

# Sacrifices to meet with God

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[ 0 : 00 ] Well, last week we did take a break from Exodus because of camp, but the week before we were looking at Exodus 26, where we talked about how the layout of the tabernacle conveys a lot by way of symbolism and meaning. This week we move along to this chapter, 27, and we find that the same is happening with the entrance of the tabernacle or the front yard of the tabernacle. Now we're all familiar with front yards, particularly of famous buildings like Buckingham Palace or the White House, the expansive courtyard or front lawn. It's there to serve a number of purposes. Firstly, it speaks of the grandeur of the place, but it also helps to keep the crowds at bay. There's a symbolic separation, isn't there, between the common people, that's us, on the outside, and the important and grand people on the inside. Now some of us try to do the same with our own homes. We have high fences to protect our privacy, to keep out unwanted guests. Maybe we even might have a sign that looks a bit like this, or maybe this other one. Now there's a double message in this, isn't there? On the surface, we're pretending to care about the person so that they don't get injured. But what's the real message? Keep out, right?

We don't want them in. And as we turn to the tabernacle, we don't get the same message, but you'll be surprised, it's not going to be surprising for you to find out that in the front yard of the tabernacle or the courtyard, we get a similar kind of message as well, or rather a similar kind of purpose, giving us a message of what the tabernacle is for. We're going to come to that shortly in verse 1 of chapter 27, sorry, in chapter 27. But in the first verse, what we deal with instead is an important piece of furniture in the courtyard. So we heard Bevan read, but look again at verse 1 where God says, build an altar of acacia wood three cubits high. It is to be five square, five cubits long. It is to be square, five cubits long, and five cubits wide. Make a horn at each of the four corners so that the horns and the altar are of one piece, and overlay it with bronze. Make its utensils of bronze, pots to remove the ashes, the shovels, sprinkling forks, sprinkling bowls, meat forks, and firepans.

Make a grating for it, a bronze network and a bronze ring at each of the four corners of the network. Put it under the ledge of the altar so that it is halfway up the altar. Make poles of acacia wood for the altar and overlay them with bronze. The poles are to be inserted into the rings so that they will be on two sides of the altar when it is carried. Make the altar hollow out of boards. It is to be made just as you were shown on the mountain. Now in case you can't visualize it, there's an image of it on the slides. And three cubits is around 1.4 meters, so around chest high for most people. Now many of your yards may have ornamental features like the water fountain or the huge Grecian urn, perhaps. But this piece of furniture is nothing of that sort, is it? It was hollow with a bronze mesh or grate in it.

And so really, this is just one big barbecue. It's even got the utensils and the bowls to go with it, right? And it stood right at the doorway of the tabernacle, as you can see on the next slide. The tabernacle and the big fire on the left there, that's the bronze altar. And so it becomes, as you enter, the biggest focus of the entire courtyard, which is now described in verse 9, the courtyard itself. There, God says, make a courtyard for the tabernacle. The south side shall be 100 cubits long and is to have curtains of finely twisted linen.

[ 4 : 25 ] So that's around 45 meters. The basis of, on which the curtains stand will be bronze and the hooks and the bands to secure the curtains to the post, silver. The north side is exactly the same as the south side.

Now, when you get to the west side, the dimensions are halved and so are the dimensions on the east. Except on the east, that's where we find the entrance to the courtyard. There's only one entrance.

And the curtain to that entrance is 20 cubits long, about 9 meters. But its pattern, as we read, is identical to the curtain on the entrance into the tabernacle.

Everything else in the courtyard is made from bronze. So this courtyard is actually quite a large area, 45 meters by 22 and a half. It's quite large, isn't it? It's quite large, probably bigger than this room, maybe. But there's only one entry. And as you enter through that curtain, the pattern of the curtain would signal to you that you were coming into God's presence. And even as you stepped into the curtain, what you get the sense of is that, yes, you're coming to meet with God, but then somehow that most holy place, that place where we found out a few weeks ago is where God dwells or his footstool resides, that's still further in and beyond your reach.

[ 5 : 58 ] So here to meet God, but you're not quite there yet. Now, in the final two verses of our passage, this idea of meeting with God is again reinforced.

So if you look there with me, verse 20, command the Israelites to bring you clear oil of pressed olives for the light so that the lamps may be kept burning. In the tent of meeting, outside the curtain that shields the Ark of the Covenant law, Aaron and his sons are to keep the lamps burning before the Lord from evening till morning.

