

Let everything that has breath
praise the Lord. Praise the Lord!

Psalm 150:6

Praise Points

with Karen Holland

An Incense so Sweet

I trust in Him
There's an incense so sweet.

These two lines are the turning point from my poem *I Am Helped* in the article *From the Depths to the Heights*. They really have intrigued my heart this month. Just what is this incense so sweet? Is it trust in the Lord? Is it the Lord Himself? Where does this incense come from? Where does it lead?

From the NetBible, incense is a substance that produces a fragrant odor when burned. It was associated with offering a pleasing sacrifice to the Lord and was to consist of four ingredients finely ground, pure and holy, to be set before the ark of the testimony in the tent of the meeting (Exodus 30:34-36). This incense was to be offered daily on the golden altar {the altar of incense} in the holy place, and on the great Day of Atonement it was burnt by the high priest in the holy of holies (Exodus 30:7-8). This immediately made me think of Jesus Christ, the perfect offering, the spotless Lamb, a living sacrifice pleasing to God; a sweet smelling savour.

Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children; and walk in love, just as Christ also loved you and gave Himself up for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God as a fragrant aroma.
Ephesians 5:1-2

From the Netbible, in Ephesians 5:2 the word for offering is a sacrifice for sin, and the word for fragrant, means a sweet smell, incense. Incense – the smell of a pleasing sacrifice to God! Jesus was a pleasing sacrifice, a sweet smelling offering – as incense when it is burned before the Lord. Jesus, incense so sweet, burning before the Lord; a sin offering for each of us given in perfect love!

He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.

2 Corinthians 5:21

We are only able to become the fragrance of Christ, a sweet incense acceptable and pleasing to God, because Jesus bore our sins for us.

Now thanks be to God who always leads us in triumph in Christ, and through us diffuses the aroma of His knowledge in every place. For we are to God the fragrance of Christ among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing; To the one we are the aroma of death leading to death, and to the other the aroma of life leading to life. And who is sufficient for these things?

2 Corinthians 2:14-16

The fragrance of Christ is the fragrance of life among those being saved, but the aroma of death among those who are perishing. I'd never thought of this before: Christ's sacrifice seems to emit an aroma which is either pleasing and accepted or displeasing and rejected. The Netbible 2 Corinthians 2:14 confirms this; the word for aroma has the idea of emitting an

odor; a smell that is either good or bad. This idea of an offering emitting a smell that is good or bad, pleasing or displeasing, accepted or rejected led to the following verses.

I hate, I reject your festivals, Nor do I delight in your solemn assemblies.

Amos 5:21 NASB

I hate, I reject your feast days, and I will not smell in your solemn assemblies.

Amos 5:21 KJV

Then the dove came to him in the evening, and behold, a freshly plucked olive leaf was in her mouth; and Noah knew that the waters had receded from the earth. ... 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. The LORD smelled the soothing aroma {sweet savour}; and the LORD said to Himself, I will never again curse the ground on account of man, for the intent of man's heart is evil from his youth; and I will never again destroy every living thing, as I have done.

Genesis 8:11, 20-21

From the Netbible, Amos 5:21 the word for smell (ruwach) in the KJV is very interesting. It means to smell, accept or delight. The word 'ruwach' comes from a primitive root "ruah" and means to breathe an odor. It is closely linked to "ruah" the word for wind and Spirit. So here the Lord did not accept, delight in, breathe in or smell the Israelite worship.

On the other hand, Noah's offering was a sweet, soothing aroma to the Lord. The word for smell here is the same as in Amos 5:21. Not only did the Lord smell, breathe in, accept and delight in Noah's offering; the offering was soothing. From the Netbible, Genesis 8:21, soothing means sweet, quieting, tranquillizing and comes from the root word nuah which means rest or resting place. Is it a coincidence that Noah also means rest and comes from the same root word nuah? Or that Noah's altar was the first altar we read of in the Bible?

The smell of Noah's sacrifice quieted God's wrath and produced tranquility! God not only 'inhaled' the pleasing, soothing scent, He breathed it out. Noah's offering, the whole burnt offering, represented his complete surrender and dedication to the Lord. The offering was thought to be consumed and accepted by God as it ascended with the sweet smelling smoke. Noah's offering, his complete surrender and dedication, produced a sweet fragrance breathed in by God. His altar provided a resting place where God breathed out the fragrance of tranquility and peace. How beautiful that the dove carrying an olive branch is also part of this passage!

The Holy Spirit descended upon Jesus in bodily form like a dove (Matthew 3:16; Mark 1:10; Luke 3:22; John 1:32) and rested on Him. How beautiful that the dove, the symbol for peace and rest, seems to be associated with the fragrance of a pleasing sacrifice.

An incense so sweet, Jesus

The fragrance of a pleasing sacrifice, the spotless Lamb

The fragrance of life and love

The fragrance of complete devotion and surrender

The sweet fragrance of the dove.

Both the Bridegroom and the bride are compared to doves (Song of Solomon 1:15, 5:12). Notice in the following verses where the bride is called 'My dove' by the Bridegroom there is also a fragrance given forth.

My beloved responded and said to me, Arise, my darling, my beautiful one, and come along. For behold, the winter is past, the rain is over and gone. The flowers have already appeared in the land; The time has arrived for pruning the vines, And the voice of the turtledove has been heard in our land. The fig tree has ripened its figs, and the vines in blossom have given forth their fragrance. Arise, my darling, my beautiful one, and come along! O my dove, in the clefts of the rock, in the secret place of the steep pathway, Let me see your form, Let me hear your voice; For your voice is sweet, and your form is lovely.

