

Approaching God Through Christ (Part 6)

The Altar of Incense

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Have you ever thought much about your sense of smell? Probably not, but maybe you have. It is just one of those things that we seem to take for granted.

We are surrounded by odors. Just walk outside, and you smell trees and flowers, and you can smell overturned earth. If the dog comes by, you can smell him too, and he smells you. There are smells of food, and those food smells are wonderful most of the time.

There are other smells like industrial smells down here in Rock Hill, South Carolina. When the plant was there, you would have these chemical smells from their manufacturing.

Of course, you walk or drive by some road-kill, and you smell the smell of decomposition. It is not a very pleasant smell. And of course, there is always that stinky baby at the end of the row who needs his diaper changed.

We have little problem distinguishing these smells. It is very clear that once we smell something, we usually know what it is. We can identify it immediately.

Although, if we are asked to describe these smells we are usually at a loss. We do not know how to describe smells. We usually say something like, "Well, it smells like something else—like a rose, or like citrus, or baking bread, or burning wood." But, we cannot really describe it. "Well it smells...you know...kind of...sweet, or bitter, or noxious, etc." Trying to actually describe the smell itself is hard.

Now, those of you who worked in coffee shops, or maybe you are a wine connoisseur, you have come across a language of identifying aromas. Yet again, they are often identified by comparisons to something else—blueberries, or pomegranates, or chocolate, or some other thing. "This tastes chocolaty." "This tastes volcanic!" So, we describe smells by other things, rather than by an actual descriptive definition.

While we are verbally vague about odors, our sense of smell is actually one of the most acute senses we possess, even though ours is not very good compared to other creatures of God. Our ability to smell comprises 80 percent of our ability to taste! If we were only able to taste, we would basically only have five sensations—salty, sweet,

sour, bitter, and savory. We could not really describe anything other than that.

Without the sense of smell, honey, molasses, maple sugar, and cough syrup would taste about the same. We would not be able to distinguish them well enough because all you could tell is that they were sweet. The same would be true about any number of other things—salty, sour, bitter, and savory. We would just have five tastes.

The average person can recognize up to ten thousand separate odors. And yet, we are one of God's creations that does not depend upon the sense of smell to survive. On the other hand, the animals that must use their sense of smell to survive, can detect odors from several miles away. Certain ones during mating season can smell the opposite sex from five or six miles away. There was an example I saw about a female moth experiment. She came out of her cocoon, in a house with only one open window. The researchers were carefully watching all this unfold. They noticed that within minutes, there were male moths struggling to get to her. All it took was for her to release her smell—her pheromone—as she came out of her cocoon, and almost immediately the males were there. They discovered that some of these males had been tagged six miles away. It is just amazing to think just how sensitive these smell receptors are on some animals.

A dog's sense of smell is one thousand times keener than the human's sense of smell. In fact, when you send out a coon dog, when the dog finds the scent, he knows when the coon was there, how fast it was traveling, and in what direction it was traveling. And if a rabbit should cross the path, the dog can ignore the rabbit.

We cannot do that. That is how sensitive they are. They can track these things through the woods on the minutest scent. But they "know" all this information automatically.

According to scientists, the center of smell in the brain is the same area that affects emotions, memory, and creativity. So we can understand, then, why smells evoke memories, and moods, and can alleviate stress, and encourage concentration. This is also why there is a scientific basis to aromatherapy—certain smells can trigger certain changes in people. It can reduce somebody's stress, and therefore help him or her to relax. It can change people's moods, depending on which smells they come across. It can even change behavior.

And then there are things like smelling salts—a real sharp, pungent smell that can wake one who has fallen faint.

Now, perhaps one of the most amazing things about smell, at least to me, is its

connection to memory. Scientists used to wonder how that works in the brain, because they found out fairly early on that the neurons in this portion of the brain are replaced every 60 days or so. So they wondered, "How can a person remember a smell if the neurons are replaced every 60 days?" Yet, we can remember smells from early childhood.

What happens is that the nerve fibers of these neurons always connect back to the same exact spot in the brain. Just the cell is replaced, and so the memory is continued. All we know is that if we catch a scent that we have not had since childhood, we can immediately remember the occasion, if it made an impression in the first place.

Now, I know for me, and some of my sisters, that smell is pipe smoke and tobacco. This is one of those things that immediately trigger a memory with me. It is from my grandfather—dad's father—who smoked a pipe. He was probably the only one we knew who smoked a pipe. He kept his pipe on him, and smoked it quite frequently. And as you know, the odor lingers in their clothes, in their hair, and on their skin. It is hard to get away from. He smoked a fairly sweet smelling pipe, and we remember that.

