

The Tabernacle

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[0 : 00] This is our little slice of heaven on earth, our forever home. We'll have to figure out a way to get it done. And that is the key to our passage today.

It's a grand design for God's tabernacle. There's an ark, a table, a lampstand, a tent, an altar, a courtyard, a priesthood, a basin, oil and incense.

It's a house so beautiful and audacious and grand that we're supposed to say, wow, with jaws on the floor. Again and again in the chapters, we're struck by the wow factor, how God has spared no expense.

In fact, one of the most repeated items in the chapters is gold. It says all over the place when the author can't think of anything else to say.

He just says, just cover it with gold. And to give you an idea of what we're talking about, I put my accounting hat back on, my old accounting hat, and I had to convert talents and shekels into kilos.

[1 : 00] So 995 kilograms of gold in the tabernacle, just about a ton. And so in today's money, anyone want to have a guess what a ton of gold costs?

A lot. Very good. It's \$58 million. As that Thursday, \$58 million. The silver, no slouch there.

Three and a half tons of silver costs a lazy \$2.5 million. Verse 4 over the page. Oh, sorry. Verse 4, tap 25. Blue, purple, and scarlet yarn and fine linen.

Goat hair, ram skins dyed red. Other types of durable leather. Acacia wood. Olive oil for light. Spices for anointing oil. And for the fragrant incense. And onyx stones and other gems to be mounted on the ephod and breast piece.

It was full of riches and luxury and wow factor. All up, I calculate, \$60 million worth of materials in the tabernacle. It should be the envy of all the neighborhood.

[2 : 02] Obviously, it should be the envy of the nations. But hey, what do you expect from a God who is holy? He is holy. He is set apart. But unlike everything else, his tabernacle, no different.

Unlike every other building in the neighborhood. And not just because of the rich stuff. God actually dwelt there. 25 verse 8 says, have them make a sanctuary for me.

Why? So that I might dwell among them. It is holy. That is, it is set apart for a divine purpose. God will live there.

When the New Testament looks back at this tabernacle, it says on the screen. It says, the priests serve at a sanctuary that is a copy and shadow of what is in heaven.

This is why Moses was warned when he was about to build a tabernacle. See to it that you make everything according to the pattern shown you on the mountain. No wonder there is gold and riches and luxury.

[3 : 05] It was a copy of the heavenly throne room. Like a grand design home. This is a little slice of heaven here on earth.

You see, if last week was the wedding between God and his people, this week it's about the house. It's about the home. It was meant to be a copy of the heavenly home.

Where God and his people would live forever. And I don't know if you realize, but the tabernacle is God's second attempt to dwell with his people. Does anyone know what the first was?

Eden. Excellent. Andrew, well done. It was the Garden of Eden. Back then, God's people were only Adam and Eve. But much of the tabernacle detail comes from the Garden of Eden.

And so I put a table on your handout. When Clive was reading, he was reading about the lampstand. Did you notice the design of the lampstand? Verse 31 says, The lampstand looks like a tree.

[4 : 20] A tree in the middle of the tabernacle. A tree in the middle of Eden. Two trees, in fact. The tree of life and the knowledge of good and evil. In Genesis, God spoke the world into existence with

six words.

And then he rested on the seventh. Throughout our chapters, God speaks six times. The seventh is about Sabbath rest. In Genesis, do you remember a cherubim had a flaming sword to block the way back to Eden?

In 2631, they embroidered a cherubim under the curtain that separates the holy place from the most holy place. You see, the first time God dwelt or tabernacled with his people, they broke the covenant and spoiled a perfect marriage.

And ever since then, it's been pretty much impossible for God and people to dwell together. Until our chapters today, where God's grand design is to tabernacle with them once again.

It's to have what he lost at Eden with us once again. It seems he's determined to be in relationship. In fact, the whole book of Exodus is about that idea.

[5 : 29] He rescues them for a relationship. But how well do you think the marriage will go this time round? Last week, we witnessed the vows, didn't we?

