

An Attempt To Listen To God

The Cords Of The Altar

By

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When in the upper room the inspired apostle informs us that the Lord sang a hymn. Some of the words were: “bind the sacrifice with cords, even unto the horns of the altar” (Psa. 118:27). That this is a Messianic Psalm is clear from the words of verses 22 and 26. When an animal was bound to the altar it indicates that there was no relaxing of the sentence of death upon it. It is evident the animal could not be tied to the altar with literal cords, for being attached to the horns of the altar, which would have been very hot, they would have burnt through quite quickly. Rather, the expression indicates there was no relaxing of the sentence of death for the sacrifice. Lifting it to the higher level, while the animal never knew what was going to happen to it, the Lord not only knew but there could be no wavering of the devotion of His heart and zeal for the glory of God. How great was the spiritual and mortal strength of the man to sing, knowing all that lay before him. This was no dark and melancholy Saviour, but with ram like determination and strength, He moves on to Gethsemane (Matt. 26:36), Gabbatha (Jn. 19:13), and Golgotha (Matt. 27:33), singing a hymn.

Coming to our subject which is based on the words: “Bind the sacrifice with cords, even unto the horns of the altar” (Psa. 118:27), and since there were four horns (Ex. 27:2), the indication is that there were four cords which bound our Lord. Therefore, the question becomes, “What were the four cords that bound the Lord to Calvary?”

Before dealing with that, it is interesting to consider others who were bound.

Individual	Position	Reference
Isaac	The sacrificed son	Gen. 22:9
Joseph	The suffering son	Gen. 40:3
Simeon	As a surety	Gen. 42:24
Samson	A judge	Jud. 16:8
Hoshea, Zedekiah, Manasseh	All kings	2 Kgs. 17:4; 25:7; 2 Chron. 33:11
Jeremiah, John the Baptist, Agabus	Prophets	Jer. 40:1; Lk. 7:28; Acts 21:10
Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego	Hebrew Servants	Dan. 3:21
Paul	An apostle	Acts 21:33

They were bound for a variety of reasons. Some were for:

- a) Personal piety before God
- b) Moral righteousness
- c) Their own foolishness
- d) Their own rebellion

Amazing is the truth Christ was bound.

- a) He was bound by Annas and sent to Caiaphas (Jn. 18:24)
- b) Then bound by the rulers and sent to Pilate (Matt 27:2; Mk. 15:1).
- c) The One who came to set free (Jn. 8:36) was bound, and yet, bound by the cords of man. Man is bound by sin, death, and is the slave of sin (Rom. 8:2), but this was never true of the Lord for He was the only man who ever lived who was free from the bondage of sin.

Our Lord lived being bound in spirit, constrained by love to the will of God for He said: “How am I straitened (bound in) till it be accomplished!” (Lk. 12:50). This is amazing, for the One who gave spiritual liberty to those who were bound is Himself bound. People, such as the woman who was bound (Lk. 13:16), or the demoniac (Lk. 8:29), these were bound by Satan. The Pharisees and Sadducees were bound by man made religion and spiritually distorted vision.

The cords which bound our Lord to Calvary were not material, but devotional; not earthly, but the burdens of the divine heart. It is my suggestion that the four cords which bound our Lord to Calvary were:

- a) The love of Christ for His own. (Jn. 13:1)
- b) His delighted obedience to God based on love. (Heb. 10:7-8)
- c) The joy set before Him. (Heb. 12:2)
- d) His love for the Father. (Jn. 14:31)

### Cord. No. 1 - His Obedience To God

I suggest the first cord is found in the expression: "Sacrifice and offering . . . thou hast had no pleasure, lo, I come . . . to do thy will" (Heb. 10:7-8). That is His unreserved obedience to God.

When it came to Gethsemane, He who had said: "My meat is to do the will of Him that sent me" (Jn 4:34) moved with dogged determination, with His face set "as a flint" (Isa. 50:7). Matthew records the Lord saying: "Behold, we go up to Jerusalem; and the Son of man shall be betrayed unto the chief priests and unto the scribes, and they shall condemn Him to death, And shall deliver Him to the Gentiles to mock, and to scourge, and to crucify Him" (Matt. 20:18-19). Wondrous is the truth that He was as a child, and a man, in whom God was well pleased, never doing anything that caused a furrow on the brow of God, nor a disappointment to His Heart. He alone could say in truth: "Truly I am Thy servant" (Psa. 116:16). Being undeviating in the path of God's design, in loveliness he walked in unrelenting and unhesitating steps for the glory of God in devotion to God.

