

Genesis 8:13-19

“At the end of forty days Noah opened the window of the ark which he had made, and sent forth a raven; and it went to and fro until the waters were dried up from the earth. Then he sent forth a dove from him, to see if the waters had subsided from the face of the ground; but the dove found no place to set her foot, and she returned to him to the ark, for the waters were still on the face of the whole earth. So he put forth his hand and took her and brought her into the ark with him. He waited another seven days, and again he sent forth the dove out of the ark; and the dove came back to him in the evening, and lo, in her mouth a freshly plucked olive leaf; so Noah knew that the waters had subsided from the earth. Then he waited another seven days, and sent forth the dove; and she did not return to him anymore. In the six hundred and first year, in the first month, the first day of the month, the waters were dried from off the earth; and Noah removed the covering of the ark, and looked, and behold, the face of the ground was dry. In the second month, on the twenty-seventh day of the month, the earth was dry. Then God said to Noah, "Go forth from the ark, you and your wife, and your sons and your sons' wives with you. Bring forth with you every living thing that is with you of all flesh - birds and animals and every creeping thing that creeps on the earth - that they may breed abundantly on the earth, and be fruitful and multiply upon the earth." So Noah went forth, and his sons and his wife and his sons' wives with him. And every beast, every creeping thing, and every bird, everything that moves upon the earth, went forth by families out of the ark.”

What is the longest trip you have ever been on? How many days was your longest trip? Maybe a week, how about 3, what about a month of traveling, or maybe even more? Remember that age old question, “Are we there yet?” How did you travel on your trip? Did you ride in a car, train, plane, bus, van, boat, or some kind of cycle? Think about your longest trip and now imagine you couldn’t see outside the whole time. Imagine you could only see inside the vehicle you were traveling in and the people you were traveling with, and nothing outside. What would your relationship be like with your traveling companions when you finally arrived at your destination with only being able to see them and nothing else for the duration of the trip? What would be the first thing you would do when you arrived at your destination?

Now try to imagine being inside a vehicle approximately 101,000 square footage (that’s just over 21 standard basketball courts), with no windows and full to the rafters with animals and birds of all kinds for, by our calendar, just over 11 months travel time. Finally the door is opened and you come out into a totally new world to you, what is the first thing you would do?

Noah and his family were secluded within the Ark for a little over 11 months with each other and animals galore. This was more than the 40 days we were taught as children. See, it only rained 40 days and nights, but they were inside, closed off from the outside over another 10 months. More than likely tempers had flared up, patience was running thin or all but gone by the time they exited the ark, but what was the first thing that was done upon leaving the ark? What was the first thing Noah did? Genesis 8:20 says *“Then Noah built an altar to the Lord, and took of every clean animal and of every clean bird, and offered burnt offerings on the altar.”* Noah built an altar after all that time locked in the ark with family and who knows how many animals, and the first thing he does is build an altar and gave an offering to God.

When Noah and his family walked out of the ark what do you think was the first thing they saw? Maybe the first thing that they saw was dead carcasses from animals and maybe even people that were killed from the

flood waters; evidence of death and destruction, they saw firsthand the aftermath of God's judgment. I wonder if one of the questions Noah had was "Well Lord, where do we go from here?" That's the question many of us would have had, or still have today. "*Where do we go from here?*"

Genesis 8:20 said "*then Noah built an altar.*" God didn't command Noah to do that. It was a freewill offering. Noah was not told or forced to build an altar he did it freely. We read 5 times in Genesis from chapter 12-22 where Abraham built an altar; Isaac, Jacob, Moses all built an altar.

Think about this, the first thing Noah did when he stepped on dry ground after almost a year locked inside the ark was build an altar. Where would you go and what would you do if the world you knew and loved had been ripped apart, and all you see is the aftermath of the storm - when you really come to grips with what life just dealt you where do you go and what do you do? Where do you go and what do you do when your life is turned upside down? Noah says to me and you this morning, "***Build an altar*** - totally surrender your life and worship God."

When was the last time you built an altar? Think about this for a moment. When was the last time I built an altar? “Have I ever built an altar?” What do you mean build an altar? I have never built an altar ... that’s what the church is for ... Right? Is it?

