

God Our Centre

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 10 November 2024

Preacher: James Ross

[0 : 0 0] an Israelite society reminding us that God will live among His people, and that's a wonderful privilege, and His people are to center their lives on Him. And so, it makes us ask the question, what is at the center of my life? And to ask that, what drives us, what gives us a sense of hope and purpose and meaning and security is to ask a worship question. We will all find ourselves devoted to someone or something in order to get those great longings met. There are many options. Perhaps even ourselves, we rotate between them. Sometimes we find that family is at the center. Sometimes it's perhaps work or a set of values, or it may just be ourselves. But the tabernacle's lesson is that by God's grace and by God's design, He would be at the center of our lives personally and at the center of our worship corporately. And we're invited to discover the solid joy of life with the God of glory and a life centered on Jesus Christ. So, I was thinking about this.

You know, imagine, so if we fast forward, this is then being told to build it, but every morning when it's constructed, an Israelite wakes up and they go outside their tent. They see the Lord of glory has taken a human address. He is right here with us. Every time they would walk to the tabernacle, every week, every week, they know that they're going to meet with the Lord who has saved them and who has committed to an ongoing relationship with them. And every day as they would go to work, perhaps out to the fields, or perhaps at the end of a day as they would be sitting with their friends, they would see the tent and they would know the Lord who is holy is in this place, in this camp.

How can I live to please Him in my life? Now, think about that for us. We have a greater privilege. We have a greater experience of glory because God Himself, the Son of God, the Lord Jesus, has come to be God with us, to save us for relationship, so that we would gratefully, gladly pursue life with Him, so that we would wake up conscious that God has come to be with us.

That we would come to worship knowing that we come because we're invited by the God who has saved us. And that we would go to work or we'd go to spend time in our relationships thinking, how can I please God, the God of glory today?

So that's our big thought, that God, our Creator and Savior, dwells among His people, so we, in response, are to organize our lives and our worship around Him.

[2 : 5 9] And we'll see this three different ways. First of all, we'll think about the nature of the offering. So we'll think about the offering, then we'll think about the tabernacle.

So within these verses, just a small reading, we see three principles that the people are to put into practice for this offering they are to bring. First, there's willingness, and then there's sacrifice, and then there's obedience. So in the first couple of verses, we recognize this call to have willing hearts. The Lord said to Moses, tell the Israelites to bring me an offering. You are to receive the offering for me from everyone whose heart prompts them to give. Now, if this was all we had to go on for our understanding of who is God and what is He like, we might think, well, that sounds very demanding. This sounds like a very demanding God. And so we need more background. We need the background of who God is and what He's done. We need to know what God's already been doing for and with and in His people in the book of Exodus. So the story begins when they are slaves to Pharaoh, and God hears their cries, and He's going to respond to keep His covenant promise. Part of that response is to call this man Moses and to send him to go to Pharaoh to say, let my people go. And then we discover that God works in power to show that He is greater than Pharaoh and the gods of Egypt with these ten acts of judgment, these ten plagues that are sent, ultimately leading them to deliverance and bringing them safely across the Red Sea. And now they find themselves in the wilderness, and still God is protecting them, and still He is providing for them. He is leading them, and He is feeding them. He's giving them water to drink. He's sending them bread from heaven. And then in chapter 19, they come to Mount Sinai, and God meets with them, and

God establishes covenant relationship with them, gives them His law. And then in chapter 24, they share a meal. The leaders of God's people share a meal in the presence of God. That's the story. This is the God who says, bring me an offering in response to all that I have done to save you and sustain you. This is God, our Creator King, God, our Savior, God, our Covenant Lord, inviting His people to respond to His grace and His mercy and His love. So we need to see that this request is calling the people to respond to the grace that He has shown them. And He says, give willingly. How we give matters, how they gave matters. And we can spot the difference, can't we, between a work that's done willingly and a work that's done grudgingly. We can spot the difference between glad hearts and grumbling hearts. And so can God. And so He says to the people, I want an offering that's voluntary and that's generous and that's sacrificial, because that's how I've loved you. And to do it because of this new relationship with God.

[6 : 26] And so I think it's appropriate for us to ask and be reflecting on that question. How is my worship? How is my heart? Am I enjoying the privilege of the gospel? Life with the God who made me and has sent His Son to save me? Is my worship, is my way of life a response to the truth of God in Christ with me and forming? Is God's love in the gospel, is His kindness to me and salvation causing me to recenter my life on Him? So there's to be willing hearts. And there's also to be, verses 3 to 7, sacrificial giving.

So all of those materials that you can read about there are all high value, high quality materials. And I think that in itself was an invitation to the people to acknowledge, as they saw this being constructed, the God who lives in this glorious tent is infinitely more glorious. His house should reflect His nature. And so there's offerings to be given for the structure, for the fabrics, for the furniture within the tabernacle, and even for the priest's clothing. It's all to be taken care of. And maybe you have the question, well, where would they get this stuff? Now, some of it seems quite ordinary. Some of it seems very high value, luxury items. Some of it, of course, they'd be able to source locally. You know, you could find some acacia trees and chop them down. You could find some olive groves and you could get some oil. But a lot of it is the treasure that they took from Egypt.