Will you, Israel, take Yahweh to be your God? Will you worship him alone? And all the people responded, Yes, we will do everything the Lord has said we will obey.

How confident are you that this marriage will last? Ever watch a celebrity marriage on TV and go, oh, I give it two years? How much do you know about Old Testament Israel?

How faithful do you think they'll be? Just as a massive clue, next week is the golden calf. The golden calf is the low point of the Bible, one of the big low points in the Bible.

Yet despite that, God is still determined to have with them what he lost at Eden. And the main verse, can I see please, Ted?

[6 : 27] There you go. This is the main verse from all our chapters today. So I will consecrate the tabernacle, the tent of meeting and the altar and the priests. Then I will dwell among the Israelites and be their God.

They will know that I'm the Lord, their God, who brought them out of Egypt so that I might dwell among them. I am the Lord, their God. You see, if you want to know what he's like, you can look at the way he rescues, brings them out of Egypt, the way he rescues us with Jesus on the cross. But you can also look at the fact that he's determined to have relationship. You see, lots of other religions have gods who are mysterious and scary and unknowable, who demand strict worship and will strike you down if you don't.

But our God wants to be in relationship with us. He loves us. He wants us to get to know him by the way he wants relationship.

He wants to dwell with us. You see, the tabernacle now and the temple of Solomon later, they should be the envy of the nations, not because of the rich stuff necessarily, but because it's a sign of how much God wanted to be with us, that he was amongst his people.

[7 : 39] We're supposed to be wowed by the idea that he would bother to live with us again after what happened the first time at Eden. And it's not as though he's a gullible spouse or he's blindly optimistic or naive about what his people are like.

Lots of the design today involves sections and limits and restrictions. The tabernacle has an outer court, a holy place, and then a most holy place.

It's got a sacrificial system with an altar, washing basins, sin offerings. There are verses about the priesthood, who are the only ones allowed to enter the holy places.

And even then, the high priest, the most holy place, only once a year. The point is, while God dwelling with us is amazing, they shouldn't think that they can just casually walk into his presence the way they did at Eden.

And the right illustration for this is visiting London. Let me show you what I mean. If you visit London, the chances are you'll go to Buckingham Palace. And if the union flag is flying above the palace, it means the queen is in residence, which is great.

[8 : 48] But the flag doesn't mean that you're invited for tea. You see, she has butlers and footmen to attend to her needs. Only the prime minister can enter once a week to update her on the government.

Prime Minister Boris, you'd think when he goes to visit that he combs his hair, maybe. The butlers, the butlers would have clean clothes, right? The silver polished within an inch of its life.

It's a high standard of cleanliness. But God's standard of cleanliness goes to the heart. Chapter 29, you don't have to flick to it. Chapter 29 of our passage looks more like an abattoir with all the blood.

The whole sacrificial system is about sin offerings for cleansing and atonement. Even the high priest would die if he approached God too casually.

The point is just because God wants to be with Israel doesn't mean they can casually walk with him like they did in the garden. He's not naive about what his people are like.

[9 : 50] Yet, he's still determined to have relationship. You see, the tabernacle is a quantum leap with God relating to people in the world.

And because of that, lots of people try to import that privilege onto their holy places. Whether it's the front part of a church or a grand cathedral, pilgrimages to Mecca or the Vatican, fighting over Jerusalem as the holy land.

People believe that God is present at their holy site, just as he was at the tabernacle way back in Moses' time. But he's not.

He's not. That sort of thinking has far too casual approach to sin. It hasn't understood how problematic it is for God and people to dwell together.

And even the tabernacle had curtains and restrictions and limitations. What's more, they haven't understood the shift from Old Testament tabernacle to New Testament Jesus when God himself walked the earth.

[11 : 00] The start of John's gospel says, The word was made flesh and tabernacled or dwelt amongst us. Everywhere Jesus went, his ministry brought people into the presence of God.

Even though the tabernacle was a quantum leap for Old Testament Israel, it was the envy of the nations. They would look at us and say, wow, you are the blessed ones.

