

Blaze of Glory

“perpetual theocratic pyro-technica for your pneuro-cardial altar”

For Parashah Tzav

by Kevin Phipps

The more enthusiastically you participate in a particular activity or make use of a particular object defines the level of passion you have for that activity or object. Some things we do because we have to. Other things we do because we want to. This is the difference between passion and duty. Passion comes from within, where duty comes from without. If you have the feeling you are nothing more than a pawn in a never-ending chess game, then your life is dictated by duty, not passion. When you do something out of your own choice and anticipate it with joy and excitement, this is passion. It comes from you.

When you came here today, you came to worship God. Did you drive, or were you driven. Did you come out of a sincere desire to draw close to God, or because it is Shabbat, and on Shabbat this is just the thing to do? Would going to the mall, or watching a basketball playoff be more exciting to you? When you think about spiritual matters does your heart sigh in boredom, or burn hot like the furnace of Nebuchadnezzar? The difference is passion.

“ Fire is to be kept burning on the altar continually; it is not to go out.”

- Vayikra/Leviticus 6:6(13)

On the altar of the tabernacle, there was a fire, which burned continually. The other fires used for the offerings came from this fire. There is a Jewish midrash which postulates that this fire actually burned in the form of a crouching lion. The allusion to the Lion of the Tribe of Judah is no accident if this is true. Isra'el had a fire, which symbolized the passion of Isra'el for their God, which never went out. It was renewed every morning by the priests during the morning sacrifices. The movie, “Passion of Christ”, ironically is a movie that centers around the crucifixion of Yeshua, which took place on the vertical altar of the cross. However, unlike the movie depicting torture and death, the eternal fire on the altar never died, and symbolized the passion which was to burn not only in Isra'el as a whole, but each member of that kingdom. It also symbolized the extreme joy, power, purity, and love, which can only be experienced by drawing close to God.

So, how is this eternal, all consuming fire kept burning?

"Give this order to Aharon and his sons: 'This is the law for the burnt offering [Hebrew: 'olah]: it is what goes up [Hebrew: 'olah] on its firewood upon the altar all night long, until morning; in this way the fire of the altar will be kept burning. - Vayikra/Leviticus 6:2(9)

We see two ingredients in this passage, a sacrifice and wood.

“ I exhort you, therefore, brothers, in view of God's mercies, to offer yourselves as a sacrifice, living and set apart for God. This will please him; it is the logical "Temple worship" for you. 2 In other words, do not let yourselves be conformed to the standards of the 'olam hazeh. Instead, keep letting yourselves be transformed by the renewing of your minds; so that you will know what God wants and will agree that what he wants is good, satisfying and able to succeed.” - Romans 12:1-2

The penalty for sin is death. Sin can only be atoned for through the shedding of blood. This is a precedent set in the Garden. Rather than requiring the shedding of blood from the sinner, the concept of substitutionary atonement was set up. The animal which was sacrificed took on the punishment on behalf of the offerer, so he or she would not have to. Yeshua then, became the final sacrifice by shedding his own blood for all those who would believe in Him. Did He then do away with the sacrificial system? No. The shedding of blood is no longer necessary for atonement, however the purposes and principles behind the sacrificial system are still intact today. In fact, now the offerer is actually that sacrifice. There is no substitutionary atonement. We are each called to be a living sacrifice for God. We bring ourselves to the altar and sacrifice ourselves through the “renewing of our mind”. One of the Hebrew words for mind is “nephesh” which incorporates mind, heart, and spirit. Ironically, another word which can be used for mind is “ruach” which is the main word for spirit. The Holy Spirit is the Ruach HaKodesh in Hebrew.

In the parashah, the specific offering described is a burnt offering. This was a complete consumption of the sacrifice on the altar. The other offerings were only partially consumed by the fire, and partially consumed by the offerer and the priests. The burnt offering was completely burned up to signify the complete surrender of the offerer to God and His service. We are to become a living burnt offering to God. We completely give ourselves, heart, mind, and spirit to God, and He replaces our spirit with the Ruach HaKodesh. This is only part of the equation, for keeping the altar fire burning. The other part was wood.

Where does wood come from? Trees.

“Happy the person who finds wisdom, the person who acquires understanding; 14 for her profit exceeds that of silver, gaining her is better than gold, 15 she is more precious than pearls -nothing you want can compare with her. 16 Long life is in her right hand, riches and honor in her left. 17 Her ways are pleasant ways, and all her paths are peace. 18 She is a tree of life to those who grasp her; whoever holds fast to her will be made happy.”
- Mishlei/Proverbs 3:13-18

When we have completely given our lives over to God, making ourselves a living sacrifice, how do we actually live our lives and make the decisions we are forced to make every day? The answer to this is wisdom.

The fear of YHVH is the beginning of knowledge, but fools despise wisdom and discipline. -
Mishlei/Proverbs 1:7

Wisdom begins with the fear of God. If we have given ourselves completely to God, He is our King. He guides our lives with the laws and principles of His Torah. Fear of God mixed with obedience to His Torah results in wisdom. David tells us that His Word is lamp unto our feet. Solomon tells us that if we trust in God, He directs our paths. Through His wisdom, we know how to live. We know what to do and how to do it. We are taught principles and values which guide how we think and react to the world around us. We are no longer a slave of the world, but a servant of God.

Yeshua provides us with atonement through His shed blood. This preserves our lives physically from our sins, however, spiritually we are still expected to be living sacrifices for God. This involves a renewing of the altar of our heart and mind. We add to this the guidance

that comes from our fear of God and obedience to His Torah, resulting in wisdom. All this together results in an unquenchable, all consuming, refining fire, which burns within us with the fierceness of the Lion of the Tribe of Judah. An excitement for the ways and worship of God will be felt like nothing we have ever felt before. Suddenly shopping or basketball take on a different level of passion and importance in our lives. Such things are seen as the vanity that they truly are.

The wood and the sacrifices which kept the eternal fire burning were renewed every day. If the priests neglected their duties, the fire would go out. The offerings made at the altar required a drawing close to the God of Isra'el. Every day, we must draw come to the altar, draw close to God, make ourselves the living sacrifice God has called us to be, and renew God's wisdom within us, to fan the flames of God's holy fire which makes us a light to the nations of the world. Let's burn with the blaze of God's glory that only He can give.