 2:4-5), and what it looks like to draw near to Him in this New Covenant in Christ Jesus (Heb. 8:5-6, Ex. 25:9).

I. THE ALTAR OF INCENSE

- A. In the Holy Place, outside the veil before the Ark of the Covenant, was an altar made acacia wood and overladen with gold (purity, sanctification, and holiness) It was upon this altar that the priest would burn incense before the LORD.**

¹“You shall make an altar on which to burn incense; you shall make it of acacia wood. ²A cubit shall be its length, and a cubit its breadth. It shall be square, and two cubits shall be its height. Its horns shall be of one piece with it. ³You shall overlay it with pure gold, its top and around its sides and its horns. And you shall make a molding of gold around it. ⁴And you shall make two golden rings for it. Under its molding on two opposite sides of it you shall make them, and they shall be holders for poles with which to carry it. ⁵You shall make the poles of acacia wood and overlay them with gold. (Exodus 30:1-5, emphasis added)

- B. The incense was to be offered upon the altar morning and evening daily before the LORD by the priest before the Mercy Seat of the Ark. This is where God would speak to them.**

⁶And you shall put it in front of the veil that is above the ark of the testimony, in front of the mercy seat that is above the testimony, where I will meet with you. ⁷And Aaron [the priest] shall burn fragrant incense on it. Every morning when he dresses the lamps he shall burn it, ⁸and when Aaron sets up the lamps at twilight, he shall burn it, a regular incense offering before the Lord throughout your generations. (Exodus 30:6-8, emphasis added)

- C. The incense to be offered on the Altar was a special blend to be used only in this way before the LORD. It was not to be used for personal application outside of offering to the LORD, and they were not to offer to any other God but the LORD.**

“³⁴ The Lord said to Moses, “Take sweet spices, stacte, and onycha, and galbanum, sweet spices with pure frankincense (of each shall there be an equal part), ³⁵ and make an incense blended as by the perfumer, seasoned with salt, pure and holy. ³⁶ You shall beat some of it very small, and put part of it before the testimony in the tent of meeting where I shall meet with you. It shall be most holy for you. ³⁷ And the incense that you shall make according to its composition, you shall not make for yourselves. It shall be for you holy to the Lord. ³⁸ Whoever makes any like it to use as perfume shall be cut off from his people.” (Exodus 30:34-38, emphasis added)

D. In Scripture, the incense being offered is almost always symbolic of prayer.

Let my prayer be counted as incense before you, and the lifting up of my hands as the evening sacrifice! (Psalm 141:2, emphasis added)

⁵ In the days of Herod, king of Judea, there was a priest named Zechariah, of the division of Abijah. And he had a wife from the daughters of Aaron, and her name was Elizabeth. ⁶ And they were both righteous before God, walking blamelessly in all the commandments and statutes of the Lord. ⁷ But they had no child, because Elizabeth was barren, and both were advanced in years. ⁸ Now while he was serving as priest before God when his division was on duty, ⁹ according to the custom of the priesthood, he was chosen by lot to enter the temple of the Lord and burn incense. ¹⁰ And the whole multitude of the people were praying outside at the hour of incense. ¹¹ And there appeared to him an angel of the Lord standing on the right side of the altar of incense. ¹² And Zechariah was troubled when he saw him, and fear fell upon him. ¹³ But the angel said to him, “Do not be afraid, Zechariah, for your prayer has been heard, and your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you shall call his name John. ¹⁴ And you will have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth, ¹⁵ for he will be great before the Lord. And he must not drink wine or strong drink, and he will be filled with the Holy Spirit, even from his mother's womb. ¹⁶ And he will turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God, ¹⁷ and he will go before him in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, to make ready for the Lord a people prepared.” (Luke 1:5-16, emphasis added)

II. INTERCESSION AND PRAYERS OF JESUS

A. The high priest would go into the Holy of Holies only once per year on the Day of Atonement. During this time, he would take the blood of the sin offering and apply it to the altar and bring a special offering of incense into the Holy of Holies.

¹⁰ Aaron [the high priest] shall make atonement on its horns once a year. With the blood of the sin offering of atonement he shall make atonement for it once in the year throughout your generations. It is most holy to the Lord.” (Exodus 30:10, emphasis added)

¹² And he shall take a censer full of coals of fire from the altar before the Lord, and two handfuls of sweet incense beaten small, and he shall bring it inside the veil ¹³ and put the incense on the fire before the Lord, that the cloud of the incense may cover the mercy seat that is over the testimony... (Leviticus 16:12-13, emphasis added)

- B. This special offering is symbolic of the prayers that Jesus would offer on our behalf as He was going to give Himself up as sin offering for us (John 17), and then go into the heavenly Holy of Holies.