And how do they leave Egypt? You know, they were slaves, but they leave with this great treasure because God again had acted for them, opening the hearts of their neighbors to be favorable to those slaves and giving them great treasure as they left. In other words, God has given to them everything that they have comes from God. Same is true for us. Their life of freedom, the reality of daily bread. All our resources, our treasures, and our wealth.

And so, they're invited to give sacrificially as worship, acknowledging God is the one who has given them everything. And again, as we think about that principle, how is our giving? Do we have that mindset that all of our resources come from our God? Whether we're thinking about our money, whether we're thinking about our energy or our skills or our homes, all of it comes from God. How do we steward and use it for God's glory? And is our giving a response to God's giving in the gospel?

That God held nothing back when He gave us His Son to give us salvation. Nobody made Him do it. It was freely given. There's generosity and sacrifice. And so, as much as we give, we will never outgive God. But we are called to generous giving. And the last principle to do with this offering is the principle of total obedience. So, read verse 8 again, Then let them make a sanctuary for me, and I will dwell among them. Make this tabernacle and all its furnishings exactly like the pattern I will show you. So, the designer of the tabernacle is God Himself.

[10 : 09] It's to be constructed according to the blueprints that He gives. In fact, in the book of Hebrews, we're told that the tabernacle is a representation of heaven itself, where God dwells in heaven.

But the privilege of God with them, it meant that it was really important for the people to follow His pattern in order to create this house fit for their king. And so, the tabernacle construction for the Old Testament worshiper gave them the best picture of the glorious privilege that they were enjoying, God living with them, of them enjoying life in God's presence. And so, their generous giving and their obedient construction and their faithful obedience in their lives are an expression of them saying, this is what we want. This is good for us, to have God among us, to have the true God to worship.

And again, flowing from that, how is our obedience when we consider, 1 Corinthians 3, that God's human address is now His people? Our bodies become temples of the living God, where God

dwells by His spirit. And God gives a pattern for the life of our bodies as temples. He gives us the moral law.

The holy God lives in us and with us. That should shape our obedience, our sense of God being present with us.

So, that's the nature of the offering. But let's think now about the nature of the tabernacle. I don't know, some of us have been in Edinburgh for a long time, some of us are quite new here.

[12:17] It's one of those cities where you can walk around and if you go to a different bit of the city, you can find yourself looking at a grand public building and asking the question, what's that building used for? Or what did it used to be used for, perhaps? Who does it belong to? What goes on in there?

Maybe we do the same on our holidays. But if we take that kind of question to our text, what's the tabernacle for? Who lives there? What's its purpose? We can actually find some answers here in verses 8 and 9. Two words that help us. The first is the word sanctuary. Verse 8, then let them make a sanctuary for me. So, this is interesting. This is one of these words that seems to have changed over time. So, when we use sanctuary, we typically, I imagine, think of a safe place. We might think of an animal sanctuary. Or we might think of the city for sanctuary, Edinburgh, a charity. But in Bible usage, it wasn't predominantly a safe place. It was a holy place.

Sanctuary was a holy place because the holy God was there. Remember the idea of holiness? God is pure. God is sinless. God exists in a moral category, all of His own. With this holy God, condescended to come and to dwell in the tabernacle among His people, making it a sanctuary, making it a holy place.

So, that's one word, sanctuary. The other word is the word that the tent gets known as, tabernacle. Make this tabernacle and all its furnishings exactly like the pattern I will show you. And the tabernacle, that word has, I guess, two related ideas. The idea of a dwelling place, a home. And related to that, a place to settle down in. And so, we put those two things together, and we discover that this tent is the human address of the holy and glorious God of the universe that the Lord settles down and makes His home with His people. Now, that's a staggering reality. That is something that sets the people of Israel utterly apart from everybody else and truly sets the Christian apart from everybody else on this earth. The God who made the whole universe, who cannot be contained by the universe, now dwelling in a tent at the center of the life of His people. Now, if indeed Alec Matira is right, that the tabernacle is this great visual aid in the Bible about spiritual realities, what lessons are we invited to draw? And especially with this idea of God at the center. So, it was interesting for me this week, a couple of different books in one conversation, this idea of the centrality of God came up. I was on a call with Manuel from Columbia. It's always a great joy to connect with him. He's one of our mission partners. He does a lot of pastoral counseling for pastors and for families and for church leaders. And I was talking to him about, what do you say to pastors who are struggling or maybe they're beginning to experience a burnout or things aren't going well in their organization? And he talked about various things. But then he said this, he said, I always tell people, find the right center for your universe. Because so often when we dig down, we discover that who we put at the center of our universe is actually our cell.