Song of Solomon 2:10-14

From the Netbible, Song of Solomon 2:13 the word for fragrance is the odor of soothing (technical term for sacrifice to God)! The bride of Christ, the dove in this passage, is midst the fragrance of soothing. Is it a coincidence that the description of Noah's sacrifice used similar words? WOW! And look, it is here midst the blossoms giving forth their fragrance that the bride promises to give the Bridegroom, her love.

The Beloved to Her Lover: *Let us rise early and go to the vineyards; Let us see whether the vine has budded {flourished} and its blossoms have opened, and whether the pomegranates have bloomed. There I will give you my love.*

Song of Solomon 7:12

From Netbible, Song of Solomon 7:12 the word for budded paints a beautiful picture of this place of fragrance where the bride gives the Bridegroom her love! Budded means to break forth, to bloom; we saw from Song of Solomon 2:13 that a fragrance is released as this happens. This is a beautiful picture of a flower opening, unfolding, and releasing a sweet, soothing fragrance pleasing to the Lord. The Bridegroom longs for this unfolding, this release, this opening of the complete surrender of His bride's heart.

The Beloved about Her Lover: *I was asleep but my heart was awake. A voice! My beloved was knocking: The Lover to His Beloved: Open to me, my sister, my darling, My dove, my perfect one! For my head is drenched with dew, My locks with the damp of the night.*

Song of Solomon 5:2

Looking closer at this word, budded, it not only gives the image of a fragrant flower opening wide, it also means to fly as the extending of wings! The image of the dove, the bride, extending her wings anticipating flight; flight to her home, her place of shelter and rest; flight to the place where she gives her Bridegroom her love.

Who are these who fly like a cloud and like the doves to their lattices {roost, home}?

Isaiah 60:8

The Beloved about Her Lover: *My beloved is like a gazelle or a young stag. Behold, he is standing behind our wall, He is looking through the windows, He is showing Himself through the lattice.*

Song of Solomon 2:9

Oh, that I had wings like a dove! I would fly away and be at rest.

Psalms 55:6

This is really beautiful! Can you hear the longing of both the Bridegroom and the bride for each other? So is it any surprise that the word for showing Himself, means to shine, to blossom, put forth blossoms, or produce blossoms?

How strong is your desire to worship Jesus? Are you willing to worship at his feet with your whole heart and being even when it appears foolish?

Then, six days before the Passover, Jesus came to Bethany, where Lazarus was who had been dead, whom He had raised from the dead. There they made Him a supper; and Martha served, but Lazarus was one of those who sat at the table with Him. Then Mary took a pound of very costly oil of spikenard, anointed the feet of Jesus, and wiped His feet with her hair. And the house was filled with the fragrance of the oil. But one of His disciples, Judas Iscariot, Simon's son, who would betray Him, said, Why was this fragrant oil not sold for three hundred denarii and given to the poor? This he said, not that he cared for the poor, but because he was a thief, and had the money box; and he used to take what was put in it. But Jesus said, Let her alone; she has kept this for the day of My burial.

John 12:1-7

Mary was not afraid to express her love for Jesus even midst the critics who viewed this act as waste. Jesus was her only focus. In Mark's account Jesus said, ...*She has done a beautiful thing for me* (Mark 14:6). Jesus saw her heart; a heart completely devoted to him. Mary's worship was intense-the oil was more than a year's wages. Jesus saw the desire in Mary's heart to express her love for her Redeemer. This desire of Mary's heart, a completely devoted heart, was of more value to Jesus than all the expensive perfume in the world.

Mary's act of worship released a beautiful fragrance which filled the entire house. It not only touched Christ's heart but the hearts of all those present and the hearts of those to come in the future. Mark wrote, *Truly I say to you, wherever the gospel is preached in the whole world, what this woman has done will also be spoken of in memory of her.* (Mark 14:9)

This is the kind of heart the Lord is searching and longing for; a heart full of the fragrance of love and devotion to Jesus. This is the kind of heart that Jesus promises to meet upon the 'mountains of spices' midst the smell of a pleasing sacrifice, an incense so sweet.

The Lover to His Beloved: *Until the day breaks and the shadows flee, I will go to the mountain of myrrh and to the hill of incense.*

Song of Solomon 4:6

The Maidens to the Beloved: *Where has your beloved gone, O most beautiful among women? Where has your beloved turned {to face, appear}, That we may seek him with you?*

The Beloved to the Maidens: *My beloved has gone down to His garden, To the beds of balsam {spice, sweet smell, perfume}, To pasture his flock in the gardens and gather lilies. The*

Beloved about Her Lover: *I am my beloved's and my beloved is mine, He who pastures his flock among the lilies.*

Song of Solomon 6:1-3

An incense so sweet, Jesus

The fragrance of a pleasing sacrifice, the spotless Lamb

The fragrance of life and love

The fragrance of complete devotion and surrender

The sweet fragrance of the doves.

Sweet blossoms opening pouring forth complete devotion

Among the lilies

An incense so sweet

Complete surrender

A living breathing sacrifice.

O my beloved, upon the mountain of spices, Make Haste!

Song of Solomon 8:14

For the eyes of the LORD run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to show Himself strong on behalf of those whose heart is fully committed to Him ...

2 Chronicles 16:9

Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living {breathing} sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship.

Romans 12:1