

Title:        **THE HORNS OF THE ALTAR**

Text:        1 Kings 2:28-30

Subject:    *Faith in Christ*

Date:        Sunday Morning — April 15, 2012

Tape #        AA-57

Reading:    *Psalms 118:1-29*

Introduction:

While you are turning to the second chapter of 1<sup>st</sup> Kings, let me tell you the story leading up to our text. Before his death David made his son Solomon to be the king in Israel; but, Adonijah, his elder brother tried to take the throne for himself.

Joab the captain of the host and by Abiathar the priest preferred Adonijah, and joined him in his plot to steal the throne. The whole scheme fell like a house of cards; and Adonijah was terrified. We read in 1 Kings 1:50 that, — “*Adonijah feared because of Solomon, and arose, and went, and caught hold on the horns of the altar.*” Solomon allowed Adonijah to find sanctuary there and forgave him (1 Kings 1:52-53).

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(1 Kings 1:52-53) “And Solomon said, If he will shew himself a worthy man, there shall not an hair of him fall to the earth: but if wickedness shall be found in him, he shall die. 53 So king Solomon sent, and they brought him down from the altar. And he came and bowed himself to king Solomon: and Solomon said unto him, Go to thine house.”

But Adonijah still wanted to be king and began plotting for the throne again. So Solomon had him executed.

Joab knew that he was next. Conscience stricken, the mighty captian of Israel whose hands were filled with the blood of others, was terrified at the prospect of his own execution. So he flew to the altar as Adonijah had done, hoping to find mercy at the altar of God. You will find my text in 1 Kings 2:28-30.

(1 Kings 2:28-30) “Then tidings came to Joab: for Joab had turned after Adonijah, though he

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turned not after Absalom. And Joab fled unto the tabernacle of the LORD, and caught hold on the horns of the altar. 29 And it was told king Solomon that Joab was fled unto the tabernacle of the LORD; and, behold, [he is] by the altar. Then Solomon sent Benaiah the son of Jehoiada, saying, Go, fall upon him. 30 And Benaiah came to the tabernacle of the LORD, and said unto him, Thus saith the king, Come forth. And he said, Nay; but I will die here. And Benaiah brought the king word again, saying, Thus said Joab, and thus he answered me.”

The title of my message is **THE HORNS OF THE ALTAR**.

**Proposition:** The brazen altar was the place of sacrifice by which men drew near to God. — It was a beautiful type of our Lord Jesus Christ. — As Joab fled to the horns of the altar, so we must flee to Christ our Altar and lay hold upon him, even upon the horns of the Altar, that is to say upon our Saviour’s

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strength and merit and efficacy as our sin-atonement sacrifice.

**Divisions:** I want to show you three things in this message.

1. There is but one altar by which sinners must come to God.
2. It will be damning to your soul to carnally flee to a carnal, material altar.
3. But there is a true Altar, a spiritual Altar to which we must flee by faith for life eternal; and that Altar is Christ our Savior.

### **ONE ALTAR**

*First*, I want you to see at the outset that there is but one altar by which sinners must come to God. Since the fall of our father Adam, God has never allowed man to approach him without an altar and a sacrifice of blood. In the old days of the patriarchs, from Adam to Moses, the people of God built altars of stone, upon which they offered sacrifices to God. **Whenever men drew near to God, whether to**

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**offer praise or to seek mercy, they built an altar and offered a sacrifice of blood. Even in those days, men of faith knew that God's justice could only be satisfied for sin by blood, even the blood of God's own Son, the Redeemer who must come into the world to put away sin.**

Then, **when the Lord God called Moses up into the mount and spoke to him face to face he appointed one altar of sacrifice** to be built, and appointed a place for that one altar in Israel alone. One spot was selected and only one. All the rest of the world was left without an altar and without a sacrifice.

