

Exodus 37:10–29

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[0 : 00] Well, if you're visiting this morning, you're probably wondering why did the preacher pick this text? I can say we've been making our way through the book of Exodus the last two summers, and Lord willing, we'll finish it this summer.

And I didn't pick this text. The text picked me. And in preparation, I was thinking to myself, what do I say about three pieces of furniture?

What do I say? So first, we ought to pray. Father, we bow in your presence, and may your word be our rule, your spirit our teacher, and your greater glory our ultimate concern.

Through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen. Well, we continue our time in Exodus and find ourselves this morning in a craftsman's workshop.

We are injected into this narrative that goes to great lengths to record what is being done. We are watching three pieces of furniture, three furnishings being fashioned that will sit within what one writer describes as a royal living room.

[1 : 20] If the ark, which was preached on last week, is the divine footstool, or the ottoman, then these pieces that surround it project a divine living space, a living room of sorts.

The narrator has begun in probably chapter 35. And he begins to record the crafting of the tabernacle, its assembly.

And what he is moving toward is ultimately chapter 39, verse 42. 39, verse 42 reads, See, the climax of the book of Exodus is actually chapter 40.

Most of us think it happens in chapter 12, the great grand deliverance of the people of God out of Egypt. Actually, of the 40 chapters of the book of Exodus, 13 of them are expended on the tabernacle.

On its design, its furnishings, its arrangement, its setup, and its assembly. Nearly one-third of the entire book of Exodus is devoted in the same narrative form to the tabernacle, as we just heard read.

[2 : 51] And in these 13 chapters, what strikes the reader is not only the amount of text given to the tabernacle, but its bizarre two-fold repetition that is nearly verbatim.

The contents of chapter 35 to 39, where we find ourselves this morning, have already been recorded in chapters 25 through 31. And let me just show you a couple of them, and you'll get the gist, since our Bibles are open.

So since we're in chapter 37, you look at verse 10 again. He, referring to Bezalel, also made the table of acacia wood. Two cubits was its length, a cubit its breadth, and a cubit and a half its height. And if you were to flip back to Exodus chapter 26, a few pages to your left, or Exodus chapter 25, in verse 23, you will read this.

You shall make a table of acacia wood. Two cubits shall be its length, a cubit its breadth, and a cubit and a half its height. They are nearly identical, verbatim.

[4 : 04] Since we're already in chapter 25, if you look down to verse 31, you'll read about the lampstand that we have just read. You shall make a lampstand of pure gold. The lampstand shall be made of hammered work.

Its base, its stem, its cups, its calyctics, and its flower shall be one piece with it. And if you flip back to Exodus chapter 37, verse 17, you read almost identical words.

He also made the lampstand of pure gold. He made the lampstand of hammered work. Its base, its stem, its cups, its calyctics, and its flowers were of one piece with it.

The book of Exodus goes to great lengths to repeat the exact same thing. The differences are, between chapters 25 and 31, it's given in future tense, and it's actually a divine speech.

So the words are accompanied with, you shall make, you shall make, you shall make. And in chapters 35 to 39, where we find ourselves this morning, the recurring phrase is, he made, he made, he also made.

[5 : 13] The verbs that we encounter in these chapters are largely past tense. And they're included to leave no doubt that what was commanded by God was accomplished by the people of God.

Why does the narrator do this? The narrator wants to leave no doubt in the minds of the reader, in the people, that in spite of their sin and their idolatry in chapter 32, they followed through in obeying what God had initially commanded them to build.

In other words, they were obedient to God. Obedience is a demonstration of loyalty and authentic faith. Obedience to God is manifested in the life of the one who is transformed by God.

And what the narrator wants us to see is that in spite of their sinfulness, in spite of their infidelity, in spite of their idolatry, they repented and they turned and they obeyed.

The narrator doesn't want us to be focused on the furnishings. He wants us to be focused on the completed action. The work was done.

[6 : 29] And because the work was done, the promise that God made would be kept. The promise in chapter 25, that after they make him a sanctuary, that God would dwell in their midst.

See, God's presence was not only important for Israel for utilitarian purposes. God's presence wasn't only meant to be a safe escort into the land.

See, we would be mistaken to think that God's presence is this military convoy that is going in front of the people of God. Though it is, and it's a benefit of God accompanying his people, the real goal is that God would be with his people.

That God would be present with his people. It is the Lord's mission. It's one of the unifying themes of the Bible, the presence of God with his people.

The horror of Genesis chapter 3, after Adam and Eve are found disobedient, is not the curses that are given or pronounced upon them. The horror of Genesis chapter 3 is actually the question that God poses earlier in Genesis chapter 2 where he says, Adam, Eve, where are you?

