

What The Tabernacle Tells Us About God

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Date: 13 October 2024

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[0 : 00] This morning we are back in Exodus chapter 25 to 27.

Two weeks ago we opened this portion, a rather large section, and we read all of it, which took significant time, and then we focused on the question, what are we willing to do to meet God?

Are we willing to go to all this trouble, all these tabernacle details and requirements, things that we have to do to set up this place for God to dwell with us? Are we willing to go to all this trouble, or does God demand too much of us?

And after thinking about that, we considered what God was willing to do to be with us, willing to come down from the mountain, willing to come down in human form, rubbing shoulders with sinners, and going to the cross on our behalf, tearing the curtain in His flesh to make a way for us to approach and know God.

Last time we also saw how the tabernacle represented the Garden of Eden, and the heaven and earth coming together, how Hebrews talks about this tabernacle being a copy in shadow of something more real and true in heaven, something that Moses was shown up the mountain, which is why he had to be so specific in following the instruction, because he was making a copy of something else.

[1 : 40] Yet even with the copy, we saw how impossible it was to approach God because of our sins. How much more impossible would it be for any of us to approach God in the real heavenly tabernacle?

Yet that is precisely what Jesus has done on our behalf because of who He is. And so that's what we focused on in part one. We spread this section over two parts.

Today is part two, and we're not going to read the whole section again. Let me just read a little bit from the start of chapter 25. Verse 8, to talk about the Ark of the Covenant and the table for bread, the golden lampstand, and he talks about the tabernacle itself, the bronze altar, the court of the tabernacle, thousands of details of cubits and ephods and all these things.

And we tried to look at some of that last time. I wonder if you've been reading that, if you've been thinking about that. But what I want to do this morning is I'd like to simply share some observations from reading through these chapters.

Perhaps you've made similar observations as the ones that I'm going to go through. Maybe you've made different observations. In fact, I would encourage you to go and read through these chapters and just make some observations.

[3 : 37] I'm sure you will make some observations of your own. And that's the beauty of reading the Bible. The Bible is God's living Word. And He speaks to us through it, any one of us.

I would encourage you to find ways to read the Bible and find ways also to share it with others. Whatever you observe what is true about God, just share a simple truth about God with someone else.

Doesn't it be complicated? Anyone can learn something true about God. And anyone can share it with someone else. It might just be saying, Hey, did you know that God loves to care for His people or to dwell with or whatever it is?

Something that God's been speaking to you. One of the wonderful things throughout the summer, when folks were hosting the prayer meeting in their house, nobody asked.

I remember Jeanette and John. Nobody asked you to prepare a word, but you just brought something from your own Bible reading and shared it. If you do this, if you just learn to just observe something about God, something true, and then maybe share it with a friend, share it with another Christian, it will grow your faith and someone else's faith.

[4 : 57] And so this morning, I don't normally do this, but I've got ten points. They're short points. Ten observations about what God cares about.

Okay? And so if you want to put up the first slide, if that's okay. So the aim of today is what the tabernacle tells us about God. God cares about the heart.

And so the first observation is this. God cares about the heart. You'll see these coming up on the screen.

Everything the tabernacle will be made with will be contributed by the people. Notice that 25 verse 2. Speak to the people of Israel that they take for me a contribution from every man whose heart moves him.

You see that? Now remember this. The earth is the Lord's and everything in it, says Psalm 24. And Acts 17 says that God gives to mankind life and breath and everything.

[6 : 11] So God could easily demand everything from these people. Also, where did they get all this gold from and all this material from? Well, back in Genesis 15, God told Abraham that they would leave Egypt with great possessions.

And in Exodus 11, we see that fulfilled. That they went out and all these Egyptians gave them all this gold and material and gems, loads of things.

And so God was the one who already provided them with all this gold and material that they would need for the tabernacle. So God could easily have demanded these things from them.

However, God cares about our heart. Even although these people, think about this, they used what God gave them to make a golden calf and break the covenant that God just made with them.

Yet God still wanted their heart more than their gold. While God was telling Moses up the mountain that he wants the people's hearts to provide this gold, the people were down at the bottom of the mountain, using what God had given them to make a golden calf.