If we happen across that odor again, we immediately remember grandpap, and card games, and all the fun we had when they came to visit. And I had that experience again, just this week. I was going through the post office getting the church's mail, and there was this older man getting his mail, and he went off to his post office box, and I walked by, and immediately my head snapped around because I smelled this pipe smoke. I had one of these smell memories. It took me back early in my life, probably as far back as 1973 or so when I was a little kid, and grandma and grandpap came out to visit us in southern California. But that memory just immediately surfaced. It only took one sniff and I remembered.

That is what smells can do for a person. Smells are a big part of our lives. But we often do not think about them. For other people, maybe it was not pipe smoke, but rather maybe a grandmother's perfume; or, maybe it was a tea that they shared; or, an herb that they smelled at a certain place in their lives; or, the smell of grandma baking cookies, or whatever it happened to be. There are certain smells that trigger wonderful memories from our childhood. And we remember them.

Turn to the book of Ezekiel because I want to show that smells work with God also. He created the sense of smell in us, and we were created in His image. He has the ability to smell too. I am sure that the smells around him are beautiful.

In this passage, Israel is coming back into the land after they have repented, after the

Day of the Lord when God is calling His people back to Him. This is actually a millennial setting.

Ezekiel 20:40-41 "For on My holy mountain, on the mountain height of Israel," says the Lord God, "there all the house of Israel, all of them in the land, shall serve Me; there I will accept them, and there I will require your offerings and the firstfruits of your sacrifices, together with all your holy things. [And this is the portion I want to emphasize] I will accept you as a sweet aroma when I bring you out from the peoples and gather you out of the countries where you have been scattered; and I will be hallowed in you before the Gentiles.

So, God says here that right now, when Israel is away from God, and sinning, and going their own way, it is a stench in His nostrils. But in the future, when they finally turn to Him, when they repent, when they start doing what is right, and they start actually fulfilling the covenant they made with Him such a long time ago, then their smell before Him will change. They will go from the bitter stench, to a sweet smelling aroma.

They will! "I will accept you as a sweet aroma." They are the sweet aroma before Him at that time in the future. It makes me wonder about the kind of odor God senses when we come before Him—personally, not as a church—what kind of smell do we have before God? Are we a sweet aroma, pleasing to Him in all that we do? Or are there times when we stink up His throne room with our nature with its deeds? Does He smile and relax at our approach because He has pleasant memories of us? Or does He wrinkle up His nose at us in distaste for the things that we have done and have not repented of?

Now, there is hope in all of this because there is the altar of incense, which we will concentrate on today. The altar of incense is responsible for the pleasing aroma that wafted up before the mercy seat within the tabernacle, and later the temple. In this last piece of furniture in the holy place, we are going to see another major way that Jesus Christ assists us in our approach to God the Father. Fortunately for us, whether we have a pleasing aroma, or a stinky aroma, His righteous sweet aroma covers us as we come before God's throne. So, when we come before God's throne, what God smells is that pleasant aroma of Jesus Christ, which covers us.

Now remember, just to set the stage again, coming inside from the camp of Israel, we enter the courtyard facing west, and immediately before us we see the brazen altar—a big bronze altar where the animal sacrifices were made. Beyond that, between it and the door of the tabernacle, set off a bit toward the door, was the brass laver. Evidently it

was highly polished, and was filled with water for the washing of the hands and feet of the priests, as well as washing the sacrifices. Then, we approach the screen—the door of the tabernacle. And we go in.

Immediately we see before us only three pieces of furniture. On our right (to the north) is the table of showbread with its large pieces of bread stacked on it, with incense on top of all that. Then to our left (toward the south) we see the golden candlestick with its seven branches and the lamps on top of them (which we looked into last time). And it is only these lamps that illuminate the interior of the tabernacle.

Now, directly in front of us, but across the room is the altar of incense. That is what we are going to see about today.

So now, we will go back to the book of Exodus to see this described. If you want to jot down Exodus 37:25-28, this is where Bezalel did exactly as he was instructed according to God's pattern. There are no added details in that section.

