



2026 Weekly Devotions

Week of: June 29th - July 5th

Sermon: June 28th



SMYRNA BAPTIST CHURCH
building community ◊ equipping believers ◊ serving Jesus

June 29

Psalm 113:4-6 & Philippians 2:8

Yesterday's sermon dealt with some more thematic, or overarching, truths that we can learn from Exodus 37. In my introduction, I mentioned that I was not going to concentrate on the specific items in view in chapter 37 (the ark, the table, the lampstand and the altar). This was partially because Pastor Robert covered so much of the significance of these items in a previous sermon, but it was also because I knew I wanted to explore each of them, and their significance, more fully in our Points to Ponder devotions for this week.

Today, I want to begin by talking about the theological significance of the ark of the covenant. I say "theological" in the truest sense of the word. Theology is a word that can be broken down into two parts. "Theo" denotes God and "ology" refers to the knowledge of something. When combined, "theology" specifically deals with the fundamental truths that we can know about God.

I want to argue today that the ark shows us something that is very important regarding God's nature and His interaction with us. When speaking about God, theologians sometimes refer to His transcendence and His imminence. Transcendence is a word that refers to the reality that God is over all, He is exalted and glorious and separate from His creation. Imminence refers to God's presence within and amongst His creation.

These two things seem like they must be contradictory. How can God be both imminent and transcendent? Shouldn't we have to choose? The answer is that God is so vast that He is both over all and amongst all. As the Psalmist shows us today, God is "high above the heavens". In fact, He is so high that he looks DOWN not just on earth but on the heavens as well! Our God is transcendent.

However, the Bible also says that God is among us. In fact, Philippians 2 reminds us that this same God took on flesh and dwelt among us (John 1). He did this for an ultimate purpose which was to experience death on our behalf and rise again in triumph over the grave (Philippians 2).

The ark is a marvelous demonstration of God's transcendence and imminence. His glory filled the tabernacle and His instructions required that those who would enter its most holy places were cleansed because of the majestic holiness and power of God. There was a weightiness to the tabernacle that was created by the very presence of God. Nevertheless, the tabernacle was God's design to dwell amongst His people. His presence filled that place, and it stayed, even amid sinful people. In the ark, we see the holiness of God (in the tablets of the law) and the grace of God (the mercy seat). We are reminded that God is separate from us (holy) and dwells amongst us. He is both exalted above the heavens and in the valley with His people (Psalm 23).

July 30

Exodus 26:34

Archaeologists and biblical commentators have arrived at similar conclusions regarding the appearance and significance of the ark. Based on numerous parallels between Israel and surrounding pagan nations at the same time in antiquity, it becomes clear that God's intention was to design a piece that would mimic (and upstage) the thrones of kings and rulers in the area.

What interests me today is the constituent parts of the ark. The ark was designed to hold the very covenant tablets (or the law of God known as the Ten Commandments). This meant that God was depicted as sitting on top of His throne of truth. God's rule and reign is grounded in His character and attributes and there is no greater expression of His righteousness and holiness in the world than His law. The problem, of course, was that the citizens of God's Kingdom could not keep His law and this begs a question... how could a holy God rule an unholy people? The design of the ark gives us a very important clue.

Not only does God throne contain His law, it also was designed so that God would reign on a "mercy seat". In fact, the cover of the ark was called an "atonement" cover. Essentially, the priests would come before God on behalf of the people of God to acknowledge their transgression of His law and, in God's mercy, they would sprinkle the blood of an atoning sacrifice on the seat of the ark which God would accept as payment for their sins.

There are few greater pictures of the Gospel in Scripture than this precious ark. Jesus came in order to fulfill the law (satisfying God's righteous demands upon His life) and then lay His life down in order to atone for our rebellion (pictured in the mercy seat and atonement cover). This means that Christ is the answer to the burning question of how a holy God can dwell with unholy sinners.

The brilliance of this arrangement is manifest. God is both just (He requires adherence to His law) and the justifier (He makes a way for us to be counted righteous members of His Kingdom). Who could have devised such a plan? Only God! Who could carry out such a plan? Only God in the flesh! Who is gracious and merciful enough to lay down their lives for sinful, wicked servants? Jesus Christ alone!

As such the ark reminds us that God is both holy and gracious. He is clear in His expectations and just as clear in His offer of grace. What a mighty, marvelous and kind God we serve!

July 1

Leviticus 24:5-9 & John 6:53-58

Today we will move to the next piece that was constructed by Bezalel and that is the table of the presence. This table was located directly outside of the holy of holies, and it was designed as a place for loaves of bread to be placed regularly. God instructed His priests to place 12 loaves of bread on this table. The significance of the number 12 is apparent to Bible students as it coincides with the 12 tribes of Israel.