[7 : 29] And notice how Aaron, who would become the high priest, Aaron didn't ask those who feel moved to give. He demanded from everyone their gold to make the golden calf.

Yet God asks only from those whose hearts moves them. Because God is more interested in our hearts than our money. You see, perhaps repentance in these people moved them to freely give.

God's more interested in your posture than your purse. Sin doesn't lead people to generosity, but grace and mercy does.

Consider the heart of God, who did not spare his own son, but gave him up freely for us. Of all the things that we are doing this morning, God is looking to see who has given their heart to God.

You know, we could do anything outwardly. God is more interested in our heart. So, are we giving our heart to God this morning? Second observation.

[8 : 37] God is really interested in the details. We mustn't think of God as being pedantic with all these details. Rather, our God has infinite care and attention to detail.

And even this morning, He is presently attentive to every detail imaginable and unfathomable. Whether you're here in this building or whether you're at home, God is presently with you and attentive to every detail of your life, like you wouldn't believe it.

Consider all the little details of your life that brought you to this very point this morning. And look back and see how God was in control of it all. Attentive, present in it all.

Little things that are like little coincidences. Or, look at every field of scientific study, and you will find that God has created everything in this world with incredible attention to detail.

The closer you look, it's not like one of these impressionist paintings where you get close and it's just random brushstrokes. You need to be at a distance. The closer you get to the things that God has made, you see incredible detail.

[9 : 49] It's like back in Darwin's day, that people had no idea how complex a human cell was. A human cell is like a city. With these electronic microscopes, you look at the cell and it's like a city.

God is interested in details. The closer you look, the more brilliant it gets. It's only been in our lifetime that we've seen the complexity of your human cell.

And yet there will always be details of this world that are beyond our comprehension. God not only cares about the details of creation, He cares about the details of the day-to-day.

For instance, it's in the book of Job that we see not only has God laid the foundations of the earth, but He is there to see the birth of the does. Isn't that interesting?

He gives the raven its prey when its young ones cry out for food and for help. He gives to the horse its might and clothes its neck with a mane.

[10 : 52] God is interested in the day-to-day. Nothing in your life is too small for God to care about. Nothing. He cares about all the details about you presently, attentively, infinitely, and unfathomably.

Matthew 10 says, Not a sparrow falls to the ground without your father knowing, but even the hairs on your head are numbered by him. Fear not, you are worth more than a sparrow.

Or 1 Peter 5 says, Cast all your anxieties on God. Why? Because He cares for you. So these tabernacle details show us that God cares more about the details of our lives than we realize.

What a wonderful, encouraging thing that is. Thirdly, God cares about order and design. God's design in anything is not random.

There's a very deliberate order to everything that God designs. The tabernacle is no exception. You could say the same about many things in creation. How God has designed human beings, us.

[12 : 01] How God has designed our relationships, marriage, parenthood, children. How God has designed the cosmos is very ordered.

Even as Paul says in Acts 17, if you ever thought to yourself, Why am I born where I was born, and why do I live where I live? Acts 17, Paul says that where and when we are born was appointed by God so that we might feel and find our way towards God.

The order and design that God has made everything with is supposed to teach us about God and lead us towards God. And if you are able, have a little read. If you're able and you've got some spare time this afternoon or through the week, have a little delve into the fine-tuning argument and you will be utterly amazed and astounded and drawn into praise at how finely tuned and designed and ordered this world and creation is.

All of this order and design doesn't come from nothing and from chaos. That's what evolution and atheism suggests. But consider this very building that we're sitting in.

Look at it. Look at the things that have been designed. Nothing in the history of humankind or the history of this world has, nothing like this has come about through chaos.

[13 : 28] and chance. Nothing. Nothing like this. And yet this does not hold a candle to the design and order of your very body that you drag about with you every day.

We know this building was designed. I mean, how much more are we designed? How much more this earth that God has put us in? Now, if you have a house, then you know that order takes more effort than chaos because every day you attend to it.

So such order in our world points to God. And needless to say, the order of things in the tabernacle is meant to teach us about who God is and how we approach Him and ultimately points toward Christ.

And we can be encouraged that God cares about order because it means that He is deliberate. Isn't that a wonderful encouragement? God is deliberate. He's not accidental in anything He does.