Exodus 30:1-8 "You shall make an altar to burn incense on; you shall make it of acacia wood. A cubit shall be its length and a cubit its width—it shall be square—and two cubits shall be its height. Its horns shall be of one piece with it. And you shall overlay its top, its sides all around, and its horns with pure gold; and you shall make for it a molding of gold all around. Two gold rings you shall make for it under the molding on both its sides. You shall place them on its two sides, and they will be holders for the poles with which to bear it. You shall make the poles of acacia wood, and overlay them with gold. And you shall put it before the veil that is before the ark of the Testimony, before the mercy seat that is over the Testimony, where I will meet with you. Aaron shall burn on it sweet incense every morning; when he tends the lamps, he shall burn incense on it. And when Aaron lights the lamps at twilight, he shall burn incense on it, a perpetual incense before the LORD throughout your generations.

Once again, this is a very simple piece of furniture. There is nothing difficult about it at all. Like the table of showbread, this altar is made from acacia wood; a very durable wood to last a long time, especially covered with gold. It is very finely grained.

It is 18 inches on each side—square. And, it is only three feet high—two cubits. So, it is not a very large thing at all. It is almost end-table sized. Like the brazen altar outside, this also has four horns on the corners, meaning that these are four curved pieces of

ornament, covered with gold.

Around the top edge was some sort of an ornamental molding, maybe appearing as a crown, acting as a border around the top probably both decoration, and a lip so that anything would be placed on it would not necessarily fall off.

Now, the only thing that may be controversial about this is that the text can read that it had two rings for the carrying poles. Of course, the carrying poles are acacia wood overlaid with gold. And these rings would have to be situated on opposite corners. This is one way that it could be read. Now this would mean that if there were only two rings, it would have to be carried diagonally, and most likely placed in the tabernacle diagonally too. This means that it would show a corner to the veil, and not an edge.

The usual rendering of it is two rings on both sides with the altar being carried and placed square. I do not know if this matters a whole lot, whether you approached on the point, or on the end. It does not matter, I suppose, but it is interesting.

What we find in Exodus 30 is that this altar of incense stood centered directly in front of the veil to the Holy of Holies. Remember, I described the veil before, showing that it was made of blue, and these various other colors—purple, scarlet, and white. And, it was made—woven—to have cherubim facing each other in the veil. And then, the altar of incense was right below, and in front of them, centered.

Now this gave an image of what was behind it, except for the fact that the veil itself did not show the Ark of the Covenant, with the mercy seat on top of that. The veil just showed only the cherubim, which represented the fact that they were covering God's throne. In the imagery, the incense being burned on the altar of incense wafted up into the blue heavenly-like image where the cherubim were, representing God's throne. So, you would be able to see this in type.

What I want you to understand, though, is that the only thing that separated the altar of incense from the Ark of the Covenant, and the mercy seat, was the veil, and a few feet of air. It was right there, behind the veil. God had a veil placed there to show that the way was closed for most people. There was not a way through the veil. There had to be some "distance" between God and man at that time. In reality though, the distance was actually very short. It was only just a few feet.

But, there was something coming between God and man, and that was the veil. In that way, you could almost see the veil as a type of sin. [It was a barrier between a Holy God, and sinful humanity.] It is kind of strange to think of it that way. But that is what

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was separating God and mankind—sin. There was something there that had to be parted, as it were. So, it had to be gotten out of the way. But, I do not want to take this symbolism too far, because I do not know if it could actually be seen that way in Scripture.

But, that was the thing that stood between the mercy seat, and the altar of incense.

So, think of it this way—the smell of the burning incense from the altar of incense drifted through the veil, and before the mercy seat, symbolizing God's throne. It was only a very short distance away. Therefore when we pray, God is only a few feet away in the symbolism. It is as if when we kneel down to pray, that God is sitting there on His throne right next to us. The intervening space is almost nothing. He is right there. That is kind of comforting to know that, and to think about it in that way—that when you think about the actual measurements, the actual distance, God is showing that He is very close—He is very near to us.

Now, we are getting to an interesting part of this. In the temple, the officiating priest burned 5 pounds of incense on the altar every day. Half of this he would burn in the morning right after the morning sacrifice, and then the other half in the evening right after the evening sacrifice. This seems like a great deal of incense—two and a half pounds every morning and evening. And this points to another lesson, which is that God does not want us to hold back in our communication with Him. He wants us to give Him everything. He wants us to overflow with communication with Him. He wants us to give Him all of our lives. He wants us to pour out our hearts before Him. He does not want us to hold back. Two and a half pounds would seem like a lot of incense to burn! It did not just burn up in a huge puff of fragrant smoke, and then be all gone, but rather it would burn over a certain period of time. God wants us to take time in our prayers to fully keep Him up to date with what is going on—every day.

