

## The Presence of God

Deuteronomy 10:1-11

I want you to think about the big picture this morning, in our study of Deuteronomy. The overall focus of this book, given by its title, is the giving of the law. Literally, Deuteronomy is the second law. So we have looked at each of the ten commandments. We have focused upon the call of God to his people as they prepare to enter the promised land, including the blessings of obedience and the warnings against the rebelliousness stubbornness of their hearts. Lots of details. And this morning we come to a few more accounts filled with those details, but I don't want to focus upon those details as much as I want to emphasize the big picture of what those details represent. And that big picture has everything to do with the presence of God.

So that's what this chapter is about. The presence of God. And for the Israelites of the Old Testament, the presence of God was tangible. It was identifiable. That is to say, they could point to the presence of God simply by pointing at the ark. The ark of the covenant.

Let's review just a little about this ark, noting the connection between,

### I. THE LAW AND THE ARK.

Ex. 25:10 "And they shall make an ark of acacia wood; two and a half cubits shall be its length, a cubit and a half its width, and a cubit and a half its height. 11 And you shall overlay it with pure gold, inside and out you shall overlay it, and shall make on it a molding of gold all around. 12 You shall cast four rings of gold for it, and put them in its four corners; two rings shall be on one side, and two rings on the other side. 13 And you shall make poles of acacia wood, and overlay them with gold. 14 You shall

put the poles into the rings on the sides of the ark, that the ark may be carried by them. 15 The poles shall be in the rings of the ark; they shall not be taken from it. 16 And you shall put into the ark the Testimony which I will give you. 17 "You shall make a mercy seat of pure gold; two and a half cubits shall be its length and a cubit and a half its width. 18 And you shall make two cherubim of gold; of hammered work you shall make them at the two ends of the mercy seat. 19 Make one cherub at one end, and the other cherub at the other end; you shall make the cherubim at the two ends of it of one piece with the mercy seat. 20 And the cherubim shall stretch out their wings above, covering the mercy seat with their wings, and they shall face one another; the faces of the cherubim shall be toward the mercy seat."

So the ark was a rectangular box, 45" long, 27" wide and 27" high. Overlayed with gold. And on top there was a gold mercy seat, with cherubim on either end. But again, my focus this morning is on the big picture. This box represented the very presence of God. Actually, in the Old Covenant, this box was the presence of God. This is where God dwelt, in the midst of his people.

### A. The ark demonstrates the glorious presence of God.

Let me prove that to you from Scripture. I will continue reading,

Ex. 25: 21 "You shall put the mercy seat on top of the ark, and in the ark you shall put the Testimony that I will give you. 22 And there I will meet with you, and I will speak with you from above the mercy seat, from between the two cherubim which are on the ark of the Testimony, about everything which I will give you in commandment to the children of Israel."

Num. 7:89 "Now when Moses went into the tabernacle of meeting to speak with Him, he heard the voice of One speaking to

him from above the mercy seat that was on the ark of the Testimony, from between the two cherubim; thus He spoke to him.”

Lev. 16:1 “Now the Lord spoke to Moses after the death of the two sons of Aaron, when they offered profane fire before the Lord, and died; 2 and the Lord said to Moses: “Tell Aaron your brother not to come at just any time into the Holy Place inside the veil, before the mercy seat which is on the ark, lest he die; for I will appear in the cloud above the mercy seat.”

Also, with reference to the whole of the tabernacle which travelled with the Israelites in the wilderness, we read,

Ex. 40:34 “Then the cloud covered the tabernacle of meeting, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle. 35 And Moses was not able to enter the tabernacle of meeting, because the cloud rested above it, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle. 36 Whenever the cloud was taken up from above the tabernacle, the children of Israel would go onward in all their journeys. 37 But if the cloud was not taken up, then they did not journey till the day that it was taken up. 38 For the cloud of the Lord was above the tabernacle by day, and fire was over it by night, in the sight of all the house of Israel, throughout all their journeys.”

So you could point to that tabernacle, to that ark of the covenant in the midst of the tabernacle, and properly say, there is the presence of God. “The glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle.” That’s the big picture. The realization and the recognition of the glorious presence of God. And the awareness and consciousness of God’s presence is a really big thing! As it is for us today.

Hebrews 9 speaks about that Old Covenant ark of the covenant.