He's deliberate. He's considerate. He's careful. And He's not chaotic. How hopeful it is that God is working to restore order, both in the world and in us.

[14 : 41] Fourthly, God cares about obedience. All these instructions that God gave Moses for the people, He didn't give us all of...

And you could say this about the entire Bible. God didn't give us all these details simply for us to give it a go. What would it say if God were simply to give us suggested ways to approach Him?

But as long as we try something, God loves a trier. No, that's not true. Even if we were to try and approach God in an orderly, even a sincere way, it wouldn't be appropriate if it were a different way than God has designed.

For instance, the cross is not just about one approach to God that we might give it a go, but there are other ways. Would Jesus have given His sinless and perfect life for sinners if there were another way?

He would not. There are many things in life that God doesn't give us specific instructions about. Many things that require wisdom and principle require a degree of freedom and grace.

[15 : 58] However, we might think, and I don't know if you've ever thought this, I've thought about this. I've thought it would be easier to do God's will if He just gave us really clear instructions. But in reality, when He does, we don't always obey.

I remember one day I was working in an office in Scottish Power, and I felt really confident going to work. I was like, God, what do you want me to do today?

And I had this sense that God was just wanting me to tell people about Him. And it was probably the only day that I didn't say a word about God the entire day.

And I get this feeling that if God was so clear, then I would be able to do His will. It's not so. We're not always so quick to obey. But when God does give clear instructions, He doesn't give us them just to give it a go.

God wants us to be faithful and obedient to the things that He's given us. What we should realize is that when God does give us clear instructions, He wants us to follow them faithfully and not arbitrarily.

[17 : 10] Why has God been so specific about these instructions? It's because they matter. When God tells us to do something, it's because it matters. Whether or not we completely understand how or why it matters is a different issue.

It's like when the prophet Samuel said to obey is better than sacrifice. Consider other things that God has designed, such as marriage, or gender, or the order of man being above the creatures.

Yeah, man being more important than animals. We might not fully grasp why God designed things these ways, but He has, and they matter. Just because we don't fully get it doesn't mean we can change it or try it a different way and suddenly expect God to accept it simply because we are sincere.

God sees and understands more than we ever will, both in terms of why He made things the way He did and also the relationship between things, the relationship between everything.

God knows what is good for us and what is not. If God gives us clear instructions, it's not for His sake, it's for our sake. There's a good reason, and so God cares about our obedience, not merely for His own sake, but for our sake and for our good.

[18 : 28] And if you've ever spent time giving advice to someone else who's leading themselves down a path that's going to destroy them, you will completely understand that it's for our own good to obey the instructions we're given.

Fifthly, these are just observations you might have, different ones. God cares about holiness and purity. The tabernacle teaches these people that they cannot be casual with God.

Their sin is a huge barrier to drawing near to God. And they were already terrified at hearing God speak out of the mountain. They were afraid they were going to die if He spoke anymore.

And as Moses said in chapter 20, verse 20, God's not trying to kill them, but He will test them so that they would rightly fear Him and they might not sin.

This is a very good thing. It's a very good thing to have a healthy fear both of God and of sin so that we wouldn't sin because sin is the thing that is trying to kill us.

[19 : 30] It's neither good for people to be casual with God, neither is it good for people to be casual with sin. Just try and be casual with a lion and you will understand both those things.

Yeah? We see this in the degradation of society. There's no longer any dignity, respect, or integrity. I see it all the time in schools when a pupil becomes too casual with teachers, losing all sense of respect, losing any interest in learning.

They're not setting themselves up for life. They're harming themselves. When a culture becomes casual about sin, it never ends well for that culture.

It never ends well. And so God is safeguarding their lives with all these layers and instructions, and He's shown us that His holiness is on a different level.

He wants us to see that in God there is no darkness at all, that there is no impurity in God at all. There is nothing on earth like God.

[20 : 35] That's why there's no image or statue above the mercy seat, because you cannot represent God with anything in the world that is made by us. God is holy.

As Hebrews 12 says, without holiness, no one will see the Lord. So, without holiness, no one will see the Lord.

Do any of us this morning feel like we're passing that test? We're all ruled out, folks. We're all scuppered. However, the next chapter has some good news.