This next passage is very familiar in terms of this particular symbol—a psalm of David. Obviously it was a prayer. He says,

Psalms 141:1-2 LORD, I cry out to You; make haste to me! Give ear to my voice when I cry out to You. Let my prayer be set before You as incense, the lifting up of my hands as the evening sacrifice.

So, here we see the one-on-one nature of David's prayer with God. The incense signifies prayers. And in the New Testament, we find the same picture being portrayed in the throne room portion of Revelation chapters 4 and 5.

Revelation 5:8 Now when He had taken the scroll, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb, each having a harp, and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints.

So, we are looking at the same figure both in the Old Testament, and the New Testament. The burning of incense represents our prayers before God.

Morning and evening, He wants us to set aside a large chunk of time, like a large portion of incense, to convey to Him our praise, our thanks, our concerns, and desires because, as we have learned, that is the way that we really get to know Him—through prayer. Sure, through study, fasting, meditation, and life experiences with Him in His way, but a great deal of it occurs in prayer—and, not only our communicating with Him, but Him communicating with us in return.

So, this figure here in Exodus 30, in terms of the incense, tells us that we are not to be stingy in our prayers with Him. We are not to give Him only a little grain of incense, and then maybe another grain of incense in the evening as we prepare for bed.

I know that in this world, we are very time-conscious, and many are sleep-deprived, and things are just happening all the time, and we do not give God the full amount of time that He deserves. So, in this symbol here of what the priests did in the offering of incense every day, they gave a lot, showing us that we should take a great deal of time with Him.

I wanted to deal with it here, at this point, because I wanted to make sure that you understand the correlation between incense and prayer, and for me not to just assume that.

Exodus 30:9-10 "You shall not offer strange incense on it, or a burnt offering, or a grain offering; nor shall you pour a drink offering on it. And Aaron shall make atonement upon its horns once a year with the blood of the sin offering of atonement; once a year he shall make atonement upon it throughout your generations. It is most holy to the LORD."

In verse 9 we get the instruction that the altar of incense was to be used only for incense. No other type of offering was to be made on it, and not any other type of incense was to be used on it either. God was very strict about this particular piece in the tabernacle. It was used only for this one very important purpose, because He said back

in verse 6 that this place, meaning the altar of incense, is where I will meet with you, the priests. God did not want there to be any confusion about what was happening here. The incense, symbolizing our prayers given at the altar of incense, symbolized a very singular, necessary, unpolluted, and undistracted act—prayer. It is not to be confused with anything else. We are not supposed to mix it with any foreign type of prayer. This is only supposed to be godly prayer. No other kind of incense was allowed on it. We are not supposed to mix it with eastern ways of "meditation." We are not supposed to use Hindu trances in approaching God our prayers. This is supposed to be exactly the kind of prayer that He proscribes for us to do. So, do not mix it up with anything else. This is your communication with the God of the universe.

Of course, He mentions that there is not to be any other kind of offering on this altar, either burnt, meal, or drink. The reason for this is because He wanted this particular altar to signify only one thing—prayer. He did not want it confused with altar of sacrifice outside the tabernacle, because they stand for two different things. As a matter of fact, they stand for two different works of Christ.

The burnt offering, the grain offering, and the drink offering were all dealt with at the altar of sacrifice outside. These stood for the work of Christ did as a human in giving of Himself totally, both in life and death for all of us. That was outside the tabernacle. That was a particular work He wants us to consider when seeing the altar of sacrifice.

But when we come inside the tabernacle, we begin to see a transition from the physical to the spiritual, all moving forward as we pass each one of these things—from the altar of sacrifice, to the laver, to the door, to the table of showbread, and the golden candlestick, and now the altar of incense. We are moving along in time, and also moving in terms of spirituality toward God the Father. We do not want to confuse the two. When we get to the altar of incense, we are talking about a work of Christ that He did after His resurrection and ascension to heaven—which He continues to do for us as our High Priest. So, we cannot confuse the two things. The sacrifice that He did in His earthly life, which we are very thankful for, and which is very efficacious for us even now, but it is something that has already been done. But this altar of incense inside the tabernacle is a continuing offering of us, and Jesus Christ and His work that He does in our behalf. So, God wanted to make sure that right from the beginning we did not mix the two up, because if we are going to learn from them, we have to keep them separate.