[7 : 46] It is not that God didn't know where they were. God is actually explaining something has happened to them. When they once walked with great intimacy and friendship and communion, it no longer existed.

God formally walked with his people and was present with his people. But after the fall, that had changed. And so, as students of the Bible, what you will begin to see, now where the second book of the Bible, you will begin to see the goal of the Bible is ultimately to restore the relationship that is broken.

The goal of the entirety of the Bible is for the people of God to dwell with God. The goal is togetherness. The goal, the grand narrative, is to bring alienated people back to where they belong, namely, the presence of God.

And the book of Exodus carries on this thing because it began in this way, you might remember, you might not remember from three years ago, but you remember that the people started and Israel was enslaved to Pharaoh.

They were laboring. All their energies were shown to be building cities and buildings for Pharaoh. But here you find, toward the end of Exodus, something radical has happened.

[9 : 11] Instead of being enslaved to Pharaoh, they have been freed and they are in service to God. Instead of building up cities and buildings for Pharaoh, they are now building for God.

They are found to be in service to God with God present among them. Well, this morning we look at three objects in chapter 37 following the construction of the ark, the table, the lampstand, and the altar of incense.

These three objects are likely lumped together largely for two reasons. One, they are found in the same living space. They are found in the same room. The tabernacle is constructed in pretty much three rooms.

There is the courtyard, there is the holy place, and there is the holy of holies. And here we are in the holy place, and there is three objects that reside there. These three.

Secondly, they are lumped together because they are all fashioned of gold, out of gold. If not pure gold, they are overlaid with gold. As a matter of fact, no other metallic substance is mentioned.

[10 : 17] Only gold is being used. And we will see that will change in chapter 38. Gold is not only emblematic of beauty and worth and value, but it also served to convey that there is durability in

these objects.

These objects needed to be moved because the tabernacle was mobile. Unlike the other temples or worship centers of the day, the people of God moved along with God in the tabernacle.

If you're curious how much gold was used, you only have to look at chapter 38, verse 24. In my math, which is questionable, 2,467 pounds of gold used.

2,467 pounds of it. Well over a ton. And so I googled it. How much is an ounce of gold worth? And I did the math and according to what gold is worth, as of Friday, it translates to \$47 million worth of gold.

That's how much gold was used. Well I want to comment briefly on these three furnishings and aim to show how they contribute to the tabernacle as a whole.

[11:41] Firstly, the table. The table. The dimensions are provided for us. Two and a half feet in length. One and a half feet wide. Just over two feet tall.

It's overlaid with gold. Four rings where two golden poles could be run through in order to transport it. Upon that table rested vessels of gold. Namely, plates and dishes, bowls and flasks.

Precisely how these vessels are used is unknown. But the most explicit use of the table is actually described in the book of Leviticus chapter 24.

It says, On the table resided twelve loaves of bread and two stacks of six. It was to be replaced weekly. And to the onlooker, the assumption would be made that the bread was food for the God. Or food for God. It's not uncommon to even think along the same lines today. Growing up, I spent my middle school summers in Taiwan. My parents wanted me to retain my Mandarin speaking skills, so they sent me to Taiwan and there I stayed with the host family, my father's college roommate.

[12:57] The family were devout Buddhists. Such was their devotion that an entirety of a bedroom was given to meditation. Additionally, the most apparent object in their living room was a shrine.

A Buddha shrine that wasn't only a small piece, it actually stretched the entire length of the wall with Buddha sitting at its center. I recall each morning I would rise and I would head to the kitchen for breakfast and I would notice the same thing.

There would be incense burning from the shrine or the altar and there would be fruit, a large plate of fresh fruit meticulously skinned, carefully placed and beautifully displayed in front of the idol.

Being a curious middle schooler, I asked, what's the fruit for? What does it do? And to my question, the reply was terse and to the point, it's for Buddha to eat.

And today, if you would find the same thing, it wouldn't take much time to wander the streets of Chinatown and you would see something similar. Food before an idol in order to provide for it.

[14:22] See, similarly, this is how food sacrifice to gods functioned in those days. Food sacrifices were made traditionally to represent feeding the gods.

It's a form of provision to the little g gods. But this was not the case for Israel's God. On the contrary, it was not food for God. Rather, we would find that it is food and provision for God's people, namely the priests.

The psalmist has written that God has said, if I were hungry, would I actually tell you? Because the world and all of it is mine. Don't think that I eat the flesh of the bulls or drink the blood of goats.