It seems fair to say that this was meant to denote and remind the people that their God was faithful to provide for all of their sustenance. Obviously, this was not mere conjecture to the people. In fact, during this era of their history, they were reliant upon the Lord's miraculous provision of manna for their daily living. God was faithful and kind to them, even providing for their basic needs after their rampant idolatry in constructing the Golden Calf.

The people of Israel could think upon this table and make the connection that God had provided but we can now look back upon this piece of furniture and see a deeper, more lasting, provision in Christ. Jesus came proclaiming that He in fact was the bread of life. In saying such a thing, He was alluding to the same fundamental truth that the table represented... men need provision.

Whereas the physical bread of the presence was indicative of this need, Christ came to provide for a hunger (and a thirst) that was far more fundamental than mere hunger. Jesus came to meet our greatest need, which is reconciliation with God. His body was broken so that ours did not have to be, and, in this great sacrifice, He provided, once and for all, for our hungry souls.

When Christ was preparing to die, He instituted a new ordinance that combined this idea of His sacrifice with bread in a more spiritually rich and enduring way. You'll recall that Christ stood before the disciples and took a piece of bread saying, "this is my body...". What does this mean? It means that Jesus was going to be broken and crushed like that bread is broken and crushed in our mouths. He was going to be chewed up by the wrath of God, but He was broken so that we could be made whole.

God showed the Israelites that He would provide. He gave them bread to eat but He was intent on providing much more than wheat and yeast. In time, the Lord would provide the very bread of life. He would lay down His life so that we would never hunger for righteousness again.

July 2

John 6:53-58

This is a passage of Scripture that haunted me as a younger man. I recall hearing this text read and wondering to myself “what in the world is Christ saying here?” It all sounds so... crazy. As I’ve grown, I have come to realize that this little phrase has great significance in light of what we discussed yesterday. There is a real sense in which Jesus is alluding here to the significance of the Lord’s Supper as a means of declaring total reliance upon Him.

Nevertheless, I think there may be another point to the passage and that is communion. I believe that R.C. Sproul summarizes this well saying, “Dining with someone in the ancient Near East was a sign of fellowship and peace, so the priests’ eating of the bread of the Presence in God’s house signified the Lord was at peace with His people. Yet this was a limited peace under the old covenant because only the priests, not every Israelite, enjoyed the privilege of dining with the Creator. Under the new covenant, however, Christ has affected an eternal peace between the Father and His people, so we may dine in His presence, especially when we partake of the sacrament of the Lord’s Supper at His table.”

Do you see the significance? Jesus came so that we could have real, lasting fellowship with Him. In fact, the entire redemptive story is moving towards a cosmic “marriage supper” whereby we “the bride of Christ” will feast with the groom, Jesus. The very thing that was unthinkable to Old Covenant believers, communing in God’s presence, has now been made possible in Christ.

Whereas the table of the presence was outside of the holy of holies, now Jesus has made it possible for the fellowship of the table to be brought to each of us. Dear friend, you have such a privilege afforded to you to commune with Christ. You are offered the invitation to be in the presence of our holy God... what a privilege indeed! Today, would you take the time to commune with Him? Will you make this precious relationship a priority in your life brother and sister? He has died so that you might live eternally but He also died so that you could dwell with Him right now.

July 3

Exodus 25:31-36

We move today to the lampstand. I have found the lampstand to be one of the more interesting pieces in the tabernacle because of its unique design. Our passage for today describes the lampstand's appearance saying that it should be constructed to depict "blossoms". What does this mean? The blossoms are meant to appear as almond blossoms, a symbol of life and provision for food.

Why would God desire to have such an image on His lampstand? The best answer I can surmise is that this was meant to point back to the source of life in God's first dwelling with men... the Garden of Eden. If you recall, in the middle of that garden stood the tree of life. The tree was intended to represent and remind man of the gift and beauty of life in the presence of the Lord. Now, years later, God is designing His tabernacle with an illustration of life in the middle of His presence yet again.

God is the source of life. In fact, without Him, there is no life at all! He gives breath to all who are physically living and He gives spiritual life to all who believe. In Him, we LIVE and move and have our being. Without Him, there is nothing but darkness and so it is appropriate and biblically significant to say that life is grounded in Him.

As the Israelite priests walked into the holy of holies, they were forced to walk past the lampstand which was there to remind them that God's very dwelling among them was critical to their survival and blessing. The same is true in our moment in history as well.