First of all, what is an altar? This actual word signifies a raised place where a sacrifice is made. From the dawn of human history, offerings were made on a raised table of stone or ground. Israel's first altars were made of earth — they were fashioned of material that was strictly the work of God's hands. If the Jews were to hew stone for altars in the wilderness, they would have been compelled to use war weapons to do the work and that would have been unacceptable to them or God.ⁱ

But why build an altar? We are not told to do so, Noah wasn’t commanded to but yet he did. Why? What Noah did was out of reverence to God. What Noah did was to stop everything he was doing and he stopped all his going and running about in order to pay reverence to God for all He had done.

When was the last time you stopped everything in your life to give reverence to God? When was the last time you put your life on hold to give reverence to God? When was the last time you sacrificed yourself freely for God?

Many will say “I do that every week between 9-10 or 11-12,” but in reality we rarely if ever build and altar and give reverence to God. Last week we came forward and received Holy Communion some came in wonder and awe they came with excitement; but others may have said under their breath we do this too often; some maybe were focusing more on what they would be doing later than what they were doing; still others might have come wondering why he always gives me such a big piece of bread. Nothing of that had anything to do with giving reverence to God. How have we gotten so far away from the altar and what have we done with God? Where is the reverence to God in all our grumblings and complaining’s? Where is our reverence to God while we are sitting in worship thinking about and/or planning lunch or planning on going here or going there, doing this or doing that?

I love the story about a couple who had two sons, ages 8 and 10, who were very ill-behaved. These two boys were always getting into trouble and their parents knew that if any misconduct occurred in their town, their boys were probably involved. The boys' mother heard of a new preacher in their town who had been successful in dealing with children, so she asked if he would speak with her boys. The preacher agreed, but he asked to see them each individually.

So the mother sent her 8-year-old first, in the morning, with the older boy to see the preacher that afternoon. The preacher was a big man with a booming voice, he sat the younger boy down and asked him sternly, "Where is God?" The boy's mouth dropped open, but he made no response. He just sat there with his mouth hanging open, staring wide-eyed at the imposing figure of the pastor. So the preacher repeated the question in an even sterner tone, "Where is God!!?" Again the boy made no attempt to answer. So the preacher raised his voice even more and this time slammed his hand down on his desk and bellowed, "SON, WHERE IS GOD!?"

The young boy screamed in fright and bolted from the room, ran directly home and dove into his closet, slamming the door behind him. When his older brother found him in the closet, he asked, “What happened?” The younger brother, gasping for breath, replied, “We’re in BIG trouble this time. God is missing - and they think WE did it!”

We laugh, but in our everyday activities we have allowed or done everything possible to remove God from everything, and now He is all but gone, and when things go wrong in this world or our lives we have the arrogance and audacity to ask where is God; and we cry out ‘how could He let this happen.’ That’s all I heard following the 9/11 attacks. God has been and is being taken away from us little by little every day and if we are not the one removing Him from every day activities we are the ones sitting idly by and allowing the world to strip God away from our everyday lives.

When Kellogg's, the cereal company, found that the sales of their Kellogg’s Corn Flakes were sagging, they instituted an advertising campaign in which people were told to “taste them again for the very first time.”

A relationship with Christ can be like that. If your Christian life has become dry, stale, expected, scheduled, normal, and/or just plain cold and empty . . . maybe it's time meet Christ again for the very first time. Maybe it's time to examine our relationship with God and connect with Him again for the first time. Maybe it's time we visit the altar again for the first time. This table is not the only altar; it is up to us to create altars where-ever we are and in what-ever we are doing. We have to reach the place where God is with us at all times. We say He is, but do our actions say something different.

People often ask why God has allowed this or that to happen when in reality we, as a people, are receiving exactly what we asked for. In Romans 1:21-24 *“For although they knew God they did not honor Him as God or give thanks to Him, but they became futile in their thinking and their senseless minds were darkened. Claiming to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man or birds or animals or reptiles. Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves,*

because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever!”

God is all but gone and it is up to us to change what and why we do what we do. In other words it's time for us to altar our lives. It's time we come to the altar again for the first time. This has to take place in our hearts first, then here. If you see this as just a wooden rail or this as just a fancy wooden table then that's all they will ever be. If you believe this type of building is the only place to meet God then that's all it will ever be. Today we need to altar what we do, and do it all for God. Does your world need altaring? I know mine does.

ⁱ Vine's Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words, Copyright © 1985, Thomas Nelson Publishers.