

Rescued to Know Him: God with Man

Exodus 24:12 – 31:18 (Part 2)

A couple of years ago there was a bit of controversy raised when a very popular pastor named Andy Stanley said that Christians need to “unhitch” their faith from the Old Testament. Here’s a little more of what he said regarding how we should view the OT. *“Jesus' new covenant, His covenant with the nations, His covenant with you, His covenant with us, can stand on its own two nail-scarred resurrection feet. It does not need propping up by the Jewish scriptures,”*

“The Bible did not create Christianity. The resurrection of Jesus created and launched Christianity. Your whole house of Old Testament cards can come tumbling down. The question is did Jesus rise from the dead? And the eyewitnesses said he did.”

“It's liberating for people who need and understand grace, who need and understand forgiveness. And it's liberating for people who find it virtually impossible to embrace the dynamic, the worldview, and the values system depicted in the story of Ancient Israel.”

Of course, there are a multitude of problems with any approach that tries to sever our faith from the Old Testament Scriptures and there have been many, many helpful responses to Stanley’s words. But I want to focus in on one particular problem. Listen to these words from Hebrews 8:1-2 regarding the work of Christ. Here’s the problem, if you begin the process of unhitching our faith from the OT, you cannot make much sense of what it means for Jesus to be our high priest. Why do we need one? Why would He become one? What specific things did He accomplish as our high priest? The OT plays a vital and important role in the story of God’s redemption of mankind from sin.

Because of this it’s necessary that we know our OT and this includes passages like the description of the tabernacle and the ordination of the high priest in Exodus 25-31. This passage plays a crucial role in the history of Israel and the history of redemption because it shows us why God rescued Israel from slavery in Egypt. He saved them so that they might know Him as He dwelt among them to bless them.

Last week we began studying this section of detailed instructions regarding the tabernacle that God gave Moses on the top of Mt. Sinai. Here's what we are looking at: **3 Reasons to Delight in God's Presence with Us.**

1. God Desires to Dwell with Mankind (24:12 – 27:19)

Look with me at 25:8. Keep in mind that term "sanctuary" means living space or dwelling place. It's the word translated tabernacle. This word is used throughout chapters 25-27 as God describes the ark of the covenant, the table for bread, the lampstand and the curtains and poles that will be used in the construction of the tabernacle. The point in this whole section is that God will come and dwell among Israel by His own initiative in order to do them good.

2. Mankind Can Draw Near to God (27:20 – 31:18)

Look with me now at 27:20-21. Now we see the phrase "tent of meeting" used and it will continue to be used throughout chapters 28-31. This phrase places the emphasis on the tabernacle being the place where humans can come and approach God in worship. This section will focus on the priests and the high priest in particular. Look at 28:1. Why?

The priests are necessary to serve as mediators between human beings and God. Look at 28:9-12, 21, 29-30. Aaron wears these stones with the names of the tribes of Israel on them as the representative of Israel to God.

We talked last time about the different materials used in the tabernacle that would have helped Israel understand God's holiness. Because of man's sinfulness and defilement they must only approach God through a holy mediator. In fact, only the mediators can come close to God's presence and only in the way God has proscribed because of God's terrible holiness. But before the priests can represent the people and before they can come near to God, they must be made holy. There are multiple warnings throughout these chapters of what will happen if a priest comes into God's holy presence in a state of defilement. Listen to 28:35, 43 as examples.

We see a very vivid example played out in the book of Leviticus of what happens when a priest comes before God in an unworthy manner and not as God has commanded. Listen to Leviticus 10:1-3. It's for this reason that God gives all of

these instructions. Let's summarize these instructions that prepare the priests, and the high priest in particular, to serve before the Lord.

First, in chapter 28 God described the garments of the High Priest and the other priests. Look at 28:1-5. They are made for glory and beauty and are the same material as the inner court of the tabernacle. These garments, made in this way out of this material set apart the priests for service.

Second, in chapter 29 we have the process by which the priests were made holy. Look at 29:1. This process involves several steps but we can summarize it overall with two words, consecration and ordination. To consecrate something is to make it distinct and give it over into the service of the Lord. For ordination, look at 29:9. To ordain literally means to "fill the hand". So, the priests are set apart for service and then are given a task to fulfill.

In order to be consecrated and ordained God had Moses and the priests offer multiple sacrifices which are described in chapter 29. These sacrifices pointed toward 3 requirements for the priests before they could approach the Holy God. First, they need purification from sin and defilement and so did the altar. This happened through the shedding and sprinkling of blood on both the altar and the priests. Second, they needed atonement. The priests placed their hands on the head of the animal and the animal was killed as a ransom substitute. It's life instead of theirs. Third, they needed peace and fellowship with God. A portion of the peace offering was eaten to show that the priest now had fellowship with God.

