

The Presence of God

Exodus 25-27

I plan to pick up the pace quite a bit now in our study of Exodus, and though I didn't read the whole passage, our text this afternoon is the whole of chapters 25, 26 and 27. That doesn't mean these chapters are unimportant, but rather that their importance for us is not in the details. In other words, the goal of our study this afternoon is not for you to be able to go out and build a tabernacle according to God's specific instructions. Instead, the goal is to understand what those detailed and explicit instructions mean now that Jesus has come in the flesh and that earthly tabernacle no longer stands.

And there is much to understand, most especially with regard to the presence of God. And that's where we begin today. The details of the tabernacle not only provide us the ability to note God's presence among his people, but to marvel at,

I. THE GLORY OF GOD'S PRESENCE.

And so the focus of these commands and regulations for the people of Israel is the command to build a sanctuary.

25:8-9

This will be the overall theme of the rest of the book of Exodus, so I want to linger here this afternoon long enough for you to catch that significance. You see, God is seeking worshippers. And worshippers are those people in covenant relationship to God who gather together to meet with God. And since God invites them to gather together, it is appropriate for God to invite his worshippers to his house. That's what the tabernacle will be. That's what the sanctuary is.

And notice exactly what it says in verse 9. "According to all

that I show you, that is, the pattern of the tabernacle and the pattern of all its furnishings, just so you shall make it." So we have a myriad of instructions. The pattern is explicitly laid out.

Let me immediately point you to two important New Testament passages that give us the importance of this passage of Old Testament ceremonial regulations,

Heb. 8:1 "Now this is the main point of the things we are saying: We have such a High Priest, who is seated at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens, 2 a Minister of the sanctuary and of the true tabernacle which the Lord erected, and not man. 3 For every high priest is appointed to offer both gifts and sacrifices. Therefore it is necessary that this One also have something to offer. 4 For if He were on earth, He would not be a priest, since there are priests who offer the gifts according to the law; 5 who serve the copy and shadow of the heavenly things, as Moses was divinely instructed when he was about to make the tabernacle. For He said, "See that you make all things according to the pattern shown you on the mountain." 6 But now He has obtained a more excellent ministry, inasmuch as He is also Mediator of a better covenant, which was established on better promises."

So the importance of Exodus 25-40 is not in the actual furniture of the Old Testament tabernacle, as interesting as that might be, but that you realize that all of this is a pattern of heaven! The earthly tabernacle was a "copy and shadow of the heavenly things." So we get a glimpse, by analogy or illustration, of what heaven is like. We get an outward, external pattern that teaches us about the internal, spiritual realities of the person and work of Jesus Christ.

Then we read in,

Acts 7:44 "Our fathers had the tabernacle of witness in the

wilderness, as He appointed, instructing Moses to make it according to the pattern that he had seen, 45 which our fathers, having received it in turn, also brought with Joshua into the land possessed by the Gentiles, whom God drove out before the face of our fathers until the days of David, 46 who found favor before God and asked to find a dwelling for the God of Jacob. 47 But Solomon built Him a house. 48 “However, the Most High does not dwell in temples made with hands, as the prophet says: 49 ‘Heaven is My throne, And earth is My footstool. What house will you build for Me? says the Lord, Or what is the place of My rest? 50 Has My hand not made all these things?’”

Stephen, then, uses the occasion of his own death sentence to preach the gospel of Jesus to those Jews who were about to kill him.

Acts 7:51 “You stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears! You always resist the Holy Spirit; as your fathers did, so do you. 52 Which of the prophets did your fathers not persecute? And they killed those who foretold the coming of the Just One, of whom you now have become the betrayers and murderers, 53 who have received the law by the direction of angels and have not kept it.”

So that’s the point. The glory of God’s presence, represented by the Old Testament tabernacle, is the ground for an evangelistic invitation. The point of the detailed instructions for the earthly temple is so that by contrast, we can understand that heaven is God’s throne and earth is his footstool. And Jesus is God, the fulfillment of all that we read in the Old Testament.

To be a bit more specific, we see in this pattern of an earthly tabernacle,

A. A gracious promise.

v.8

“...that I may dwell among them.” That’s the significance of the tabernacle. Not only the covenant promise of, “I will be there God.” But now even more personally, “I will live with them.” I will make my home with them. And so he does, now, in spirit and in truth. He dwells with us now, even now on earth. And that is our future inheritance, too. He shall dwell with us in the new heaven and the new earth.

