

Lenten Devotional 2020

Friday, March 27, 2020
Day 27, Exodus 27

Grab the Horns

Make a horn at each of the four corners, so that the horns and the altar are of one piece, and overlay the altar with bronze. (Exodus 27:2)

When we come to Scripture we all wear lenses as we read. Those lenses colour the way we read and the conclusions we draw. One set of lenses that the church has worn for too long is rather antiJudaic. Many of us have been taught to read the Hebrew Scriptures as Law/Works. For us Protestants we read Scripture through the lenses Martin Luther bequeathed to us. Basically, that the Jewish people believed they had to work, do specific things, to earn salvation. Then they read the Christian Scriptures as freeing us from those Works/Law. Salvation by grace alone. This is a poor reading of Scripture and does not describe the covenant Israel had with YHWH.

Hopefully, having worked through Exodus up to this point, we will be able to recognize that Israel's salvation has come by grace alone—they did nothing to earn it, it has always been by God's *hesed* (loving kindness). Israel's works are their obedience to the the Law that YHWH gave to them so they might worship him appropriately. In short, the Works of the Law were Israel's appropriate obedience in gratitude for God's free gift of salvation by grace alone. This comes into focus as we turn to the altar.

The Lord directs Israel to build an altar with four horns on it. This altar is to sacrifice animals on and make them a burnt offering. So, the horns, at one level, reflect the animals which will be sacrificed on them. Another possible use of the horns is to tie the animals down on the altar. Although, as one author notes, it doesn't make a lot of sense to bind an animal that is already dead. Finally, the horns are there for people to grasp in supplication. Cole says it well, "Since the altar was a 'sanctuary', a miniature 'city of refuge', the suppliant would grasp these horns with his [or her] hands, making himself [or herself] a living sacrifice, devoted to YHWH, and so under his protection (TOTC Exodus, 196).

The astute reader will hear the echo of Paul's words to the Christians in Rome, "Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship" (Romans 12:1). Jesus and faith in Jesus (Christianity) is not a replacement of Israel's worship, but a fulfillment of it. Having a grasp on Israel's worship deepens our own understanding of our faith. When Paul calls us to be a living sacrifice he is calling us to grasp the horns of the altar which for us is Jesus Christ. In this way we abandon ourselves to him and place ourselves totally under his protection—which is the salvation by faith alone that Luther was talking about.

When we read Scripture the proper lens to read through is the gospel—Jesus's life, death, resurrection, and ascension—which tells us that salvation from Genesis to Revelation is by grace and faith alone.

Prayer

God of Israel, thank you that you are not the God of the Jews only, but the God of all people. Thank you for your unmerited grace and mercy on all human beings. Help us to respond in humble gratitude through the obedience of faith in Jesus Christ. Amen.