

For God to Dwell with Us... What would you be willing to do?

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[0 : 0 0] Well, my thanks to Murray and to Colin and to Ethel for giving us the readings from chapter 25 to chapter 27. As I said, we're going to consider these over two Sundays, so the next Sunday, not next week, but two weeks' time, we're going to revisit this, and we're not going to read it all again then. And today, we're going to consider some of it, and the next Sunday, we're going to consider some other stuff. And it's not like we're going to just consider the cubits and ephods today and then the other stuff next time. Both today and the next time, we're going to have an overview look at what this is all about. And so, let me just point us to chapter 25, verse 8.

Really, at the beginning of this, God said to Moses, Let them make me a sanctuary, that I may dwell in their midst. This is the purpose and intention of this, and it's quite an incredible thing. Colin was hinting at how incredible it is even today. So, have you ever heard of the term glamping? Has anyone ever been glamping? We've all been slumming it in ordinary tents. Glamorous camping.

When we consider all these details that we've just been through in the tabernacle in Exodus with all its gold and gems and royal curtains, I was wondering to myself, reading all that, do we think that God is like one of these high-maintenance celebrities?

You know the ones. They have these demands of a green room when they visit a place. They want to come to your event. Well, you need to have puppies in the green room, or you need to have M&Ms; minus one particular color, or you need to have very specific scented candles and the temperature to be just right. You can look at lists of these incredibly weird demands that celebrities have.

Is this what God is like? Is this just another demanding celebrity? I was reading about some of these demands of celebrities and all the things that they require if you want to have them come to your event. And it was like, let's say it was like the 30 of the most extreme demanding celebrities.

[2 : 5 2] And one of these demands stood out to me. It was a Christian actor. And the demand that this article found extreme was that he would refuse to kiss anyone but his wife on screen. And so, they have to CGI on another face. And I thought to myself, one of these things is not like the others.

Because for him, this so-called demand was actually more about covenant faithfulness to his wife, compared with all these other demands of other celebrities, which are more about self-gratification and self-grandiosity. Some of these celebrities have become so detached from reality and from the common people as though they are not flawed and human like the rest of us. Yet, one of the things that we learn about the tabernacle is that even the high priest had to offer sacrifices for himself. No one was exempt from needing their sins covered. But we've just sat this morning and we've heard long readings about many details, some of them foreign to us. And it makes us think, is this just a bit too much?

Does God demand too much before he will come to town? I wonder if the extent of all these details of the tabernacle make people think, well, if this is what God requires just to be with us, then he can forget it. We'd be better off with the golden calf. More pointedly, consider all these details and ask yourself this question. Is it really worth the effort to be with God? It's a question we need to ask ourselves this morning. We go through reams of details and think, is it worth it to you to be with God?

All that effort. Clearly, plenty of people think that seeing and meeting celebrities are worth the effort of all these ridiculous demands and the incredible cost of VIP tickets and such.

Hundreds of thousands of people worship these celebrities. They think it's worth it. No matter how ridiculous the demands are, it's worth it to see this celebrity. Now, one of these things is not like the other. Because in Exodus, the person we're talking about is God. This is God, not an actor, not a singer, not a celebrity who is every bit as flawed as us. This is the very being who created the universe. This is the one who laid the foundation of the earth and set the limit of the sea. The one who binds the chains of the Pleiades and commands the wind and the waves is coming to town. One of these things is not like the others. Yet in Exodus, he's actually considering to come down and dwell with people. Not only is he infinitely different from a celebrity, but he's infinitely different from every other God of every other nation. And so, Moses, later on, he'll say in Deuteronomy chapter 4, he will say, for what great nation? What great nation is there that has a God so near to it as Yahweh, our God is to us whenever we call upon Him? What other nation has a God so near?

[6 : 37] This is Moses who was in Egypt. He was aware of the worship of other gods. He was in the greatest empire of its time. Yet despite their gods and in spite of their idols, he knew that they had nothing compared with Yahweh being present with Israel, a living God. A living God. I think it is perhaps one of the most revealing things of our day, what people are willing to do to meet a celebrity, their favorite sinful celebrity, yet what they are not willing to do to know their mighty creator.

It's one of the most revealing things of our day. People go to extraordinary lengths to meet their favorite sinful celebrity, yet the little bit that God asked them to draw near. No, I'm not willing to do that. How revealing is that of our culture? You know, when I became a Christian, I was 20 years old.

I was an atheist, and I really didn't believe there was anything more than this. Nothing more than matter. But God cracked open my heart just enough to realize the possibility that He is real and that He exists. And as unbelievable as it sounds, He was so close, and there was a way to know Him. You see, God had plenty of reason to condemn me, plenty of reason to refuse to come anywhere near me, because I had denied God, and I had mocked His Son who went to the cross because of our sins. He had every reason yet to make Himself known, to reveal Himself, to come to town just to say, ha, I'm real, and you are done.