Every year on the Day of Atonement, the high priest had to consecrate this altar once again. What would happen on the Day of Atonement is that they would kill the bull and the goat for a sin offering, and he would take some of the blood of each animal, and he would come in, and he would use his finger to paint the horns of the altar of incense

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seven times. The blood would also drip from his finger. The seven times shows that it was completely consecrated. It was not just sprinkled once, but seven times. So, this act of Jesus Christ as our High Priest and Mediator was an offering that was complete, perfect, and holy.

But, we are a part of this. We are the ones who offer the incense. We are the ones who are praying, and we are the ones who are sinners, so it is being constantly consecrated by the blood of Christ. And so, that is why it is done once a year at the Day of Atonement.

Now, this is an interesting bit of symbolism, because it shows that before our prayers can truly be effective, the sacrifice of sin must already be covering us. This also backs up the idea that until you become a son or daughter of God, God does not necessarily hear your prayers. The blood of Christ must cover you before you have that wonderful relationship and privilege that we can actually come before the Father, and having Him hear our prayers.

Like I said, we have got to keep them separate, and see them in their order as we go through them, that the altar of sacrifice comes first, and that is what starts the ball rolling for us in every way. Once that happens, then we can be cleaned up at the laver. Then, we can have the Bread of Life. We can see the Light of the world. And we can have communion with God.

See how they move us along toward the Father? All of them represent various works of Jesus Christ as get closer to the Ark of the Covenant with its mercy seat.

This is the path that we have to take to approach God the Father and Jesus Christ—which is what I have been getting at this whole time of this sermon series.

So, this just illustrates how the completed work of Jesus Christ aids us in approaching God. It is His sin offering in His flesh that makes our prayers, and thus our relationship with the Father possible. We will see a bit later how Christ helps us as we pray, not just that He gets us in, but that He also helps us as we pray too.

This next passage begins the recipe for the incense.

Exodus 30:34-38 And the LORD said to Moses: "Take sweet spices, stacte, and onycha, and galbanum, and pure frankincense with these sweet spices; there shall be equal amounts of each. You shall make of these an incense, a compound according to the art of the perfumer, salted, pure, and holy. And

you shall beat some of it very fine, and put some of it before the Testimony in the tabernacle of meeting where I will meet with you. It shall be most holy to you. But as for the incense, which you shall make, you shall not make any for yourselves, according to its composition. It shall be to you holy for the LORD. Whoever makes any like it, to smell it, he shall be cut off from his people."

There are some very interesting commands here. The making of the incense was a quite involved and huge undertaking. I do not know if any of you are aware of this, but it is interesting to me. It was made, from what we understand, once a year in giant batches. Now, remember they used about five pounds a day. It was a very big process with a lot of spices, resin, and whatever else that had to go into this powdered incense. So they made a year's worth of morning and evening sacrifice incense, meaning that the yearly batch was typically about 1825 pounds. And then, they stored it until ready to be used. And the priests, when he was to go in to officiate, would go in and get his five pounds, cut it in half, and that would be his for the day.

And so, what was this recipe?

Well, God gives us only four of the ingredients here, and leaves out a lot. He says to do it with stacte, and the onycha, and the galbanum, and pure frankincense, with these sweet spices. So, we do not know for sure what all these sweet spices are, except through tradition that came down to us through the Jews, and history.

And, even some of these things—stacte, and onycha especially—nobody knows for sure what they are.

Stacte is a Greek word. And the Greeks used it to denote drops of tree-gum, or resin. And most people think that it was probably from the balsam tree. So, it might be drops of gum or resin of balsam. This tree grows wild in Yemen, and near Mecca, and at one time probably in or near Sinai. Now the reason I say that nobody knows for sure is because some of the historical records say that this was not balsam, but myrrh. So, which is it? It is hard to know. No one is certain, although the traditional recipe, which we will see in a moment, includes myrrh also. It could have been balsam, because myrrh was one of these sweet spices.

Now, onycha—probably no one knows what this is. I looked it up, and it is pronounced, O-ny-kah. This is the most amazing or intriguing ingredient to me. Most authorities see it as coming from an aquatic animal. It is therefore usually identified as Onycha, or *Blata*

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byzantia, the fingernail-like closing flap of certain snails of the murex family, such as the *Onyx marinus*. Believe it or not, when you take this closing flap off of this snail, and prepare it properly, it smells sweet when it burns.