Their ordination happened over a period of 7 days. Listen to 29:35-37. Now, chapters 30 and 31 go on to describe an array of items and practices that are needed by the priests to fulfill their role as mediators between Israel and God. These include the altar of incense, where incense was continually burned before the Lord in the Holy Place. The wash basin, where they washed their hands to cleanse them of defilement, and the taking of a census tax and the making of oil and incense. We also read about the men who will actually be gifted by God to make these items and the priests garments.

All of it comes together in the high point of these chapters in 29:38-46. There are three major points you have to get to understand why all of this is being done. First, the priests were sinful men, just like everyone else, and they needed

atonement and holiness to enter God's presence. Second, they had to offer sacrifices and burn incense every single day. Third, the whole reason for all of this was so that Israel could approach God. Listen to these verses.

Now, once you have a sort of big picture introduction into the ministry of the priests in the old covenant, and the high priest in particular, it's vital that we jump ahead to Hebrews and read a little bit about how the ministry of Jesus fulfills this role for us. Listen to Hebrews 5:1-4. Now Hebrews 9:1-10, 10:11. And finally, listen to Hebrews 9:11-15, 22-28; 10:12-18.

And I hope you can see through these NT passages that the tabernacle and the priesthood are a vital part of a much larger story. And this brings us to our last reason to delight in God's presence with us.

3. Every Experience of God's Presence Points Toward God's Final Purpose for Creation

I want you to notice something in God's instructions to Moses regarding the building of the tabernacle. Look at 25:9 and 40. You read this several other times in Exodus regarding the tabernacle and you read it in Hebrews. The point is that the earthly tabernacle was a copy of the heavenly one and the earthly tabernacle always and by definition points beyond itself to something greater.

In fact, the tabernacle actually points backward in time to the Garden of Eden. What does that mean? Well, there are striking similarities between the Garden and the tabernacle. Let me list some of the most significant. Both the Garden and the tabernacle face east and have cherubim guarding God's presence. Remember the cherubim on the inner curtains of the tabernacle? The lampstand symbolizes the tree of life. There are stones found in Eden that are used in the building of the tabernacle, such as gold and onyx. The same verbs are used in Genesis 2:15 regarding Adam's work in the Garden as are used to describe the priests service to God in the tabernacle. And above all, the Garden was the place where God came to meet with Adam and Eve and the tabernacle becomes the place where Israel can meet with God once again.

I think we are on good ground saying that God's purpose in creation and in the garden was to make a sanctuary where God would dwell with man. The commands for Adam and Eve to be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and take

dominion over it were essentially commands to expand the borders of the garden as the sanctuary of God's presence to cover the entire earth. So, God, in His grace, makes the building of the tabernacle and His coming to dwell among men a restart of His purposes for earth. This is the entire point of the Promised Land. It's like a restart, a beachhead, where Israel will represent God to all the nations of the earth.

This is the story of the Bible. You can draw a direct line from the Garden of Eden to the tabernacle when God comes to dwell among Israel to the Temple that Solomon built. Listen to these words in 1 Kings 8:6-11 at the dedication of the Temple. And yet, we read in Ezekiel 10:18-19, hundreds of years later, about God's glorious presence departing the temple and city because of Israel's sin.

But the promises throughout the prophets speak to a time when God will return to dwell among His people. Then, of course, the line goes from Solomon's temple and the departure of God's presence from Israel to John 1:14 as the Word of God comes to dwell with man in the incarnation. And as Jesus prepares to depart back to heaven through His death and resurrection He makes this promise to His disciples in John 14:15-17.

And in Acts 1 the Holy Spirit comes upon the followers of Christ and now everyone who receives the forgiveness of sins offered through the New Covenant receives the Holy Spirit so that we now read these words in 1 Corinthians 3:16-17. You and I have God's glorious presence in us now, working, and expanding throughout the earth with the proclamation of the gospel.

And one day, all of this will reach its final goal in Revelation 21:1-4.

The tabernacle and the ministry of the priests was always intending to point beyond itself to something bigger. When you read these passages keep in mind how they fit into the overall story of the Bible and what God is doing.

Here's the big takeaway for us. All of our worship points us beyond our present experience. When we worship in Spirit and truth it reminds us that the Spirit is ours because God desires to dwell with man and that has been made possible by the work of Christ. It reminds us that our experience of worship now points beyond itself to the final purpose of God for all of creation.

So, keep this in mind when you pursue God and long for his presence. That longing and that pursuit are forestates of what is to come and point us toward the glorious hope that awaits us. Let's pray.