Every reason to do that. And yet instead, He wanted me to know Him and to see His utter goodness and grace through Jesus Christ His Son. What an unbelievable thing. You see, God doesn't need our worship. He doesn't need anything from us. He doesn't need our love, our worship, our obedience.

It's not going to add anything to God. It's not for Him. It's for us. We were made for it, to worship God. We were made to love God. Made not just to be loved, but to love. You see what it's like if somebody goes an extended length of time without loving someone or something, they turn into a bitter human being.

[9 : 10] God doesn't need it. It's not going to do anything to Him. It's for us. We need it. We need the tabernacle. We need all these details. We need a way to approach God. And yet, He's the first one to approach us. All these requirements for God to come down from the mountain and dwell among the people.

Sin has so skewed our understanding of things that we are so quick to jump to the wrong conclusions. You see, we can read all these details. We can see all these things, and we can think to ourselves, what on earth is the deal with all these details? And we miss the utterly astounding thing that God was planning to do, that God was planning to come down and dwell with the people.

Not some celebrity, the creator of all things, the maker of the heavens and the earth, the one who dwells in an unapproachable light, the ancient of days we're talking about, the alpha and omega, eternal and infinite, almighty and self-existing, the source and sustainer of all that is, was planning to come down and dwell with His people. And yet, we can think, what is the deal with this tabernacle? If you really realized that there was a God who made all of this, who breathed out the stars and gave motion to galaxies, wouldn't you want to meet Him? Would you not want to meet God? What requirements would you not do if it was about meeting the creator of the cosmos? You see, the things that humans do for so much less than that. And again, it's not for Him, it's for us. He doesn't need anything. Acts 17:25 says He is not served by human hands as though He needed anything. This is God we are talking about. And so, explaining some of these details,

I'm actually going to wait until the next time we look at this. And at first, I thought it would be helpful to draw out observations of all these details, having gone to the effort to read it all during the service. But I actually think it helps us to consider our own heart towards God, if we have all these details and perhaps not really understand much of it.

perhaps it helps us to press into the question, what are we willing to do to meet God, to be with God, to know God, and to approach God? If such a God were so real and so near, wouldn't you want to meet Him? Wouldn't you want to know Him? Would there be anything you wouldn't do, provided it's not wrong in evil? Because the incredible truth is, what would God not do to dwell with His people?

[12:08] And so, I just want to look at just two things this morning, very quick points, two incredible things that God actually intends to come down and dwell with us, and two, that God is the one who makes a way to dwell with us, and for us to dwell with Him. You see, one of the things that the Israelites were supposed to think of when they see all these details, at this point in this story, is how the tabernacle was symbolic of the Garden of Eden. The candle-giving light, shaped and designed. You know, Murray, I wonder if you thought when you were reading that, it sounds like you're describing a tree with the blossoms and buds and stuff, because it's supposed to symbolize the tree of life.

The table for fellowship and provision, the bread of the presence, the curtains of red, symbolizing earth, and blue, symbolizing heaven, and heaven and earth coming together, and blue and red coming together make what color? Purple. See what we're supposed to understand with the tabernacle? This is the spot on earth where heaven comes to earth. This is the place where heaven and earth overlap, where God walked with humanity. Both the garden and the tabernacle had an eastward-facing entrance, and because of sin, the way was guarded by the cherubim. And it's not chubby little angels we think of, oh, a wee cherub. The cherubim in Hebrew were really intimidating creatures. You did not.

If you saw one of them, you would turn around and book it for the hills. These were terrifyingly intimidating creatures with wings in the face of like an eagle and a bull and a lion, and they were the guards of the most holy place. They upheld the throne of God. They weren't like ordinary angels who delivered messages. No, they always stayed before the presence of God.

They were always guarding the most holy place. As Hezekiah says, O Yahweh, God of Israel, enthroned above the cherubim, you are the God, you alone of all the kingdoms of the earth. And because of sin, blood had to be spilled, and death was the fruit of the sin of Adam and Eve. And they had to be covered with the skin of an animal, just like the tabernacle had to be covered with the skin of an animal. And sacrifice was the only approach. You see the things that's supposed to remind them of Eden and the presence of God on earth. And yet it has to be veiled now because of sin.

There's something about the overlap of heaven and earth and Eden that's meant to reflect in the tabernacle. Yet because of sin, the top of Mount Sinai now looks terrifying and unapproachable, and heaven and earth are now divided in a way that we cannot approach. No one could come near.

[15 : 30] Yet one of the repeated phrases that you get in all of these details is that the tabernacle was to be made according to what Moses is shown on the mountain. What was he shown on the mountain?