This is to be a lasting ordinance among the Israelites for generations to come. Now, it may not be clear right away what I'm referring to by this idea of meeting with God, but perhaps you've noticed the change in the reference to the tabernacle.

It's no longer now called the tabernacle, is it? Rather, it's called the tent of meeting. And this subtle change starts from here on in, marks a turning point or a change in the focus of the tabernacle. Remember the last few weeks, we've been talking about how God's dwelling place, this was God's dwelling place, the tabernacle. Now the focus is switched from vertical, God's dwelling, to the horizontal.

[ 7 : 20 ] That is, this now becomes a place of meeting with God and his people. And that's why in the next chapter, or even at the end right here, we have the introduction of the priest and of Aaron, because meeting with God, as we will see next week as Daniel comes to share with us, requires a mediator.

But notice too that the oil for the lampstand has to be provided so as to keep the lamps burning day and night, from evening to morning. What this tells us is that God's presence and God's desire to meet with his people is an ongoing aim or focus.

It's not just seven days a week and 24 hours a day, but it's also going to be for generations to come. That's why we read in the last sentence that this is to be a lasting ordinance among the Israelites for generations to come.

Aaron has to do this so as to say, God desires to keep meeting with us. So we need to keep the oil in the lamps burning as a symbol of that.

This practice was even maintained when we get to the permanent temple, because God's people being able to meet with God, as I said at the very start of the series, is God's main purpose, isn't it?

[ 8 : 39 ] His main goal for saving them. And so all of this sounds really good, except that when you first enter the courtyard, you know, when you peel back those curtains and you step through it, imagine what you see in front of you.

Blocking your view to the entrance of the tent of meeting is this huge bronze altar, right? Burning away. And around it, you would see lots and lots of discarded animal skin.

Lots of blood everywhere. And so it would strike you immediately just how costly this whole exercise is. You see, people were meant to bring the choicest animals, weren't they?

Without blemish. To be sacrificed. And when I say sacrifice, it means that they're not being made, like it's not a barbecue that they've brought their lamb, right? They're not going to have roast lamb or lamb chops.

No. These animals, the meat portions of it, were to be burnt to ashes. All of it was to be burnt. All right? So we're not going to have a dinner from it.

[ 9 : 47 ] And so if you join the dots over the last few weeks, this is the message we get. Two, three weeks ago, we saw God's desire to dwell with His people. Then two weeks ago, the great difficulty of that, because God is holy and His people will not.

But here now, in this chapter, what we find is the partial solution. That, yes, it's still possible for God to meet with His people, but only through the costly and confronting offering of animal sacrifices. And as I said, this was to be an unending and perpetual reminder for them, as long as they were living in the land. Day after day, each time people had to bring an offering.

It's not like you bring one lamb and that's it. No, every time you came to the temple, you had to bring a lamb. And this was going on. You might not be the one bringing the lamb all the time, but others would be.

So this was a constant thing that was going on seven days a week in the heart of your community. And so the question that it prompts is, why?

[10:56] Why all this? It seems so over the top, doesn't it? So wasteful. What is God trying to prove with all of this? Well, it seems over the top, unless you realize that the point that God is making is just how serious sin was in His people, which made them unholy.

God has decreed that the only appropriate punishment for sin is death. It should rightly have been the death of the perpetrator, but in His mercy, He allows for a substitute.

And in the Old Testament, that's an animal substitute. But it had to be offered over and over and over again. It was limited. It was imperfect.

And so this was the thing that, you know, they would have lived with for hundreds and hundreds of years, from the tabernacle to the temple to the exile, and then back again when they rebuilt the temple. This was the one constant in their community.

Animal sacrifices over and over again. Until we get to Jesus. When Karen read previously in Hebrews 9, verse 22, this principle was set out very clearly, doesn't it?

[12:16] In fact, the law requires that nearly everything be cleansed with blood. And without the shedding of blood, there is no forgiveness. Now, we may look at our own sin and failures, and we might think, that's not that serious, is it?

Yeah, sure, we may not live up to what God wants us to do. But really, does it require that much blood?

Well, the Bible tells us that it does. It's not just our failure in that we do wrong things, but rather it's our failure when we reject God's rule over us.

When we are proud, and we ignore Him. These things are what profoundly matter to God. When we fail to honor Him with our thoughts and our words, and our actions display a lack of grace and truth, you know, when I spoke about holiness a couple of weeks ago, then we've fallen short of God's mark, and we are in need of forgiveness by Him.