**That altar was placed in the tabernacle of Israel.** It was the only altar of sacrifice, by which men might approach unto God. From time to time, the prophets of God, by God's special command, raised up other altars. But for all others the rule was unbending – One altar! All other altars which men erected were erected in defiance of God's command; and their pretended sacrifices to God were an abomination to him.

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As in the typical, legal dispensation, so it is now. **There is but one altar upon which the holy Lord God meets sinners in mercy**, only one altar upon which God can and will be worshipped; and that Altar is Christ (Hebrews 13:10).

(Hebrews 13:10) “We have an altar, whereof they have no right to eat which serve the tabernacle.”

**The altar of sacrifice, in the tabernacle and in the temple, was typical of our Lord Jesus Christ**, (his Person, his work, and his merit), as our Substitute before God. This is what Paul is teaching us in our text – The only access which sinners have to God, and the only acceptance we have with God is Christ our Altar.

**Our Altar is in heaven.** We recognize no altar upon the earth. He who has an Altar in heaven needs no altar upon the earth. He who has an altar upon the earth has no altar in heaven. The Holy Spirit tells us

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this plainly.— “*We have an altar, whereof they have no right to eat which serve the tabernacle.*”

**We cannot approach God without a Mediator, without an Altar, and without a Sacrifice.** We are all guilty men and women, our best and most holy acts are but the sinful deeds of sinful men, and our purest worship is but the worship of depraved hearts. Who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean? Not one. Before we can ever be accepted with God, before we can ever bring an acceptable offering or service to God, there must be a shedding of blood for the removal of our sin and guilt. We must come to God by way of the Altar and Sacrifice he has appointed, the Lord Jesus Christ.

**There is no door of acceptance for us except through the merit of our great Surety, who laid down his life for us.** There is but one way by which we who are washed in the blood of Christ can offer unto God our prayers, our gifts, our praises, or our service, and that is by the Lord Jesus Christ, who alone is our Altar. We must give ourselves to him, as

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living sacrifices to God, because only in him will God accept our reasonable service.

**In the Old Testament there was but one altar of sacrifice by which men could ceremonially approach God; and that one altar finds its fulfillment in the Person of the Lord Jesus Christ.**

The only altar, which can sanctify us and make us acceptable to God, is Christ.

**Today all physical, carnal, ceremonial altars are instruments of idolatry.** Use anything as an altar for acceptance with God other than Christ and you have no right to the merits of Christ. If you have another altar, your altar will drag your soul down to hell.

**There are many who think of the cross upon which our Lord died as an altar.** I have heard it said that the cross was the altar upon which our Lord offered himself as a sacrifice for sin. But it is not so. That cross upon which our Lord was crucified was nothing more than the instrument of his torture. It is no more to be revered as an altar than the whips

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of Pilate's soldiers or the spit of those Jews, which defiled his holy face. — I would no more wear a cross around my neck than I would take the dagger a murderer used to kill my wife and wear it on my belt.

**Sometimes men talk of the heart as an altar to God.** I know what they mean. They mean that sincerity makes our service to God acceptable. It is true that there must be sincerity in our service to God, or it will never be acceptable. But sincerity itself will never make our most solemn devotion acceptable to God. Nothing but blood will ever make a man acceptable to God. Only the blood of Christ, shed for the atonement of our sin can make us accepted with God.

**It is common for men to talk of having a family altar.** It is good to worship God in your home, with your family. But your family devotions will never make you acceptable to God. — The church of God is a family, and we have a family altar. His name is Jesus Christ our Substitute.

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**In many churches, the table used for serving the Lord's Supper is looked upon as an altar.** But the scriptures never speak in such a way. The table spread before you is a table of communion; but it is not a table of sacrifice. It is a place of remembrance, but not a place of atonement. It is a solemn feast, but not a sanctifying feast.

**Perhaps the most deceptive of all idolatrous notions is the idea that there is an altar of salvation at the front of the church.** You can no more obtain salvation by walking down the aisle of a Baptist church to an altar than the papists can by making a pilgrimage to Rome and climbing the stairs to the pope's seat of infamy.