Hebrews 13 says, just as the high priest brings the blood from outside of the camp into the holy place as a sacrifice for sin, so, also, Jesus suffered outside the city gate to make the people holy through His own blood.

What good news. We're never going to reach that holiness on our own, but Jesus made a way so that we can see God, because without holiness, no one will see the Lord. We are made holy through the blood of Christ, and so through Jesus, we have the holiness required both to see the Lord and to dwell with Him.

[21 : 47] Wonderful good news. Number six, God cares about our approach. As I was thinking about this, trying to think of observations, I thought to myself, is this just the same as the last point about holiness and purity?

God cares about our approach, but I don't think it's the same. I think it's slightly different, because I considered the angels. Even angels who are holy and have no sin, nevertheless cannot be casual and stroll up to God.

Even the angels, even the cherubim, and the seraphim. There's a famous scene, again, I'm going to talk about the Lord of the Rings. There's a famous scene when they hold a council about what they're going to do with this ring, right?

And they're like, we could use this ring against evil. No, you can't use this ring against evil. Evil will win. They agree the only option is to take it to Mount Doom, to Mordor, to destroy the ring.

They're like, that's what we're going to do. We're going to take this ring to Mount Doom and destroy it. And then Boromir pipes up, and he says this. It's a great, famous line.

[23 : 00] He says, one does not simply walk into Mordor. And then he goes off rhyming stuff about how you can't just walk into Mordor. The point is, how casual we are, and how easily we underestimate what it takes to approach something so great.

The cherubim guard the most holy place where God dwells, where the full strength of his being is manifest, where the seraphim, who are called the burning ones, they've got six wings, and only two of them are used to fly, and the other two are used to cover their face and their feet, because they're so near the burning brilliance of the glory of God.

One does not simply walk up to God. Even Moses and Joshua had to take off their shoes. Even Jesus' closest friend, John, fell down as though dead when he saw Jesus glorified.

God cares about our approach. Firstly, that he is not like us. We need to remember he is not like us. He's not like anything in creation. He is the infinite, eternal, almighty God of all things.

Secondly, that no one comes to the Father except through the Son. Approaching God, apart from the grace and righteousness of Christ, will destroy us.

[24 : 27] We can't approach God without that. No one comes to the Father except through the Son. And thirdly, being casual often is about being proud.

God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble. And it's like the two men who are praying. One is self-righteous. God, I thank you. I'm not like that person. And then the other man is a humble sinner and he says, Lord, have mercy on me.

I'm a sinner. It's only by God's grace through Jesus that we have any way of approaching God. Jesus said, I am the way.

Number seven, God wants us to walk in light. Think about the golden lampstand. That's what the menorah is supposed to represent, the presence of God which gives light and life.

John 1, 4 says of Jesus that in him was life and the life was the light of men. Luke 1, Zechariah said, because of the tender mercy of our God whereby the sunrise shall visit us from on high to give light to those who sit in darkness in the shadow of death and to guide our feet into the way of peace.

[25 : 43] That's what God gives us light for. Jesus and Simeon, when Jesus is a baby in the temple, Simeon says, my eyes have seen your salvation, a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people, Israel.

And Jesus himself said in John 8, I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness but will have the light of life.

Jesus is the light in life that the menorah symbolizes. He is the light that guides us out of darkness just as God brought Israel through the desert in a pillar of fire.

He is the light that exposes darkness and he is the light of life that brings us out of death. As long as we follow Jesus, as long as we are in his light, then we will live and see and walk in freedom.

And so, that's what the menorah symbolizes, that God wants us to walk in light. It is for our good. Number eight, God wants heaven and earth to overlap.

[26 : 50] Many people struggle with the idea of an unseen realm. others feel like heaven and earth could not be more separate, unconnected, that heaven and earth couldn't possibly be more different.

Yet Hebrews talks about things on earth as if they're copies of the true things in heaven, like things on earth are designed to reflect and reveal a greater reality. Since the beginning, heaven and earth were meant to overlap, firstly in the Garden of Eden, then in the Tabernacle, then in the Temple, then with Jesus himself.

He was walking about as heaven on earth. That little prayer, your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven, happened every single moment of every single day that Jesus was on the earth.