Rev. 21:1 “Now I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away. Also there was no more sea. 2 Then I, John, saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. 3 And I heard a loud voice from heaven saying, “Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people. God Himself will be with them and be their God.”

That’s the promise given to us as we read Exodus 25. That’s the promise that is for us as we study all the details of this earthly tabernacle. God will make his tabernacle with us. And to prove the certainty of that promise, he sent Jesus to live on earth for just that reason, to dwell with us. And that is actually his name, God with us. Immanuel. Such a gracious promise. Along with,

B. A spoken word.

God has given us a spoken word, his word. And in this tabernacle to be built by Moses, there was to be something that would give evidence of God’s presence as he spoke to his people. The ark of the covenant. We have a literal, physical description of the ark in,

25:10-21

We don’t have to guess about the meaning and significance of

all of that.

v.22

Consider as well,

Ex. 29:42 “This shall be a continual burnt offering throughout your generations at the door of the tabernacle of meeting before the LORD, where I will meet you to speak with you.”

That is what our God does. He speaks to us! This, too, points us to Jesus Christ, for all that God said to his people, throughout all of the Old Testament, was to lead up to and prepare for that final word, that incarnate word.

Heb. 1:1 “God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, 2 has in these last days spoken to us by His Son, whom He has appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the worlds.”

God spoke to his people “at various times and in various ways” throughout the Old Testament. That was the purpose for this ark of the testimony in the tabernacle. Then, finally, he spoke to them through Jesus.

This is such a gracious thing, that God the creator of the universe would speak to his lowly creatures! That he not only would enter into a relationship with us, but speak to us. Personally. And this is important, for it is the basis for our doctrine of Holy Scripture. We now have a written record of what God has said. So that now, with the incarnation of Jesus Christ in the past, we have no more continuing revelation of God’s speaking, but with that completed word we have a finalized, written record. So when the Bible speaks, God speaks. When you read the Bible, God is speaking to you. Personally. With words that are alive, the living word.

It is good to note that our worship service itself can be understood more clearly by this comparison with the furnishings of the tabernacles, for in a worship service today, when two or three are gathered together in Jesus’ name to meet with God, God himself agrees to meet with us. So as we speak to God in our worship, in psalms and prayers, God also speaks to us by his word! What a glorious privilege we have, every time we enter God’s presence in worship, that he would speak to us.

He is personal. He is personally involved in a covenant relationship with you, you who are in Christ. He is not distant, not disconnected, nor disinterested. But intimately joined to you and to me in an association characterized by direct, specific and particular communication. He is a God whom we can, therefore, know. For we know him as he reveals himself to us by speaking to us!

Such is his glory. And it is a glory revealed so clearly by this whole Old Testament tabernacle, which is why we have such intricate details. Above all the specific incidentals is this overarching theme, that the God of Israel was a great and glorious God, greater than all the false and imagined gods of the nations. He alone is worthy to be praised, for he alone is full of glory! That’s we we learn from the tabernacle.

C. A revealed glory.

Just look.

26:1-6

So why the curtains? To hide from view the fullness of the glory of God who inhabited the tabernacle. That is most obvious by this curtain which separated the main part of the temple from the Most Holy Place. That’s where God’s actual presence would be, in that innermost sanctuary, that innermost holy place behind

the curtain.

Ex. 26:33 “And you shall hang the veil from the clasps. Then you shall bring the ark of the Testimony in there, behind the veil. The veil shall be a divider for you between the holy place and the Most Holy. 34 You shall put the mercy seat upon the ark of the Testimony in the Most Holy. 35 You shall set the table outside the veil, and the lampstand across from the table on the side of the tabernacle toward the south; and you shall put the table on the north side. 36 “You shall make a screen for the door of the tabernacle.”

So great was God’s glory that Moses later received these instructions,

Lev. 16:2 “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.”

That’s where God was, his glory revealed by the splendor of this earthly tabernacle. But remember what happened when Jesus died.

