

Title: Altered at the Altar

Scripture: Ezra 3:1-3

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Event: Sunday Evening Service

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**Ezra 3:1-3** *“And when the seventh month was come, and the children of Israel were in the cities, the people gathered themselves together as one man to Jerusalem. Then stood up Jeshua the son of Jozadak, and his brethren the priests, and Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, and his brethren, and builded the altar of the God of Israel, to offer burnt offerings thereon, as it is written in the law of Moses the man of God. And they set the altar upon his bases; for fear was upon them because of the people of those countries: and they offered burnt offerings thereon unto the LORD, even burnt offerings morning and evening.”*

The church should be as the description in Ezra 3:1 – “the children of Israel were in the cities, the people gathered themselves together as one man to Jerusalem.”

A majority of the Old Testament books mention people who built altars. Noah built an altar right after the flood. Abraham, Moses, Gideon, David, Solomon, Elijah, Jacob, and many other built altars. They built these altars either after something great happened or right before something great happened. God wanted them to seek him at these altars. They meant something. Today churches build altars to be used. It's not for show or to be for decoration. It's for altar calls, invitations, and to get hearts right with God. A trip to the altar should be used for something. It serves a purpose. How important is the altar call? D.L. Moody attracted large crowds. He once said, “My greatest mistake occurred October 8, 1871.” He preached a message and a closing hymn was sung. He told the congregation to go home and think about the question he preached on “what shall we do with this man Jesus?” As this was happening, they heard sirens which they later found out that it was the Chicago fire. Moody then said “I have never since dared to give an audience to think of their salvation.” He gave the people a week to think about whether or not that they would choose Christ. He said he would never do that again because so many lost their homes and their lives that night with the fire.

After being in captivity for almost seventy years the temple was getting ready to be rebuilt. Instead of starting to build the temple first, they built an altar.

#### **Things not revealed about the altar in this scripture:**

1. They did not come to the altar with their own agenda to be seen of men. Their agenda was the furthest thing away.
2. They did not come to see who would have the most power with God.
3. They did not come to see who would praise them the most.
4. They did not come to get their own way. They wanted God's help.

Why did they go to the altar? They wanted to meet, seek, and talk with God. They knew that the task they were taking on was greater than anything that they could ever imagine. If we aren't in the altar seeking God to help us, we will fail miserably at anything we try to do. There needs to be purpose. The word altered means *changed* or *different*. If a person leaves the altar the same as they went down, then they didn't seek the Lord. If we want God to do great things, we need to be broken. We need to meet, seek, and talk with God.

#### **There are eight things that we need to see about an altar in the church:**

1. **The altar symbolizes holiness and represents the presence of God.** When we come to the altar we need to be serious. When God spoke about the altar, those who came to it knew God was there. He assured them that he would meet them.
2. **The altar gives us an opportunity of fellowship with God.** An altar is a good place to start praising Him and giving thanks. We have more to thank God for and to praise God for than we can ever imagine. When we come to the

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altar we get a new perspective on all that we've been blessed with. We can praise him for our salvation, our possessions, our spouse, and all that we have.

3. **The altar offers a place of refuge and comfort during troubled times.** The altar is a place of encouragement. It allows us to bear one another's burdens and help those who need it.
4. **The altar is a place of intercession for others.** It's not just about you. We all have lost loved ones that we can pray for, that we should be broken hearted over. We can be an intercession for those lost loved ones. We need to pray for those who are lost, backslidden, or who have lost a desire for the Lord. A trip to the altar doesn't always have to be personal.
5. **The altar is a place where mercy and grace meet together for sinners and saints.** We all need grace and we all need mercy. We should be thankful that God didn't give us what we deserve for our sins that we've committed. Grace is so great that when the devil brings you down, grace will lift you back up.
6. **The altar is a place of renewed dedication.** We need to see ourselves as lining up with God's word. If we aren't lining up as we should, the altar is the place for realignment. It's a place to get your walk adjusted to match God's word and get rededicated to serving him.
7. **The altar is a place of vision revealed.** God can reveal things to us by prayer.
8. **The altar is a place of surrender.** We have to surrender ourselves before the Lord. Warren Wiersbe said "the Christian who fails in life is the one who has failed first at the altar. Refusing to surrender completely to Christ. True dedication is the presenting of body, mind, and will, to God day by day." Romans 12:1 *"I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect will of God."* In order for us to be used by God, we must be surrendered completely so that all of us is ready and willing to serve him.

There's a reason why we have the altar. If we are going to do all that God wants us to do, we must put it to use so that we show him we are sincere. Only then will he put us to use.