**There is but one Altar.** There is but one place of salvation. That Altar is Christ. He is God's salvation. God only meets with men in his Son (Exodus 20:23-26).

(Exodus 20:23-26) "Ye shall not make with me gods of silver, neither shall ye make unto you

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gods of gold. (24) An altar of earth thou shalt make unto me, and shalt sacrifice thereon thy burnt offerings, and thy peace offerings, thy sheep, and thine oxen: in all places where I record my name I will come unto thee, and I will bless thee. (25) And if thou wilt make me an altar of stone, thou shalt not build it of hewn stone: for if thou lift up thy tool upon it, thou hast polluted it. (26) Neither shalt thou go up by steps unto mine altar, that thy nakedness be not discovered thereon.”

- Christ is our Altar of earth.
- Christ is our Altar of stone.
- Christ is the Altar of God’s making.—”*If thou lift up thy tool upon it, thou hast polluted it.*”
- Christ is the Altar with no stairs for men to climb.

All forms of carnal worship, all forms of physical things that men call “holy,” all attempts to place any merit of any kind or any reverence of any kind in material things is base idolatry (Exodus 20:23; John

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4:23-24; Philippians 3:3). — **Let us once and for all put away every form of idolatry from our midst** (2 Kings 18:4).

(2 Kings 18:4) “He removed the high places, and brake the images, and cut down the groves, and brake in pieces the brazen serpent that Moses had made: for unto those days the children of Israel did burn incense to it: and he called it Nehushtan.”

### **EXODUS 27:1-8**

Moses describes the altar of sacrifice for us in Exodus 27:1-8. All that the altar of the tabernacle and the temple signified typically is fulfilled for us really and truly in the Lord Jesus Christ.

(Exodus 27:1-8) “And thou shalt make an altar of **shittim wood**, five cubits long, and five cubits broad; the altar shall be **foursquare**: and the height thereof *shall be* three cubits. (2) And thou shalt make the **horns** of it upon the **four corners**

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thereof: his horns shall be of the same: and thou shalt **overlay it with brass**. (3) And thou shalt make his pans to receive his ashes, and his shovels, and his basins, and his fleshhooks, and his firepans: all the vessels thereof thou shalt make *of* brass. (4) And thou shalt make for it a grate of network *of* brass; and upon the net shalt thou make four brazen rings in the four corners thereof. (5) And thou shalt put it under the compass of the altar beneath, that the net may be even to the midst of the altar. (6) And thou shalt make staves for the altar, staves *of* shittim wood, and overlay them with brass. (7) And the staves shall be put into the rings, and the staves shall be upon the two sides of the altar, to bear it. (8) Hollow with boards shalt thou make it: as it was showed thee in the mount, so shall they make *it.*”

**The altar of sacrifice typified Christ in the use for which it was made.** — **The altar sanctified the gift,** the sacrifice, which was placed upon it, and made it acceptable to God (Matthew 23:19). —

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Christ sanctifies us. He makes the believing soul and our sacrifices acceptable to God (1 Peter 2:5).

(Matthew 23:19) “*Ye* fools and blind: for whether *is* greater, the gift, or the altar that sanctifieth the gift?”

(1 Peter 2:5) “Ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ.”

There was **one altar for all the people**, one altar for all their sins, one altar for all their sacrifices. — There is one Altar for sinners; and that Altar is Christ.

The altar **bore the violent heat of divine wrath**, so that the sinner might go free. While the fire consumed the sacrifice on the altar, the altar itself was not destroyed. — **Even so, Christ our Altar bore the violent heat of God’s wrath**. He poured out his soul unto death for our sin as a sacrifice to

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God of a sweet-smelling savor. Yet, he is not destroyed. This sacrifice, rather than being consumed by the wrath of God, has consumed the wrath of God (Romans 8:1).

The altar was **a place of refuge for guilty men.**

- Adonijah (1 Kings 1:50).
- Joab (1 Kings 2:28-30).