He doesn't. And it's important to pause here and consider the realities of this table. Because you and I may read this text and think that what is transpiring on the table in the tabernacle is for God's hunger to be appeased, when in reality, it actually serves to be a reminder.

it's an emblematic, it's an emblem of God's perpetual provision for all his people. Why were there 12 loaves?

[15:38] Well, it doesn't take much to connect the dots. Because 12 is the number of tribes for all the people of Israel. You'll find 12 is the number of disciples that we find in the New Testament.

12 basket fulls were the number of baskets found left over after Jesus fed 5,000 and more. See, we would understand amiss if we didn't come to understand that the table actually embodies the Lord's provision for his people.

In contrast to the surrounding nations, Israel presented God with bread, not for his sustenance, but as a reminder that God sustains his people. Secondly, the lampstand.

The lampstand. What can we say about the lampstand? Well, the narrator wants to make a couple things clear. Firstly, that it's fashioned out of a single piece of pure gold.

It's so important that he actually says it twice in verse 17 and 22. Of all the objects in the tabernacle, the lampstand is probably the most difficult to replicate because there's a lack of specific dimensions.

[16:53] Similarly to the table, there are utensils that accompany the lampstand, particularly tongs and trays. And the lampstand's purpose is explicit in chapter 25 verse 27.

It's to give light to the space in front of it. Though its functional purpose is already given to us, many people have gone to great lengths to bring symbolic purpose to it.

One writer has made the claim that it's like the tree of life with all its branches and flowers and blossoms. Another has claimed it's a replica of the burning bush.

And though there may be validity to some of these claims, we ought not to feel the necessity to spiritualize every object in the tabernacle. But what should we say about the lampstand?

Well, its function is plain. Imagine you're a priest, you enter into the holy place, there are no windows, there are no doors, there is no natural light.

[17:58] Of course you need a lampstand because it provides light in a room where there's no other source. But perhaps another meaning can be derived, and let me illustrate it this way.

In the technological world that we live in, one of the more popular devices that are emerging or actually have found their place are these Wi-Fi controlled outlets.

We call them smart plugs. It gives you and I the operator freedom to control that device from anywhere in the world from my mobile device.

Probably the most popular appliance to plug into the smart plug is a lamp where once we had a clap on or clap off to turn off lamps.

Now we can control that lamp from anywhere in the world. And so I pose this question to you. What is the benefit of being able to turn on or off my lamp when I'm in Paris?

[19:06] Or better question, why would I be motivated to turn on a light in my living room when I'm away on vacation?

Anyone? No. Well, my dad does it. And the principle is simple. It conveys that somebody's home. When the light is on, someone is home. And so we look at the lamp stand. elsewhere in the Bible has, it's been explicit that the lamp was to burn continually, continuously.

It was never to die or diminish. It not only illuminates the Holy of Holies so that the priests could see what was being done, but it further highlights the fact that someone is home, namely the God of Israel.

The lamp never ceases to die. It burns continually. And for the one who resides in this home, unlike you and I, he never sleeps. The God of Israel never sleeps.

[20:18] I lift my eyes up to the hills. Where does my help come from? My help comes from the Lord, the maker of heaven and earth, who does not what? Slumber or sleep.

It's fascinating. I can only wonder that if you were in a drone or sitting atop a mountaintop, and as you saw Israel encamped around the tabernacle, at night when all the families put out their fire, there in the middle of the camp would be this soft glow emerging from the lampstand.

Why? Because it's emblematic of the fact that as God's people slept, God stood watch.

the God in Israel's midst would not only always be home, he would always be awake. He never sleeps. As a parent, parent of three, one of the times that I look forward to the most is when I could put my head down at night and go to sleep.

And here, you're given a picture of a God who never sleeps, who never tires, who is never weary, who is never overwhelmingly burdened by the day's tasks.

[21:47] Instead, he resides there awake, listening, hearing, attentive, guarding. Lastly, thirdly, the altar of incense.

The altar. The table, the lampstand, and the altar. Well, the altar, likewise, is encased in gold. It's molded on the side with two rings, emblematic, that it shouldn't be touched by human hands.

And it tells us elsewhere in Exodus that there should be a fragrant incense on it. Every morning, when the priest goes in, according to chapter 30, when the priest goes in and he dresses the lamps, he shall burn incense.

And every evening, when he dresses the lamps, he shall burn the incense. It was a special blend, a divine composition.

No other forms of incense were to be offered. It was located closest to the ark, only separated by the veil. Its nearness to the ark, according to chapter 30, verse 6, suggests that it was the daily

meeting place between God and the priest.