[16:13] And when we do that, especially as Christian people, we find that we can become really impatient with God. God, your timing is not matching up with my timing and you're not answering my prayers exactly how I would like to. We can become angry with God if things don't go our way.

But he said, when we choose to put God at the center of our universe, we're constantly asking, where do I fit in His plan? How can God be at work for His glory? How can I live with trust so that God's glorious purposes are being worked out? It's a very different way to think depending who or what is at the center. And then, different voice, Tim Keller in his book, *The Reason for God*, he says it in many places, that recognition that everyone will live with something at the center. It'll either be Jesus or it'll be something else. We understand that because we're made to worship. We all are made to find meaning and purpose in something. But what Keller was always so good at was that reminder that it's only Jesus that gives freedom. So, if we live thinking that my career is my center, this defines me, what happens when we lose our jobs? Or what happens when we need to retire? Then all of a sudden, our foundation crumbles. What about if we choose to make our family the center and our identity is based on how our kids are, how our home is, and they don't turn out the way that we would like?

Well, we can feel ruined and we can feel worthless. And what we need to understand is that Jesus is the only center, the only person or thing that we can build our life on who can forgive our sins, who recognizes our failures and still will choose to love us. He is the only one who lived for us and died for us, the only one who can give us a secure and lasting identity. But we need to make him central.

And in our chat, Greg Beo is a biblical theologian. I just finished his book, *We Become What We Worship*. It was a very thick book that was just making the same point over and over.

That we come to, he uses the language, we revere, what we revere, what we lift up high, we come to resemble. We become what we worship. And so, what we make central, that thing that we devote ourselves to will have a shaping influence on us. One thing that I found helpful from that book, he says, worship involves commitment and contentment. What do I commit myself to? Who gets my loyalty and devotion? And where can I find peace and rest? Do we live with the God of glory on the throne at the center of our lives? And that will be shown in our loyalty and our contentment to know that he is enough and more than enough. So, I think the question that we can be asking ourselves every day is, how will my life today be shaped by the God of glory? How can I bring God glory today, acknowledging that he is central? And just as we close up, here's another thing to think about, and it's maybe going more wide, to think about the nature of God's promise that's represented by this tabernacle tent. So, as God invites us to make him the center and the goal of our lives, we're also being reminded that God with us is one of the great unfolding themes in the storyline of the

[20 : 34] Bible. So, if we do a very quick scan from creation to new creation, we would go to the beginning, and we would discover that the Garden of Eden was designed as a garden sanctuary, that there are Adam and Eve in this perfect place, in this holy place, and God is among them.

And there is worship, and there is joy, and there is loving relationship. But then we know that there was that fall into sin. Instead of God being at the center, God being on the throne, they wanted to get rid of God's rule and to place themselves at the center. And that sort of giving in to that sin and the idolatry of the self led to separation and to loss, no longer in the holy place, no longer dwelling where God is. But even so shortly after that, the promise came again that God would be with his people, that promise that was given to Abraham and to Isaac and to Jacob, then given to the nation of Israel, represented visually by the tabernacle and then the temple. Here was the one people group on earth who had God with them, and as they lived in worship and lived following God, the nations were being drawn in. But again, we see the storyline of the Old Testament that the people would so often reject God. They wouldn't make him central. They found their security from other idols and other nations. And so we had those sad realities of the people being sent out of God's holy place, the holy land being sent into exile. Prophets like Ezekiel giving these visions of God's glory departing the temple because of his people's sin. But you get towards the end of the Old Testament and we're left with the prophets bringing this great promise, this gracious promise that the Lord God again would come to his temple, that the glory of God would return, that he would once again dwell among his people. And so the Old Testament closes with that question, well, when will it happen and how will it happen?

John's gospel gives us that wonderful answer as he introduces Jesus, Jesus, the Word who became flesh and made his dwelling, who tabernacled among us so that we see God's glory, the glory of the one and only, full of grace and truth. The glorious Son of God takes a human address in the form of a human body, the holy God walking the streets of Palestine. Jesus as God with us, revealing his grace and glory in a new way, dying to forgive our sins, giving us new birth and sending the Spirit, making us a renewed people, his family, the temple of the living God, and still to come, we'll get there by the time we get to the end of Revelation, when Christ comes again, that promise of the new creation becoming a tabernacle and a sanctuary, when heaven comes down to earth, when God and his people live together forever in a holy place, a place of perfect love. There is a day coming when Jesus returns when the great lesson, when the great lesson, the great visual aid of the tabernacle will be fully and finally understood. When all the people of God live with our glorious God and Savior for all eternity, we will live forever in the new creation to glorify God and enjoy him forever.

So in the gospel, we discover that Jesus has come to tabernacle among us as the Lord of glory. And the invitation for all of us is to organize our lives, our worship, our mission around him.