Now, other sources, and some of the rabbis, say that this was a kind of root. The Talmud also seems to indicate that it came from an annual plant such as a species of rock rose.

The reason that nobody knows for sure is that the word "onycha" only means "fingernail." Some have even wondered if they used human fingernails. But, that would not smell too good, because fingernails smell like burning hair or feathers when they are burned.

So, they are searching for what this could mean. The reason they came up with these various roots, or the rock rose is because they have parts on them that look like fingernails. And, they are also found in the area of Sinai. But, this onycha, the *Onyx marinus* has been used basically from the beginning of apothecary. I do not know how they did this, or discovered this, but they found that this certain closing flap, when treated and rubbed with an alkali solution from the bitter vetch, had all the impurities removed from it. Then, it had to be soaked in the fermented juice of the caperberry, or in a strong white wine to enhance its fragrance. And then, once this was done, it would be ready to be used in incense.

If this is exactly what they did, this process used 9 quarts of vetch lye, and 21 quarts of caperberry or strong white wine to produce what was needed for the incense.

At first you would not think that God would use a snail flap as part of His incense. But, on the other hand, it was not ingested, but rather only burned. As you know, we are told not to *eat* unclean things, but this was not something eaten, but something that was only burned and smelled. And so, as far as I know, most of the rabbis were not really concerned about that (although some were, and so these suggested those various other roots, and things).

Galbanum is a yellow-brown gum resin, obtained from a Persian plant *Vurula galbanifula*, part of the fennel family (carrots, caraway, celery, cilantro, etc.). It had a pungent almost unpleasant odor.

Frankincense is also a gum resin, and it is from an evergreen tree of the genus *Boswellia*. The gum is yellowish, semi-transparent, and has a very bitter taste, almost nauseous. But when burned it is very strong and aromatic.

We know that the balsam smells sort of savory. And then, the onycha is very pleasant. The galbanum was pungent—almost unpleasant, while the frankincense was very strong and aromatic. You see, it was a mixture of various smells—sweet, bitter, pleasant, pungent, savory.

By tradition seven additional fragrances were added besides the four mentioned in Scripture. This means that there were eleven individual fragrances in this holy incense.

This is the recipe: 350 pounds of balsam; 350 pounds of onycha; 350 pounds of galbanum; and 350 pounds of frankincense. (Of course, this would be the bulk of it.) Then, there were 80 pounds of myrrh; 80 pounds of cassia; 80 pounds of spikenard; 80 pounds of saffron (stamens from a middle eastern crocus); 60 pounds of costus (which I am unsure what this is); 45 pounds of cinnamon; and 15 pounds of cinnamon bark. This makes about 1840 pounds of incense, enough for 368 days (a little more than a year).

So, what we have in just listing these various ones—balsam, galbanum, onycha, frankincense, myrrh, cassia, spikenard, saffron, costus, and cinnamon—we have the whole gamut of smells, from very sweet, to very pungent, almost nauseous. Think of the symbolism! This was burned before God.

Now, besides these ingredients, there was one more thing added. To this 1840 pounds of incense was added one cup of salt. All of the offerings, all of the sacrifices offered to God were to contain salt.

Leviticus 2:13 And every offering of your grain offering you shall season with salt; you shall not allow the salt of the covenant of your God to be lacking from your grain offering. With all your offerings you shall offer salt.

He says it three times to make sure that we understood that His offerings were to be made sprinkled with salt. He also specifically links it to the covenant.

Also in Mark 9, Jesus quotes this in His teaching about salt.

Mark 9:49 "For everyone will be seasoned with fire, and every sacrifice will be seasoned with salt."

So He repeats it in the New Testament showing that it is an important principle.

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In the biblical symbolism, salt is a reminder of the covenant, not just to God, but to us—mostly to us. In fact, it symbolizes a perpetual covenant—a binding eternal agreement. Every time we pray, we are supposed to remember that we are in an eternally binding agreement with the Father. We have entered into a covenant, and we have certain requirements that we must meet. And so, we are to be reminded of that every time that we pray—thinking about this particular symbolism here.

There are two references regarding this.

Numbers 18:19 "All the heave offerings of the holy things, which the children of Israel offer to the LOORD, I have given to you and your sons and daughters with you as an ordinance forever; it is a covenant of salt forever before the LOORD with you and your descendants with you."

He is talking about the Old Covenant here, but it certainly applies to us under the New Covenant, in that we have also made a covenant of salt—a perpetual covenant to live by.