What else can a guilty man do but take hold of the horns of the altar? Christ alone is the Refuge for guilty sinners.

**There were four horns on the altar.** These four horns represented the fact that Christ's redemption reaches to the four corners of the earth. — *“Whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.”*

You will be wise to lay hold of the horns of the Altar, and plead for God's mercy. — Horns represent power, might, and efficacy. The horns on the altar represented the infinite merit and efficacy of Christ's

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precious blood. Here are four mighty horns upon God's Altar for you to lay hold of...

- The Grace of God.
- The Merits of Christ.
- The Promise of God.
- The Invitations and Commands of The Gospel (Isaiah 43:25-26).

(Isaiah 43:25-26) “I, *even I, am* he that blotteth out thy transgressions for mine own sake, and will not remember thy sins. (26) Put me in remembrance: let us plead together: declare thou, that thou mayest be justified.”

**The altar of Sacrifice was typical of Christ in its position, too.** The moment the sinner entered the door of the tabernacle, the first, the most important, most prominent thing he saw was that huge brazen altar. As he went into approach God the first thing he saw was the altar. As he left the tabernacle, and went out to live in the world, the last thing he saw was the altar.

- Christ is pre-eminent. All fullness dwells in him.

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- In order to approach God, we must come by the Altar, Christ Jesus (Hebrews 7:25).
- As we attempt to live in the world, we must live with the Altar of Sacrifice, the Lord Jesus Christ, ever before our heart's eyes.
- Every relationship in life is affected by this Altar.

### **The altar of sacrifice was typical of Christ in its form. — 1. The altar was four square.**

- The Fullness of God's Love (Ephesians 3:19).
- The Fullness of God's Covenant (2 Samuel 23:5).
- The Fullness of God's Grace (Ephesians 3:8).
- The Stability of All Things in Christ (Hebrews 13:8).

### **There were no steps going up to the altar.**

- There is no possibility of approaching God by the steps of your own works.
- There are no steps of preparation before you come to the Altar.

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- When the priest approached the altar, no nakedness could be seen. – His robe completely covered him.

### **The altar was completely covered with blood.**

- Sin can be put away only by blood (Hebrews 9:22).
- Justice must be satisfied.

### **The altar of sacrifice was typical of Christ in its materials.**

- The shittim wood represents the incorruptible humanity of Christ.
- The brass represents the eternal Godhead of Christ.
- The shittim wood overlaid with brass represents the eternal duration of the sufficiency of Christ's sacrifice.

**And the fire, which continually burned upon the altar of sacrifice, is also typical of Christ.** — That perpetual flame represents:

- The eternal love of Christ for his people.

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- The zeal of Christ for the glory of God.
- The purifying of God's elect by the blood of Christ.
- The unfailing intercession of Christ for us.

## **CARNAL ORDINANCE**

Joab's use of the altar, like Adonijah's, was but a carnal thing.

(1 Kings 2:28-30) "Then tidings came to Joab: for Joab had turned after Adonijah, though he turned not after Absalom. And **Joab fled unto the tabernacle of the LORD, and caught hold on the horns of the altar.** 29 And it was told king Solomon that Joab was fled unto the tabernacle of the LORD; and, behold, [he is] by the altar. Then Solomon sent Benaiah the son of Jehoiada, saying, Go, fall upon him. 30 And Benaiah came to the tabernacle of the LORD, and said unto him, Thus saith the king, Come forth. And he said, Nay; but I will die here. And

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Benaiah brought the king word again, saying,  
Thus said Joab, and thus he answered me.”

**So, the second thing revealed in our text is this: —**  
**It will be damning to your soul to carnally flee to**  
**a carnal, material altar.** Joab’s conscience pricked him. He had no repentance, just terror. When the sword of justice pursued him, he fled to the altar. And there he died. He refused to give up his refuge. So he died holding on to the horns of the altar (1 Kings 2:30-34).