In and through him, heaven was coming to earth. Many of the details of the Tabernacle reflect this, like the heavenly blue and the earthly red overlapping to make purple, or the lampstand like a tree that gives light, or the continual reference to the pattern that Moses was shown in the mountain.

God is not trying to keep earth and its inhabitants at a distance. God's not trying to keep us at a distance. He's not trying to keep heaven and earth separate. He wants his space and our space to overlap that we might dwell together.

[28 : 16] And Jesus is right at the heart of it all, right at the center. Number nine, God actually wants to dwell with us.

Again, in verse 8 of 25, let them make me a sanctuary that I may dwell in their midst. All of these things are in relation to God's desire to dwell with us.

In many ways, humans have given God every reason to want to stay away. Even if he were not a holy God, why would any God want to dwell with a stubborn, stiff-necked, selfish, and sinful people like humanity?

Some religions promote a completely transcendent God who keeps aloof. Some views promote an impersonal God, just a kind of energy that created the world and set things in motion, but is impersonal.

Another view about God is that he is only interested in us behaving. And he only involves himself in our lives to get us to behave. But all of these views are not biblical.

[29 : 30] God actually wants to dwell with us. And as we look at the attributes of God we explored in many scriptures, that God has absolutely no need for us, nor do we add anything to him, yet in spite of that God nevertheless desires a personal relationship with us.

Because that is who God is. He's a personal God. Just as God designed the tabernacle to dwell with us, it shows that God's original design for creation was that he would dwell with us.

And not that he should just dwell with us, but that we should have a relationship with our creator, since he is by nature a personal and relational God.

Triune, the Trinity. He has designed us in such a way to dwell with him because he is our light and our life. In him we find our joy and satisfaction.

Consider that the Son of God and the King of Heaven came down and took on human form to dwell with us. And where is he now? Where is Jesus now?

[30 : 42] John 14 says that he has gone not away from us to be away from us, but to prepare a place that we might be where he is.

Is that not an incredible thing? Do you feel worthy of that? I do not. But he wants that. He's done everything necessary to make that happen. Do you not marvel when you think would anyone want to spend time with you as a person?

How could someone live with you as a person? You ever thought that? I think about that. How could Jen live with me? If no one else ever from this moment on ever wanted your company, if no one else ever wanted to spend time with you, Jesus, sinless and perfect as he is, the Son of God is preparing a place that you might be where he is.

He's inviting you to his home. Isn't that incredible? Jesus, the Son of God, is inviting you into his home. What a thought. Lastly, again, please read through this and find other observations, share them with people, but I thought it would be best to end on this, that God wants to have fellowship with us.

Think about the table and the tabernacle for bread, the bread of the presence. He's not only inviting you to his home, he is inviting you to his table. What a thought.

[32 : 20] Consider the table and the tabernacle for the bread of the presence and then consider what Jesus has done to make for you a place at the table. And we're going to approach this table in a wee moment.

Jesus has made a place for you at his table because he wants to have fellowship with you. Think about that, the creator of heaven and earth wants to sit down and share a meal with you.

And I left this last because we're about to approach the table and I want you to know how much the Lord wants you at his table. But in order to get there, in order to get to the table, we need to go through the nine points before.

We can't be casual with God. He wants our heart. He cares about the details. It's with order and design. He cares about our obedience and holiness matters.

Our approach can only be through the blood of Jesus and in humility. We are not to come to the table as those in the dark but those who walk in light. And as we come to the table, let us see heaven and earth overlap.

[33 : 29] Let us see what God has done in order to dwell with us. And let us see what a great invitation it is that we have to sit at the table of the Lord with him.

Let me pray. Amen. Heavenly Father, what wonderful things we can learn from your word.

And yet, there is more. Please help each one of us to learn something true and good about you. Let each one of us know how much you care for us and what great effort you have went to to dwell with us and to invite us not just to your home but to your table, that you are a God who wants to have fellowship with us and how all of that comes through your son Jesus.

Lord, please would we be super encouraged by that this morning and as we share bread and the cup this morning, Lord, please give us a sense of your invitation.

Give us a sense of your presence. Give us a sense of your love and care. Give us a sense of what a wonderful thing it is to be with you and how that points us to the future when we actually will see you and share fellowship with you in glory.

[35 : 01] Lord, we thank you so much in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.
Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.