Exodus 21 contains one of the most interesting laws in the Old Testament. It deals with a man who has been a slave and the time has come for his release. However, he is married and has a family and there is a crisis in the family. He can go out a free man, leaving his wife and family behind, or he can remain a slave and stay with his family. A decision had to be made, and when decided upon, the decision was to stay a slave. He then speaks saying: "I love my master, my wife, and my children; I will not go out free" (Ex. 21:5-6). He is taken to a post and his ear is pierced with an aul. As I read it there comes to mind the words of love, the wounding of love, and the wounds of love. It is a lovely illustration of our Lord who, because of His love for the Father, His bride and His children; He will endure the wounding of God. Perfect obedience marked the life of Christ: "I come. . . to do thy will" (Heb. 10:7). He was the Servant marked by devotion of the purest kind. In love He sought not His own but always of others. Paul dealing with this brings to our attention the fulness of His obedience when he wrote: "For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor" (2 Cor. 8:9); or "Made Himself of no reputation, and took upon Him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled Himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross" (Phil. 2:7-8). In the prophetic picture the cry goes out: "Who will go for us?", and His answer comes back: "Here am I; send me" (Isa. 6:8). He never was coerced into service for God but as a cheerful giver (2 Cor. 9:7). He gave God His full devotion and love. We cannot grasp the bittersweet sorrow he had as He went to Calvary, nor the intensity of His smarting to be our surety (Prov. 11:15). "His delight is in the law of the Lord; and in his law doth he meditate day and night" (Psa. 1:2). God was never "someone up there" or "an unseen" to Him. He knew God and loved all there was about God, and all the purposes of God. Never is His devotion seem more clearly than when He was being led out to be crucified. Spurned, mocked, spat upon, whipped, slapped, and became the song of the drunkards (Psa. 69:12), yet the obedience begotten of love to God would not let Him turn back. Well has the hymn writer penned the words:

"It was a lonely path He trod, from every human soul apart,  
Known only to Himself and God, was all the grief that filled His heart  
Yet from that track, he turned not back, from where I lay in want and shame  
He loved me, blessed be His Name.

### Cord No. 2 - The Joy Set Before Him

The next cord to be considered is: "The joy set before Him" (Heb. 12:2). Amazing is the truth that He is seen weighing up "the joy set before Him" against "enduring the cross and the shame", and the joy set before Him

outweighed the suffering and shame! It causes the heart to bow in wonder to think that a guilty sinner would be so valuable to Him. He who could have all creation and millions more, and not cost Him anything of physical affliction and shame, yet, to see man redeemed (Rev. 5:9), Satan defeated (Heb. 2:14; 1 Jn. 3:8), and that God may be all in all (1 Cor. 15:28), it was all worthwhile. How beautifully Isaiah writes: “He shall see of the travail of His soul, and shall be satisfied” (Isa. 53:11). How His heart will rejoice when He sees the full harvest of the corn of wheat that fell into the ground (Jn. 12:24). Who can enter into the delight of His heart when He stands with His own and says to His Father: “Behold I and the children which God hath given me” (Heb. 2:13), and to see the purpose of the Father fulfilled when humanity is conformed to His own image (Rom. 8:29).

In Hebrews 11 there had been brought before the ancient people worthies of a past era. Marvelous men and women who, by keeping their eye firmly fixed on God, ran the race and glorified God in how they lived and died. Then the writer encourages us to run the race set before us by presenting the greatest personification of motivation the world will ever know: “Looking unto Jesus” (Heb. 12:2). Here was a man who lived as no other lived the life of faith, who despite all present appearances and afflictions looked beyond the present to the joy which lay ahead.

What were some of the joys which lay ahead of Him? A few of these are:

- a) Delivering the kingdom to God, even the Father . . . that God will be all in all. (1 Cor. 15:24-28)
- b) To have His own around Him to behold His glory. (Jn. 17:24)
- c) To execute judgment for the glory of God. (Jn. 5:22, 27)
- d) To be the corn of wheat that would fall into the ground and bringeth forth much fruit. (Jn. 12:24)
- e) To see the travail of His soul and be satisfied. (Isa. 53:11)
- f) To see the purposes of God fulfilled in people being conformed to His image. (Rom. 8:29)

### Cord No. 3 - His Love For The Father

To me one of the most profound statements of all the scriptures was spoken by our Lord prior to His leaving the upper room. Looking at His disciples He said: “The prince of this world cometh, and hath nothing in me. But that the world may know that I love the Father; and as the Father gave me commandment, even so I do. Arise, let us go hence” (Jn. 14:30-31). That statement: “I love the Father”, was only spoken once by the Lord. What a man He was, always loving God with all His heart, soul, mind and strength (Lk. 10:27). Now with the shadow of the cross falling across Him, and in this context it is not for the sinner, but as a manifestation of the fulness of His love for the Father He says, I speak reverently: “Father, this is the extent of my love for you”.