“30 And Benaiah came to the tabernacle of the LORD, and said unto him, Thus saith the king, Come forth. And he said, Nay; but I will die here. And **Benaiah brought the king word again,** saying, Thus said Joab, and thus he answered me. 31 **And the king said unto him, Do as he hath said, and fall upon him,** and bury him; that thou mayest take away the innocent blood, which Joab shed, from me, and from the house of my father. 32 And the LORD shall return his blood upon his own head, who

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fell upon two men more righteous and better than he, and slew them with the sword, my father David not knowing [thereof, to wit], Abner the son of Ner, captain of the host of Israel, and Amasa the son of Jether, captain of the host of Judah. 33 Their blood shall therefore return upon the head of Joab, and upon the head of his seed for ever: but upon David, and upon his seed, and upon his house, and upon his throne, shall there be peace for ever from the LORD. 34 **So Benaiah the son of Jehoiada went up, and fell upon him, and slew him: and he was buried in his own house in the wilderness.**” (1 Kings 2:30-34)

Joab was not executed for joining in Adonijah’s rebellion, but, it is for the murders he had committed. In obedience to the law of God King Solomon had him executed (Genesis 9:5-6). Oh! How sweet is it to the relief of every poor, distressed, guilty conscience, to learn that Christ Jesus both fulfilled the law and paid its penalty to the

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full satisfaction of Divine justice by the sacrifice of himself!

**Many there are like Joab who run to and make a refuge of external religion when death threatens them.** They flee to the tabernacle and cling to the altar; but their refuge is their damnation.

- If you rest in external religion, the mere form of godliness, you will die there.
- The ordinances of gospel worship (Baptism and the Lord's Supper) are not a means of grace and salvation. The ordinances of God are for believers only. They are damning to the unbelieving (1 Corinthians 11:29).<sup>1</sup>
- **Religious observances**: Hearing sermons, — attending prayer-meetings, — joining in Bible-studies, — practicing family-prayer, — all these put together cannot save a lost soul. They are all good things in their place, but the merely formal practice of them cannot save. — *“For bodily exercise profiteth little: but godliness is*

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<sup>1</sup> Nothing is more damning to the souls of men than the practice of infant baptism.

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*profitable unto all things, having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come” (1 Timothy 4:8).*

- **Preachers:** These are looked upon by some foolish reverence. In the hour of death people often call for the preacher to come to their bedside and pray.

**Illustration:** C. H. Spurgeon wrote, — “I remember being called up, at dead of night, to pray with a dying person. He had spent the Sabbath in going out upon an excursion, and at three on Monday morning I was standing by his bed. There was no Bible in the house, and he had often ridiculed the preacher; but before his senses left him he begged his servant to send for me. What could I do? He was unconscious; and there I stood, musing sadly upon the wretched condition of a man who had wickedly refused Christ, and yet superstitiously fled to his minister.”

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- **Professions**: Many join a church and make a profession of faith who have no faith. — Church membership, religious association, and a carnal profession is but a refuge of lies (Isaiah 28:14-20).

“14 ¶ Wherefore hear the word of the LORD, ye scornful men, that rule this people which [is] in Jerusalem. 15 Because ye have said, We have made a covenant with death, and with hell are we at agreement; when the overflowing scourge shall pass through, it shall not come unto us: for we have made lies our refuge, and under falsehood have we hid ourselves: 16 Therefore thus saith the Lord GOD, Behold, I lay in Zion for a foundation a stone, a tried stone, a precious corner [stone], a sure foundation: he that believeth shall not make haste. 17 Judgment also will I lay to the line, and righteousness to the plummet: and the hail shall sweep away the refuge of lies, and the waters shall overflow the hiding place. 18 And your covenant with death shall be disannulled, and your agreement with

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hell shall not stand; when the overflowing scourge shall pass through, then ye shall be trodden down by it. 19 From the time that it goeth forth it shall take you: for morning by morning shall it pass over, by day and by night: and it shall be a vexation only [to] understand the report. 20 For the bed is shorter than that [a man] can stretch himself [on it]: and the covering narrower than that he can wrap himself [in it].” (Isaiah 28:14-20)

- Many vainly imagine that doctrinal knowledge and orthodoxy are a refuge from the wrath of God.
- **Feelings:** Dread, delight, dreaminess, despondency, all are used as a basis of hope with God; but all are futile.