Heb. 9:1 “Then indeed, even the first covenant had ordinances of divine service and the earthly sanctuary. 2 For a tabernacle was prepared: the first part, in which was the lampstand, the table, and the showbread, which is called the sanctuary; 3 and behind the second veil, the part of the tabernacle which is called the Holiest of All, 4 which had the golden censer and the ark of the covenant overlaid on all sides with gold, in which were the golden pot that had the manna, Aaron’s rod that budded, and the tablets of the covenant; 5 and above it were the cherubim of glory overshadowing the mercy seat. Of these things we cannot now speak in detail.”

The point of Hebrews 9, however, is to emphasize that it was that Old Covenant shadow which shows us that Jesus himself brings us into that same presence of God.

Heb. 9:6 “Now when these things had been thus prepared, the priests always went into the first part of the tabernacle, performing the services. 7 But into the second part the high priest went alone once a year, not without blood, which he offered for himself and for the people’s sins committed in ignorance; 8 the Holy Spirit indicating this, that the way into the Holiest of All was not yet made manifest while the first tabernacle was still standing. 9 It was symbolic for the present time in which both gifts and sacrifices are offered which cannot make him who performed the service perfect in regard to the conscience— 10 concerned only with foods and drinks, various washings, and fleshly ordinances imposed until the time of reformation. 11 But Christ came as High Priest of the good things to come, with the greater and more perfect tabernacle not made with hands, that is, not of this creation. 12 Not with the blood of goats and calves, but with His own blood He entered the Most Holy Place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption.”

Again, the big picture. This is the presence of God among his people. And we now have the privilege of entering the greater and more perfect tabernacle, by faith. We meet God in this place, as we worship together this morning, this place which was represented by that ark of the covenant in Deuteronomy 10.

So what we have here in Deuteronomy 10 is nothing less than a demonstration of the glorious presence of God. And so as we continue to read in,

Heb. 10:19 “Therefore, brethren, having boldness to enter the Holiest by the blood of Jesus, 20 by a new and living way which He consecrated for us, through the veil, that is, His flesh, 21 and having a High Priest over the house of God, 22 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. 23 Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful. 24 And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, 25 not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching.”

Then, just for the fun of it, let’s look into the future!

Rev. 11:19 “Then the temple of God was opened in heaven, and the ark of His covenant was seen in His temple. And there were lightnings, noises, thunderings, an earthquake, and great hail.”

Now, back to our text in Deuteronomy 10. What, exactly did Moses do? Verse 5, “I...put the tablets in the ark which I had made.”

The two tablets of the law, the second time God had inscribed his law on those tablets of stone.

v.1-4

So why the law? And why were the tablets of the law put into the ark? Two things stand out to me. First, the law retains its importance in the covenant God made with his people. God’s covenant people are in fact obligated to live in accordance with the law which God has prescribed.

But, and this is a very important point, our approach to God, the place where we meet with God is actually the mercy seat. The place of atonement. We meet with God at the very place that represents the finished work of Jesus, who is himself represented by that very mercy seat covering the ark of the covenant.

And it is his own sacrifice, the sacrifice of his own body and blood, by which we have access to the glorious presence of God. So the law is still valid. It remains inside the ark, but it is not the means by which we gain acceptance in God’s sight.

In fact, this second edition of the tablets actually demonstrates God’s covenant faithfulness. Remember why the second edition of the tablets was necessary. Moses broke the first tablets when he came down the mountain and saw the sinfulness of the people worshipping a golden idol. And here’s the point of all this, the transition from last week’s sermon into this week’s. Despite the sin of the people, God is still gracious. Despite the sin of his people, God is still faithful to his covenant promise. And so this second...

### **B. The giving of the law demonstrates the covenant faithfulness of God.**

God spoke to Moses again. God gave him the law again. Thus, despite the unfaithfulness of the people, God would remain faithful to the covenant he established. This second giving of the

law would actually be an act of grace, as those tablets would again be put inside that ark of the covenant.

v.4-5

The covenant relationship between God and his people would continue, despite the previous sinfulness of the people. God would remain faithful.

Then, we come to a description of,

## **II. THE LEVITES AND THE ARK.**

v.6-8

The Levites were separated, set apart as holy, for a separate and distinct purpose. They would be responsible for the care and preservation of the tabernacle. And they would be the priests who would minister in that meeting place of God with his people. And they would be dependent upon the Lord directly for their inheritance. They got none of the land itself.

v.9

So what were they to do? What was,

### **A. The service of the Levites in the presence of God.**

According to verse 8, three things.

v.8

What does that mean? To bear the ark of the covenant meant to carry it, using the poles so as not to actually touch it. But in a very practical sense, they were to see to it that this physical representation of the presence of God would always remain with the people.