It is always of interest when people say things. It was a magnificent moment when the Lord, being baptized and coming out of the water, the heavens opened and God said: “This is my beloved Son” (Matt. 3:17) and it would have been easy to understand the Lord at that time saying, “I love the Father”, but He did not. There was a time when the people were ecstatic about the Lord and wanted to make Him king, riding the crest of popularity. It would have been easy to understand the lord at that time saying, “I love the Father”, but He did not. Then there was the time when he was transfigured and God opened the heavens and said: “This is my beloved Son, hear Him” (Matt. 17:5). It would have been easy to understand the Lord at that time saying, “I love the Father”, but He did not. It was a dark night, the despising of men was about to come to its zenith with them crying: “Away with Him” (Jn. 19:15), “Crucify Him” (Mk. 15:13), treating Him with such disdain that they would rather a murderer be granted freedom to live in their streets again as they cried: “Not this man but Barabbas” (Jn. 18:40). Dark as this was, there was still a deeper darkness which would happen when He would be forsaken by all the disciples and He left alone. But the deepest intensity of darkness was to come when God Himself would forsake Him, and when bringing down the rod of affliction without mercy, chastise His son as if He were the guilty one. Knowing all these things and that this was the Father’s will, He says: “I love the Father”. He would take this opportunity to be the supreme Burnt Offering. Loving God he will move with steady steps toward fulfilling the purpose for which He had come into the world.

This lovely man stands unequalled in devotion, unparalleled in love to God, and was never preceded, nor will He ever be superseded by any other. He is unblemished in moral excellencies, unassisted in His conquest, unbroken by the afflictions of men, and unchangeable in His character. “This is my beloved, and this is my friend” (Song of Sol. 5:16).

**Cord. No. 4 - His Love For His Own**

Tender are the words: “Having loved His own which were in the world, He loved them unto the end” (Jn. 13:1). Many years ago my dad sent me a postcard from Budapest on which he wrote: “Son you will never know how much you are loved”. As I look at Calvary and the darkness, as I hear His orphaned cry, I hear His tender heart saying: “My child, you will never know how much you are loved”. It is wonderful to know: “Christ loved the church, and gave Himself for it” (Eph. 5:25). Even more wonder to know: “The Son of God, who loved me, and gave Himself for me” (Gal. 2:20), but beyond this is: “He loved them unto the end (telos) uttermost” (Jn. 13:1).

It is a statement that causes one to stop, as it were, and catch a breath. A statement so profound that it overwhelms. “Having loved His own that were in the world, He loved them unto the end”. It is almost impossible to read it without thinking of the prayer He had so recently made: “Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me” (Jn. 17:20). It is amazing to see the breadth of the Lord’s prayer, for He was praying for those who were the disciples at that time, who would be in the world (Jn. 17:15-18), and in due time would believe (Jn. 20:30-31).

He will love them to the “end”, to the uttermost. Love can be measured by what it gives up, what it endures, and what it bestows. In contemplating the love of Christ:

- a) What He gave up: Leaving the glories of Heaven, the acknowledging of that which He was: “Adored by all the sons of flame” (Isa. 6:1-3).
- b) What He endured: Living among those who put little to no value on that which was precious to Him. Patiently dealing with man’s impudence and insolence, knowing hardship and sorrow, being His acquaintance with the grief of unrequited love. He was despised and rejected of men, came unto His own and was rejected and ultimately killed.
- c) What he bestowed: Paul begins to write: “Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?” (Rom. 8:35); “being justified by faith, we have peace with God” (Rom. 5:1); “blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ. According as He hath chosen us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love; Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children” (Eph 1:3-5); “Have been given exceeding great and precious promises” (2 Pet. 1:4); “Now are we the sons of God” (1 Jn. 3:2). Because of His love we have: “life . . . more abundantly” (Jn. 10:10) and have the pledge of being like Him (1 Jn. 3:2) and with Him (Jn. 14:3) for eternity.

Well may we sing

**“Hallelujah, what a Saviour”**

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**May God grant us good understanding as He, by His Holy Spirit, deigns to guide us into all truth.  
John 16:13**

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