God's presence is still critical to our lives. If He were to abandon us, there would be no hope of a future. This fact should remind us that we have every reason in the world to worship a God who is faithful and true. We are blessed beyond measure to be with God, and we are further blessed to know that God has promised never to leave us or abandon us. What security is found in these words! What joy we have from the light that is shed on God's nature.

Do you have life today? If so, it is only because you have been ushered into God's family and, therefore, into His presence. Without Him there is no life but with Him we will live for all eternity. In the days that followed, One came into the world proclaiming that He was the light of the world. His light brought life and, therefore, He was greater than any lampstand could ever be. When the light of the world came, the lampstand ceased to be central to our worship precisely because we didn't need a piece of furniture once God decided to dwell among us!

July 4

Psalm 141:2

We move to the final piece of furniture listed in Exodus 37 which is the altar of incense. The purpose of the altar was to offer incense to the Lord, and this incense is meant to be symbolic of man's prayers. Biblically speaking, incense and prayer are often connected. This is the case in our passage for today. The Bible teaches us that the prayers of God's people are a pleasing aroma to the Lord. He loves it when we pray to Him which is part of the reason why the Scriptures exhort true believers to "pray without ceasing".

What I want to do today is answer the question some might be asking. Specifically, why do our prayers please the Lord? I can think of many answers but let me give you two. First, they are pleasing to God because they depict a sense of reliance. I once heard a pastor say (I forget who it was so I cannot give proper credit) that prayerlessness is the greatest indicator of sinful independence in a person's life.

I have found that to be true! I typically only pray about the things that I feel I need help in accomplishing. Unfortunately, many times I don't feel as if I need the Lord's assistance in most things! Conversely, when the man or woman of God prays to the Father, they are crying out for His help which is a great sign of faithful dependence upon the Lord.

Second, prayer is communication between child and father. Here is something I have learned about parenthood... as my kids get older, the fact that they still want to talk to me means increasingly more. I love my daughters and that love pales in comparison to the love the Father has for His own! When we take the time to pray before the Lord, the very act of communicating with Him is a pleasing declaration of our desire to commune with the One who loves us so much.

Prayer was central to the design of the Tabernacle because prayer is foundational in the lives of all of God's children. There can be no true worship without communion and there can be no communion without prayer. How often do you pray? Is your life constantly offering a pleasing aroma to the Lord? The Lord Jesus died so that you could be adopted into God's family. He made it possible for us to call God "Father" and part of this blessing is realized when we seek His face as His children. Don't miss out on the opportunity to please God by seeking Him often. He loves so much that it is a pleasing aroma to Him!

July 5

Exodus 30:6

I want to begin with a bit of a confession... I struggle sometimes when my prayers don't seem like they are being answered. Do you have this issue? Are there things in your life that you have prayed about for years and yet there doesn't seem to be a resolution? If so, then you know my frustration! We live in a push-button society. I have been conditioned to want what I want, when I want it! That being so, the discipline of prayer is very challenging for me at times.

Believe it or not, I do think there is a connection between my frustration and the configuration of the tabernacle. It seems that the altar was placed in a very strategic spot, such that the smoke that arose from the burning of the incense would make its way into the very holy of holies (where God's presence most tangibly dwelt), disappearing as it went. Derek Thomas writes about this layout saying, "Being set outside the veil, the priest would see the smoke penetrate the curtain into the Holy of Holies even though He could not see past the curtain (v. 6). And is this not like prayer in that we know our prayers enter heaven itself even though we cannot yet see into that place?"

The priests had to offer the incense in faith that God would accept it and be honored by it and that their actions would be seen. In the same way, we offer our prayers and they seemingly "disappear" but that does not mean they cease to be effective! The essence of faith is in trusting for things unseen. It's in the conviction that God is doing far more than we can ask or think (Ephesians 3:21). It is in faith that we pray for God's blessing and intervention and guidance and then we trust that the smoke of that beautiful incense wafts into His presence and that He is pleased to do with it whatever He desires.

Here's what I've learned about that process... often times my perspective is skewed by immediacy and a finite mind. As I look back over my life, I realize that God was often answering my prayers in a way that I couldn't even fathom in the moment. Sometimes, my frustration with God was really just ignorance! He was doing exceedingly and abundantly more than I could have ever thought or imagined. My prayers were being heard and accepted and acted upon, but I didn't know it in the moment.

Folks, the priest's job was to offer the incense in faith that God received it and would bless it. Our job is to offer prayers in the same conviction. Don't allow the disappearance of the prayer from your view cause you to think that your actions don't matter. Trust Him, in His timing He will answer and when He does you will have every reason to worship Him for His wise and patient response.