But even more importantly, verse 8, “to stand before the Lord to minister to Him.” In other words, to conduct all the services of the sacrifices. To offer those sacrifices. To enter that most holy place on behalf of the other worshipers, sacrificing all that God has specifically prescribed to be done.

And then, thirdly, verse 8, to bless his name. In other words, to give honor and praise to his name! That’s what worship is all about. It’s really not about us, our pleasure or our enjoyment. We come to God’s presence in worship to bless his name. And that was the job of the priests.

Now, let me make a really important point here. Namely that this service of the priests in the Old Covenant becomes the service of all of God’s people in the New Covenant. We are now the priests! All of us.

Rev. 1:5 “To Him who loved us and washed us from our sins in His own blood, 6 and has made us kings and priests to His God and Father, to Him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.”

1 Peter 2:5 “...you also, as living stones, are being built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.”

So when you read about the priestly service of the Levites in the presence of God, please immediately think to yourself, that’s my responsibility now! That’s what God has called me to do! That’s why I come to worship each Sunday in church, to offer my sacrifices as a priest called to be in the service of God.

Not animals, of course. Nothing that we killed and lay upon an altar. But as I just read in 1 Peter, we come “to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.”

So the big picture here in Deuteronomy 10 is a picture of the very thing we are doing together here in this room this morning.

v.8 “At that time the Lord separated the tribe of Levi to bear the ark of the covenant of the Lord, to stand before the Lord to minister to Him and to bless in His name, to this day.”

We see something else about these here as well, namely,

**B. The intercession of the Levites in the presence of God.**

Actually, it's Moses presented as the mediator and intercessor, and though the particular tribe for the priesthood was the tribe of Aaron, his brother Moses was also a descendant of Levi. So look at the work of intercession here in our text.

v.10-11

We looked at that last week in,

Deut. 9:17 "Then I took the two tablets and threw them out of my two hands and broke them before your eyes. 18 And I fell down before the Lord, as at the first, forty days and forty nights; I neither ate bread nor drank water, because of all your sin which you committed in doing wickedly in the sight of the Lord, to provoke Him to anger. 19 For I was afraid of the anger and hot displeasure with which the Lord was angry with you, to destroy you. But the Lord listened to me at that time also. 20 And the Lord was very angry with Aaron and would have destroyed him; so I prayed for Aaron also at the same time. 21 Then I took your sin, the calf which you had made, and burned it with fire and crushed it and ground it very small, until it was as fine as dust; and I threw its dust into the brook that descended from the mountain.”

Thankfully, the Lord listened to Moses. The Lord heeded his prayers. The Lord honored his intercession and mediation.

I hope you immediately anticipate what I am going to say next. We still have a mediator! We still have a high priest. We still have an intercessor!

Heb. 4:14 “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. 15 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. 16 Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need.”

Heb. 2:17 “Therefore, in all things He had to be made like His brethren, that He might be a merciful and faithful High Priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people. 18 For in that He Himself has suffered, being tempted, He is able to aid those who are tempted.”

Heb. 7:23 “Also there were many priests, because they were prevented by death from continuing. 24 But He, because He continues forever, has an unchangeable priesthood. 25 Therefore He is also able to save to the uttermost those who come to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them. 26 For such a High Priest was fitting for us, who is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and has become higher than the heavens; 27 who does not need daily, as those high priests, to offer up sacrifices, first for His own sins and then for the people's, for this He did once for all when He offered up Himself. 28 For the law appoints as high priests men who have weakness, but the word of the oath, which came after the law, appoints the Son who has been perfected forever.”

And so we know and believe,

1 Tim. 2:5 “For there is one God and one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus, 6 who gave Himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time.”

So that's the big picture of Deuteronomy 10. It is a picture of the faithfulness of God and of the perfection of Jesus our high priest.

So come to the glorious presence of God. Come with the confidence of knowing that you have a mediator and an advocate, a priest who has already laid down his life as the atoning sacrifice for your sin, that you might be forgiven. And come as priests to offer the sacrifices of your worship this morning that would be most pleasing to him.

So come to the glorious presence of God and bless his name!