Mat. 27:51 “Then, behold, the veil of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom; and the earth quaked, and the rocks were split, 52 and the graves were opened; and many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised; 53 and coming out of the graves after His resurrection, they went into the holy city and appeared to many.”

Let me keep drawing you back to my main point, which is how all of this points us to Jesus Christ.

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. 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.”

And so from Exodus 26, from the building of the Old Testament tabernacle, I declare to you the gospel of Jesus Christ, for Jesus entered this perfect tabernacle in heaven with the blood of his own body as a sacrifice for our sins. And by doing so, he accomplished your own eternal redemption and salvation.

So that leads us to the question of how a sinful and fallen man is able to enter into the presence of a infinitely holy and perfectly righteous God.

II. MAN IN GOD'S PRESENCE.

How can that be, if God's glory is so great that the fullness of it's light must be hidden from men? How? That's an easy question to answer. The covenant itself tells us the answer. Covenant breaking requires an atoning sacrifice of blood. And so we have,

A. The blood of the atonement.

The blood of the burnt offering. On the bronze altar or brazen altar.

27:1-8

This altar in the outer court of the tabernacle "represents the meeting place between a holy God and a guilty sinner. It was certainly evident to the devout Israelite that 'without shedding of blood there is no forgiveness' for sin. The brazen altar was the place where all the blood of atonement was shed. Sin was there dealt with in accordance with the righteous judgment of God upon it." The altar clearly prefigured Christ's meeting of the fire of divine judgment on the cross.

Without that blood, there is no forgiveness. And without forgiveness, there can be no worship! But there was more. More in this tabernacle to show us Jesus Christ. There was the bread.

B. The bread of life.

In the tabernacle, it was called the showbread.

25:28-30

The showbread. The bread of presence. Literally, the bread of face, and the face of God is the explicit reference in the Old Testament to the presence of God. One author puts it this way, "Showbread literally means 'presence bread' because the twelve loaves pointed symbolically to Christ the never-failing source of

spiritual sustenance and refreshment for his people. He is the one who is the food and drink of his people, supplying them all needed nourishment for spiritual life and growth. They must first understand that God has made this provision for them before they will ever be able to appropriate it properly in their worship."

Shall I read the obvious New Testament fulfillment of this?

John 6:32 Then Jesus said to them, "Most assuredly, I say to you, Moses did not give you the bread from heaven, but My Father gives you the true bread from heaven. 33 For the bread of God is He who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world." 34 Then they said to Him, "Lord, give us this bread always." 35 And Jesus said to them, "I am the bread of life. He who comes to Me shall never hunger, and he who believes in Me shall never thirst."

Then, with bread, we also have light.

C. The light of the world.

25:31-40

27:20-21

Again, the imagery of light is easily understood. From John's gospel again,

John 8:12 "I am the light of the world. He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness, but have the light of life."

John 12:35 Then Jesus said to them, "A little while longer the light is with you. Walk while you have the light, lest darkness overtake you; he who walks in darkness does not know where he is going. 36 While you have the light, believe in the light, that you may become sons of light."

So it was that the Old Testament people of God would come to

know, even in that ceremonial system, that all that they needed would be provided by God himself.

With one more final thought. “It is in the large court outside the tabernacle proper that we come upon those furnishings which set forth the method by which sinful man approaches a perfectly holy God. We note that there was only one door of access to this courtyard, even as there is only one Door by which men may find their way into the saving presence of God. The inner part of the large court of the tabernacle was accessible only to priests and Levites, for they were the God-appointed mediators between Jehovah and His people. The repentant sinner could bring his sacrificial offering to the brazen altar, but that was as far as he could go. The priests took over as soon as the animal was killed.”

One door to the presence of God in the tabernacle.

D. The door.

Ex. 27:9-16

One door. One gate. And so we read,

John 10:7 Then Jesus said to them again, “Most assuredly, I say to you, I am the door of the sheep. 8 All who ever came before Me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not hear them. 9 I am the door. If anyone enters by Me, he will be saved, and will go in and out and find pasture.”

Let me end with what I hope is a very familiar exhortation. It is my prayer that although all these details of the Old Testament tabernacle might bore you this afternoon, nevertheless this exhortation from the book of Hebrews might be more understandable and more encouraging to you as we gather together here today in this sanctuary, in this place of God’s glorious presence.

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.”