II Chronicles 13:5 "Should you not know that the LOORD God of Israel gave the dominion over Israel to David forever, to him and his sons, by a covenant of salt?"

This is a personal covenant that God made with David. This is actually Abijah the king speaking to Israel about the covenant that God made with David. This is the idea of perpetuity, that God made this covenant, agreement, and promise to David, that he would have a son to reign over the children of Israel forever. So, He made, then, a covenant of salt.

Salt is also a preservative, and that is where this idea of perpetuity comes from, because when you preserve something with salt, it lasts for a long time (relatively). So, salt, then, came to signify endurance, and perpetuity.

In addition, salt is also a purifier. It also enhances certain things. So, these properties point to the holiness and purity of the relationship. So, not only is it a perpetual covenant, and an enduring covenant, it is also a holy and pure covenant made between God and man.

That is how our relationship with God should be—pure and holy.

Finally, the incense was to be pounded or ground very fine before being offered to God. Evidently, since this incense was made of somewhat resinous materials—several were gums or resins of some sort—the incense tended to clump together, or become caked. And so, when the priest came for his daily incense, he had to take some time before offering it, to grind it down as finely as he could. He got his two and a half pounds of incense, got out the mortar and pestle, and he ground it down as fine as he could get it. In doing so, it further mixed all the ingredients together. And once it was lit on the altar, it burned more evenly in this powdered state, giving off a pure white smoke before God.

Now, remember we went through all these ingredients quite finely. I wanted to make sure that I showed you that they were of various kinds. And, I wanted to make sure that I showed you this grinding down, mixed together the bitter, the sweet, the spicy, the sour, the savory, and the salt—all in one. And so all these things were put into one mixture and burned before God.

This is a symbol of the care that we are to take in our prayers—that we think deeply what we want to say to Him (grinding it down); that we give Him the details of our concerns, and our requests; that we try to relate the situation to Him from all sides. This is where the bitter, sweet, salt, sour, and savory come all together.

Not everything we bring before God in our prayers is going to be sweet. Some of it is bitter. Some of it is savory, while still other portions are spicy, or even sour. We need the salt mixed in to give it the proper understanding. Remember, salt is the enhancement, purifier, and the preservative—we have to have all these things together in our prayers before God. He wants "the whole enchilada" as it were. He wants us to give Him the "straight dope." He wants us to give Him how we understand a situation, from our perspective, but He also wants us to grind it fine so that we can see it from maybe the other person's perspective. He wants us to try to see it from all the angles—the sweet, sour, salt, bitter, and savory—in its completeness, but not from our own simpler perspective.

We may look on it and see something happening as the worst thing that ever happened—maybe that would be bitter. But, if we grind it fine, and we start to try to look at it from other angles, we may see the sweet; we may see what we need to see, what God wants us to see, by just talking it out with Him. And in that way getting the whole perspective, which He sees.

So, He wants us to present to Him not just our side of the matter, but He wants us to present it as reality—how it really is. What this will do is, not only will we gain wisdom from this, not only will we maybe find answers that come to mind once we are doing this

because we are trying to look at it from a different angle, we are also increasing our ability to judge things properly—to use the mind of God, because that is how He looks at things. He looks at things just as they are, not from people's human perspective.

So, it is a very interesting symbolism that we see there in the incense offering.

Philippians 4:6-7 Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

So Paul is saying here that in everything, let your requests be made known to God, because that is where we will have the peace of God, and we will be able to find the answers that we need.

We have spent long enough on all of that. Now, let us get to the point of all of this. This next passage is part of Jesus' statements at the Passover,

John 14:13 And whatever you ask in My name, that I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If you ask anything in My name, I will do it.

John 15:7 If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you.

John 15:16 You did not choose Me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit, and that your fruit should remain, that whatever you ask the Father in My name He may give you.

John 16:23-24 And in that day you will ask Me nothing. Most assuredly, I say to you, whatever you ask the Father in My name He will give you. Until now you have asked nothing in My name. Ask, and you will receive, that your joy may be full.

John 16:26-27 In that day you will ask in My name, and I do not say to you that I shall pray the Father for you; for the Father Himself loves you, because you have loved Me, and have believed that I came forth from God.

So, Jesus, here, gives the outline of how we come before God the Father, under the

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authority of Jesus Christ. It is through Him that we gain access to God's throne—through His sinless perfection, by the blood that He shed when He sacrificed Himself for us. He makes it possible for us to make our requests known to the Father. Therefore, we can have every expectation of receiving what we ask, as long as it conforms to God's will, because He is there, and He has opened the way for us. He can make things happen for us, whereas before, it was not possible. Now He is there, and He has opened the door for us through His sinless sacrifice.