And I know that sometimes, as Christians, we're accused of bringing up sin all the time, that all we want to do, particularly the pastor, is get people on a guilt trip, so that they'll come to church, you know, and they then think, oh, this is all really harmful, because, you know, it's, you know, undermining people's self-esteem, and all things like that.

[13:38] And yes, I agree that we can say all these things harshly, and in an unloving way, but the truth is, if we are truly wrong before God, then pretending that it's not true is not going to make it go away, is it?

We all heard Daniel Andrews say last year, didn't he, that just because you want this to be over, doesn't mean it's over. Just because you think it's wrong, you don't want it to be true, doesn't mean it's true.

And he's right, isn't he? When we ignore what is true, then we live under a delusion. And more importantly, when we don't acknowledge what is true, then we don't seek the solution to make it right.

It's like suffering from cancer, for example, and pretending it's not real. You know, that the doctor is telling you lies, the blood tests are all false, the pain is imaginary. It's not going to go away just because you think it's not true, is it?

And that's the same with sin. The effect and consequences of sin isn't going to just disappear just because we ignore it. And so actually, it's unloving not to portray the severity of sin, particularly as the Bible does.

[14:53] And particularly when we do it the way the Bible does, as in here in Exodus. And this is even more so because God actually reveals this problem in order then to show us what the true solution is.

And that is, when Jesus comes, God reveals to us that he's the lasting solution to our problem of sin. Not the blood of animals, but the blood of another human being, just like us.

Not a temporary solution which requires ongoing sacrifices, but a once-for-all offering by Jesus on the cross. And so it's true still, as it says in Hebrews, that without the shedding of blood there's no forgiveness of sin.

But in Jesus, we have the sacrifice of the blood of a perfect human. Not an animal without physical defects, but a human being without moral or spiritual defects.

Now, if we've never been told about our true human condition, that our sin is profoundly offensive to God, then we would never see just how wonderful our Savior Jesus will be.

[16:06] Or how crucial and how beautiful his death for us is. The fact that actually we are able to just gather each Sunday.

You know, we don't have to bring any more animals. Don't need to bring a little lamb or whatever other animals you have. And still be able to meet with God. We take that for granted, don't we? We take it for granted that we can even come to church. And last year, we really found out how it is that when we cannot need. Can we? But the fact that we can do this and that God is present with us is because of Jesus and what He's done.

We don't need to sacrifice anymore. Every time you open your eyes in the morning and say a prayer, God is able to hear you. God listens to you and you're able to speak with Him because of what Jesus has done.

Again, you don't have to bring sacrifices and all that and do all that before you say your first prayer because Jesus has already done that for you. And so, every day that we live as a Christian, all these things that we take for granted as Christians is only made possible because of Jesus' perfect sacrifice for us.

[17:20] And so, our hearts really should be filled with thanksgiving and joy because this is such a privilege, isn't it? Despite our own failure and our own unworthiness. And if there's anyone here sitting today and you're wondering what it takes to be acceptable to God, if you're struggling with guilt in your life, you know, things you wish that you could undo, then the Bible's answer is very simple.

You can't change the past, but you don't really need to because the burden of sin is lifted from your shoulder when you put your trust in Jesus. You can have a fresh start.

You can have access to God by the blood of Jesus because His shedding of His blood has provided forgiveness of sins for you.

And so, if you have not done that today and not taken the opportunity to do that, then can I invite you to do that? Come to Jesus and find salvation with God.

But for the rest of us, well, I think, you know, sometimes you want a big application point, but there really isn't one in this passage, is there? Except for us to be thankful, to again, give thanks for how wonderful it is that we can be in God's presence week in, week out.

[18:39] not because we're perfect, we don't need to pretend to be one, but simply, humbly coming to Jesus and coming through Jesus to God and knowing that God's, Christ's blood is all the sacrifice we need to be welcome into God's presence.

as the reading in Hebrews 9 says, if the blood of goats and bulls and the ashes of a heifer sprinkled on those who are ceremonially unclean, sanctify them so that they are outwardly clean, then how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal spirit offered himself unblemished to God, cleanse our consciences from acts that lead to death so that we may serve the living God.

Let's pray. Father, thank you that the blood of Jesus is enough, more than enough, to save us from sins and from death.

Thank you for the privilege of living in your presence. Help each of us to draw near to you through faith in your son Jesus. Help those among us to do so if this is their very first time doing it.

In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.