[23 : 01] See, only once a year they were able to go behind the veil, but daily the priest could stand before the veil, and before him was the altar of incense. The incense was to be burned perpetually, being refreshed every morning and evening.

It demanded continual attention to ensure that the incense would never cease to be rising toward God. Its constant burning surely communicated this constant tending of the divine relationship that was required of Israel, God's people.

And so you begin to see that the light never dimmed in the tabernacle. The bread never went stale in the tabernacle. The incense never faded in the tabernacle.

Why? Well, the idea is that for you and I, when you and I engage or commune with God, it's an ongoing engagement.

It's ongoing. Daily. Moment by moment. For Israel, it was not to be an occasion, a one-time thing. It was not one day a week.

[24 : 11] It would involve their constant, active participation. It was here at the altar where God would accept the prayers of his people.

The psalmist would write that incense is like prayer that God would hear. The New Testament doesn't use the word incense many times.

Five, two of them that describe physical incense, but of the three remaining, they're all tied to prayer. Interestingly, I'll end with this.

In the Gospel of Luke, how Luke starts his Gospel is unlike all the other three Gospels. All the other three Gospels, Matthew starts with the genealogy that leads to Jesus, Mark starts really with Jesus on the move, and John starts in the beginning with the word, and talks about Jesus tabernacling with his people.

Luke doesn't open up his Gospel with Jesus. Rather, he brings the reader, you and I, to the temple. And it's fascinating, in light of this morning's text, what is actually happening in the temple.

[25 : 24] Luke chapter one, verse eight. Now, while he, referring to this man named Zachariah, was serving as a priest before God, when his division was on duty, according to the custom of the priesthood, he was chosen by Lot to enter the temple of the Lord, and to burn incense.

And the whole multitude of the people were praying outside at the hour of incense. And in verse 11, there appeared to him an angel of the Lord, standing on the right side of the altar of incense.

And here we find Luke does something quite intriguing. He doesn't start the gospel with Jesus. He actually walks the reader into the temple, and he wants to say, you want to know where it starts?

It actually starts in the temple. It starts in the temple at the altar of incense. And if you know the story, Elizabeth and Zachariah are barren, and they're unable to have kids.

And there the angel announces to Zachariah that his wife would be with child. And this child is a special child. It's not Jesus. It's the forerunner to Jesus.

[26 : 50] But this child is to go before the Lord to prepare his ways, to give knowledge of salvation to his people, to announce the forgiveness of sins.

It's written of John, the child of Zachariah, the promised one, according to Luke chapter 1. He will turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God.

It's as if Luke is linking the tabernacle to the temple, ultimately to Jesus, knowing that in Jesus the presence of God would be with his people.

Imagine for a moment you enter the Holy of Holies. It's the divine living room. it's a divine dining room. And you and I enter, and on our right we would see the twelve loaves of bread resting there, as a reminder how God provides for his people.

On our left we would see the lamp stand illuminating the room, so that ultimately you would see the altar in front of you, the altar of incense that is filling the room with a backdrop of the giant veil.

[28 : 05] as the incense rises you're reminded that all your petitions, all your longings, all your requests, all your pleas, don't fall upon deaf ears, but upon a merciful and gracious God, an ever-present help, one who does not slumber or sleep, for he keeps watch over his own.

And so this morning, providentially, we come to a table, a table that is set before us. It's actually set by God himself.

What rests on it is a reminder of God's provision in Christ. Matthew 26 reads this, as they were eating, Jesus took the bread, and after blessing it, he broke it and gave it to the disciples and said, take and eat, this is my body.

And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks, he gave it to them, saying, drink of it, all of you, for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. And here, in Exodus, we've read of a table prepared for the provision of God's people. And once again, we read in Matthew, a table prepared for the provision of God's people.

[29 : 36] Not only to provide your human needs, but the ultimate provision, as alluded to in Matthew, the forgiveness of our sins.

Because God, in forgiving your sins, is now able to dwell with you, and to walk with you.

And the promise remains that he will forever be with you. Well, let me pray for us.

Father, we come to you this morning, and our desire is that you would be present with us.

And you are only present with us. If you have redeemed and rescued us.

[30 : 39] And so, Father, as we come to this table, may it serve as a reminder of your perpetual presence in providing a sacrifice on our behalf. And as we take the bread and take this cup, we pray it would bring into remembrance the work that you have accomplished on our behalf.

We ask these things for Jesus' sake. Amen. Well, this morning, if you're visiting, just to explain how we do it here in the cafeteria, Doug and I will...