Is it just a set of blueprints? You see, it seems like it's more. In Hebrews chapter 5, also references this phrase that Moses was to make everything according to the pattern that was shown him on the mountain. And it says in Hebrews 8 that they serve a sanctuary that's a copy and a shadow of what is in heaven. Why do you think there's all these painstaking details about the tabernacle unless it's actually like a model of something that is real? A scale model of something that is greater, a greater reality in heaven, that the tabernacle was supposed to reflect something true and real and more greater than we can imagine. It seems that Moses was not just shown a set of plans, but he was shown the true thing. The tabernacle is just a copy of. And one of the reasons for the meticulous detail is to show that this is a copy of something that's true and real and greater.

Tabernacle would be this little phrase. You've heard it. Have you ever prayed the Lord's Prayer? I will be done, thy kingdom come on earth as it is in heaven. You see, the tabernacle is on earth as it is in heaven. And it's meant to bring the presence of God, the rule of God, the goodness of God, the blessing of God, the glory of God on earth as it is in heaven right now.

Yet when we need all these provisions and requirements to approach God, even just the copy, all these requirements just to approach the copy, the scale model, how could we ever really approach God in the true things? Again, it's not that God is demanding. It's not for Him. He doesn't need any of it. It's for us. We need a way to approach God. The tabernacle is supposed to teach us about that way. Not only that God is holy, that we are sinful, but that He is making a way for us to draw near. In every point of the tabernacle, He's teaching us something about the way that He is making to draw near to God. We need a sacrifice. We need a table and a candle for light.

We need a tabernacle. We need a door. We need a curtain. We need an atonement. Is God so demanding that He needs all these things to feel comfortable to come down and be with us, like He has to glamp on earth? What if instead, you know, what proof do we have that God is not so demanding, that it's not just about God's comfort? What if instead God came down to earth in the womb of a young Israelite?

[18 : 41] What if instead He appeared as a baby in the midst of a feeding trough in a dirty stable? What if He put on flesh and blood and dwelled among us in such a way that people didn't realize that the holy God was rubbing shoulders with sinners? Is God so demanding? What is He not willing to do to be with us, and what are we willing to do to be with Him? Doesn't He go the farthest to make a way for us? And so, just as John's gospel introduces Jesus as God's tabernacle, that He tabernacled with us, dwelling among us, we see that He's also the bread of the presence. We see that He's the light of the world and the tree of life. We see that He has the way and the truth and the life, and we see that

His flesh is the curtain that was torn for us, the veil between the holy place and the most holy place, veiled in flesh, the Godhead see. Hail the incarnate deity, pleased with us, and flesh to dwell, Jesus our Emmanuel. Not many days to Christmas now. Emmanuel means God with us.

Yet not only was He pleased to dwell with us in flesh, He was pleased to have His own flesh torn, that we might have a way to dwell with Him. He was pleased to go where none of us could go.

As difficult as it is, because only a high priest could only go once per year into the most holy place. How difficult it is for humans to even draw close to the copy. How could we ever go into the true things? But yet it says in Hebrews 9.24, for Christ has entered not into holy places made with hands which are copies of the true things, but Christ has entered into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God on our behalf. If Jesus has risen, where is He? Well, He has gone into the true holy place on our behalf to appear before God like no man has or ever could, because He is the Son of God.

He is the perfect sacrifice. He's the eternal high priest, and He's the King of glory. Is God so demanding that He needs all this to dwell with us? Look at what He has done to make a way for us to know Him and dwell with Him. He had every reason to condemn us, yet Jesus took our guilt and He nailed it to the cross to make a way for us to God. And so I want to finish with this.

[21 : 48] And in the weeks to come, until we return to this, perhaps have a wee read through all these details and try and think about applications, observations, think about whether or not we would be willing to do this to dwell with God. And so I want to end just with these thoughts. Do you want to know God?

What are you willing to do to know Him? Look at how little He asks of us. Is it too much to believe in Christ? Is it too much just to turn away from your sin to know God? Is that too high a price?

Surely there's nothing that we could do that would be too much, considering both what He has done to make this possible? And also what a glorious thing it is to know God. Through Jesus, Eden has been reopened.

Through Jesus, we begin to see heaven on earth. And the reason for all of this is that we were not made to be separate from God. To be separate from God is to die. The story of the Bible tells us that. We were made to know Him and to walk with Him. And if we really want to know where it is for it to be on earth as it is in heaven, it will only be through Jesus, who is God with us. Let me pray.

God, many of these things are hard to understand, but what is not hard to understand is their own heart. Please help us to consider our heart. Please search us and know us and try us.

[23 : 42] Reveal yourself to us and help us to draw near to you. Do we want to know you? God, I want to know you. I want to be with you. Please help us to see the way that you have made, the extent at which you went to dwell with us. Help us to feel close to you through Jesus, our Lord. Amen.