This next passage many of you may have thought about earlier in terms of Jesus Christ opening the way for us.

Hebrews 10:19-22 Therefore, brethren, having boldness to enter the Holiest by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way which He consecrated for us, through the veil, that is, His flesh, and having a High Priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water.

Just reading this, I was thinking that we can say that the veil does symbolize sin, because all the sins of the world were placed on Jesus Christ in His flesh. He died, and therefore our sins were covered. So the veil does indeed represent His flesh with all the sins of the world, and that was ripped apart, and destroyed, so that we can approach the Father.

What is said here is that it was so efficacious, not just that we can come before the Father, now, but we can come *boldly* before the Father. We can come with great confidence before the Father, because Jesus Christ went through the veil, and is sitting there at the right hand of the Father, opening the way for us, keeping the way open for us, and we can approach in great faith knowing that He is there, watching out for us, knowing what we are like, wanting us to have all the good things, wanting us, certainly, in His Kingdom, and He is going to do His utmost to make sure that we get what we need.

And because we have been washed, because we have had the sacrifice of Christ, we can therefore come before the Father in full assurance that what we need in terms of His will, will be given to us. That is a great confidence to have!

In this next passage, we find more of this, getting more toward what He is doing now, after He has opened the way.

Hebrews 4:14-16 Seeing then that we have a great High Priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

Like I said, this gives us an indication of what He does for us. He not only helps us to enter the throne room, He also acts as our Advocate before the Father. He is our High Priest there, but He has lived on earth. He lived as a man. He lived going through all the same sorts of things that we go through. He had to suffer those temptations, and He had to overcome those temptations—the same temptations that we have. Whereas, we usually give in and sin, He did not. But, He knows how hard it was for Him not to sin. He knows what great concentration of mind it took, and what sacrifice it took of His human nature so that He would not sin.

So He comes at our problems from a man's perspective. But He also comes at them from God's perspective, and so He is able to meld the two perspectives together, and therefore make request of the Father to give us help so that we can overcome. And as it says above, the help we usually get is mercy, and grace—forgiveness of our sins, and gifts to help us so that we will not do it again.

Paul, here, is not saying that Jesus Christ is up there saying, "He really wants a Wii [video game player]! Why don't you give him that Wii? He'd play with it a lot. He'd really enjoy it."

No, that is not what He does up there. He is not trying to give us material things, necessarily, though He can and will if they are really necessary. But, He is mostly interested in giving us those spiritual things that we need, as it says above, "mercy and grace." Those are the things that He really fights for us on. He is our Advocate before the Father so that we get what we truly need. And, it is usually something spiritual. God responds to His Son because His Son always does what pleases Him. (John 8:29)

And so, we have an Advocate before the Father who always wins! He always wins because He always does God's will.

To conclude, let us get a better grasp of what really happens. Paul writes,

Romans 8:26-27 Likewise the Spirit [Paul speaking of Christ using the Holy

Spirit] also helps in our weaknesses. For we do not know what we should pray for as we ought, but the Spirit Himself makes intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered. Now He who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit is, because He makes intercession for the saints according to the will of God.

In the next passage, we find out who this Spirit is.

Romans 8:34 Who is he who condemns? It is Christ who died, and furthermore is also risen, who is even at the right hand of God, who also makes intercession for us.

So, that is who it is! It is Jesus Christ making intercession for us, not some third member of some trinity called the Holy Spirit. It is Christ the Spirit, as it says in II Corinthians 3:17. He is the One sitting there at the right hand of God making intercession for us. And He makes intercessions for us, it says, with groanings that cannot be uttered.

We often do not know what we need. But Christ does. He was a man. He lived through what we are going through, and so He is able to tell God and to express to God what we really need—things that we might not know about. But He makes sure that He whispers in the Father's ear what we really need. "He is really saying this. . . this is what he really wants. . . I know, I've been there. . . if you give it to him, things will turn out well."

So, God then listens to Him, and gives us what we need.

And now we know how this all ends:

Romans 8:35-39 Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it is written: "For Your sake we are killed all day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter." Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us. For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

So, we have a High Priest, prefigured in the altar of incense, who is always on the job,

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who is always ready to extend to us the love of God.

He is only a prayer away!