**What an awful thing to perish with your hand on the altar of God!** Yet you must, unless your heart is renewed by divine grace. — The outward altar was never intended to be a sanctuary for the guilty. The

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Lord God says, — “*Thou shalt take him from mine altar, that he may die*” (Exodus 21:14).

(Philippians 3:3) “For we are the circumcision, which worship God in the spirit, and rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh.”

### **COME TO CHRIST**

But, *third*, there is a true Altar, a spiritual Altar to which we must flee by faith for life eternal; and that Altar is Christ our Savior. As Joab fled to the altar and clung to the horns of the altar for life, I urge you who hear my voice to flee to Christ by faith, lay hold upon the horns of the Altar (His blood and righteousness!) for life everlasting!

**Joab** “**caught hold on the horns of the altar.**” That is what we must do.

- We do this spiritually by fleeing from the sword of Justice to the Lord Jesus.

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- And by taking hold upon his great atoning work, and thus through faith uniting ourselves to his propitiation.

**Joab's great adversary demanded that he give up his refuge.** — *“Thus saith the king, Come forth!”* —

This is the demand of:

- Unbelieving Pharisees, legalists, and work-mongers who teach salvation by works.
- An Accusing Conscience within the man.
- Satan, quoting Holy Scripture falsely.

**Now, look at Joab's desperate resolve and do as he did.** — *“Nay, but I will die here!”* — This is a wise determination, for we...

- Must perish if we do not have Christ.
- Cannot make our case worse by clinging to him.
- Have nowhere else to go. — No other righteousness! — No other sacrifice! — No other atonement!
- Receive hope from the fact that none have perished here.

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Come humble sinner, in whose breast  
A thousand thoughts revolve;  
Come with your guilt and fear oppressed,  
And make this last resolve.

“I’ll go to Jesus, though my sins  
Like mountains round me close;  
I know his courts, I’ll enter in,  
Whatever may oppose.

“Prostrate I’ll lie before his throne,  
And there my guilt confess;  
I’ll tell him I’m a wretch undone  
Without his sovereign grace.”

I’ll to the gracious King approach,  
Whose scepter pardon gives;  
Perhaps He may command my touch,  
And then the suppliant lives!

Perhaps He will admit my plea,  
Perhaps will hear my prayer;

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But if I perish, I will pray,  
And perish only there.

I can but perish if I go,  
I am resolved to try;  
For if I stay away, I know,  
I must forever die.

But if I die with mercy sought,  
When I the King have tried,  
This were to die (Delightful thought!) —  
As sinner never died!”

**O sinner, come to Christ our Altar. Trust my Savior. Lay hold on the horns of this Altar with the assurance of acceptance and life eternal.** —  
“He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life”  
(John 3:36). — If you perished trusting in the Lord Jesus Christ your ruin would...

- Defeat God.
- Bring shame to Christ.
- Nullify God’s Word.
- Destroy grace.

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**Come now to the Lord Jesus Christ, and lay hold on eternal life.**

- You may come because he bids you come.
- You should come because he commands you.
- You should come now because now is the accepted time, today is the day of salvation..

**Illustration: *The Handkerchief***

(Isaiah 45:22) “Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth: for I [am] God, and [there is] none else.”

Look! sinner, look! Look out of yourself. Look away from all your works, and prayers, and tears, and feelings, and church-goings, and ordinances, and ceremonies, and preachers, and feelings, and experiences! Look alone to Christ. Look at once to him who on the bloody tree made expiation for sin, and who bids you look, and you shall live.

Amen.