¹ ...“Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son that the Son may glorify you, ² since you have given him authority over all flesh, to give eternal life to all whom you have given him. ³ And this is eternal life, that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent... ⁹ I am praying for them, I am not praying for the world but for those whom you have given me, for they are yours... ¹¹ And I am no longer in the world, but they are in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, keep them in your name, which you have given me, that they may be one, even as we are one... ¹³ But now I am coming to you, and these things I speak in the world, that they may have my joy fulfilled in themselves... ¹⁵ I do not ask that you take them out of the world, but that you keep them from the evil one. ¹⁶ They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. ¹⁷ Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth. ¹⁸ As you sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world. ¹⁹ And for their sake I consecrate myself, that they also may be sanctified in truth. ²⁰ “I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word, ²¹ that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me... ²⁴ Father, I desire that they also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, to see my glory that you have given me because you loved me before the foundation of the world. (John 17:1-3, 9, 11, 13, 15-21, 24)

⁷ In the days of his flesh, Jesus offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears...⁹ ...he became the source of eternal salvation to all who obey him, ¹⁰ being designated by God a high priest after the order of Melchizedek. (Hebrews 5:7, 9-10)

- C. We can now approach God confidently in the place of prayer, praying God’s will, because of what Jesus has done for us and redeemed us back to God.

¹⁴ Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. ¹⁵ For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. ¹⁶ Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

III. PRAYERS OF THE SAINTS

- A. Even while under the Old Covenant, it was prophesied that people from all nations would offer up holy prayers as incense before the LORD and receive the gift of His joy in the place of prayer.

For from the rising of the sun to its setting my name will be great among the nations, and in every place incense will be offered to my name, and a pure offering. For my name will be great among the nations, says the Lord of hosts. (Malachi 1:11, emphasis added)

⁶ “And the foreigners who join themselves to the Lord, to minister to him, to love the name of the Lord, and to be his servants, everyone who keeps the Sabbath and does not profane it, and holds fast my covenant—⁷ these I will bring to my holy mountain, and make them joyful in my house of prayer; their burnt offerings and their sacrifices will be accepted on my altar; for my house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples.” (Isaiah 56:6-7, emphasis added)

- B. Our prayers in agreement with God’s Word rise before Him like incense in the heavenly places, and we receive answers to our prayers in Jesus’ name.**

⁶ And between the throne and the four living creatures and among the elders I saw a Lamb standing, as though it had been slain, with seven horns and with seven eyes, which are the seven spirits of God sent out into all the earth. ⁷ And he went and took the scroll from the right hand of him who was seated on the throne. ⁸ And when he had taken the scroll, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb, each holding a harp, and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints. ⁹ And they sang a new song, saying, “Worthy are you to take the scroll and to open its seals, for you were slain, and by your blood you ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation, ¹⁰ and you have made them a kingdom and priests to our God, and they shall reign on the earth.” (Revelation 5:6-10, emphasis added)

¹ When the Lamb opened the seventh seal, there was silence in heaven for about half an hour. ² Then I saw the seven angels who stand before God, and seven trumpets were given to them. ³ And another angel came and stood at the altar with a golden censer, and he was given much incense to offer with the prayers of all the saints on the golden altar before the throne, ⁴ and the smoke of the incense, with the prayers of the saints, rose before God from the hand of the angel (Revelation 8:1-4, emphasis added)

¹³ Whatever you ask in my name, this I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. ¹⁴ If you ask me anything in my name, I will do it. (John 14:13-14, emphasis added)

²³ In that day you will ask nothing of me. Truly, truly, I say to you, whatever you ask of the Father in my name, he will give it to you. ²⁴ Until now you have asked nothing in my name. Ask, and you will receive, that your joy may be full. ²⁵ “I have said these things to you in figures of speech. The hour is coming when I will no longer speak to you in figures of speech but will tell you plainly about the Father. ²⁶ In that day you will ask in my name, and I do not say to you that I will ask the Father on your behalf; ²⁷ for the Father himself loves you, because you have loved me and have believed that I came from God. (John 16:23-27, emphasis added)