You had the ministry of Jesus. A New Testament reading, which Ross brought to us, it has images of the tabernacle, which I've highlighted, imported onto the ministry of Jesus.

Therefore, since we have confidence to enter a most holy place, like from the tabernacle, by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way open for us through a curtain, that is his body.

And since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near to God. Full assurance that faith brings, having a heart sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience.

[12 : 06] That's what a tabernacle is for. And having our bodies washed with pure water. Do you want to enter the most holy place of God? There's Jesus' blood. Do you want to go past the curtain to see God?

It's by Jesus' body. Do you want to confess to a high priest? Jesus is the great one. The tabernacle was a grand design. It's amazing. Once upon a time, it was literally heaven on earth.

But now it's the ministry of Jesus that opens the door and gives us the access into the very throne room. The tone of that passage is confidence. It's assurance.

It's drawing near. See, all holy sites in the world, they all claim one thing. They all claim to be a place where you can meet God on earth. But you can't because God's throne room is in heaven. Not down here anymore. Jesus has opened the way. And I wonder what difference that would make between the Jews and the Palestinians fighting over Jerusalem.

[13 : 08] If they knew that God is not here on earth. That he's up in heaven. That it's the ministry of Jesus and not the dome on the rock that opens the way.

By all means, go to Israel for the history. Visit the Vatican for the great photos. But don't think or don't go there hoping to get closer to God.

His throne room is in heaven and not here on earth. I visited the River Jordan once and busloads of Christians would come and they'd dunk themselves in.

Because they thought getting dunked where Jesus was baptized, you know, was somehow superior to their baptisms they had as a baby in their home churches. That water, which is pretty filthy, by the way.

But that water won't bring you close to God. It's the ministry of Jesus that does it. We need to be careful when what we do competes with what Jesus has done.

[14 : 04] I don't know about you. Sometimes when I'm out there in the world, sometimes I feel only 80, 90 percent Christian, depending on how I'm going. Until I come into church with all of you and the priest says a confession, he says the assurance and then I'm 100 percent Christian again.

Do you feel like that? We need to be careful when what we do in church competes with what Jesus has done. Same goes for music. I love church music.

It's amazing. It's great to sing praises with everyone together. Great when the music is up and about. It's really fantastic. But if music brought us closer to God, then Jesus could have spared

himself the cross and just learnt the guitar instead.

We need to be careful when what we do in church competes with what Jesus has done. I've told this story probably a few times now. When I was being ordained, the archbishop commissions you by laying his hands on your head and you get his powers.

But as soon as it was over, I went outside and this lady came up to me and said, would you pray for me? And I thought, oh, okay. And she knelt down in front of me with Fed Square and Flinders Street in the background.

[15:18] I was so uncomfortable and I was like, please just stand up. But someone told me that what she thought was that just because the archbishop had just laid his hands on me and because I hadn't done anything stupid just yet, that I had all of his juice in my body.

And if I prayed for her, her prayers would be better heard than if she prayed by herself. It's a little bit laughable, isn't it? But it's a little bit sad that she doesn't realise the access that Jesus has won and not the archbishop for her already.

I know churches that use rails and ropes and sections to section off the holy place from the riffraff. No, you're not riffraff.

Sorry. Holy places from less holy places. I know churches that use the communion table and call it an altar. You know, like where sacrifices are made.

Churches that think that in the wafer and the juice, it's really Jesus in there, in those parts.

Churches that turn on red lights to sort of signify that God is now present with us.

[16:28] And people who believe in those sorts of things, they're very similar to people who make grand design homes and try to create a slice of heaven on earth.

We need to be careful about drifting away from the access Jesus alone gives us and going back to something that might look a bit impressive.

But really, it's full of limitations and restrictions and regulations like a tabernacle. It sort of seems like I'm taking away all the reasons for you to come to church.

So let me finish with a positive. Our buildings are terrific. As Glenn highlighted in his warden's report, we are thankful for them.

It's right to spend money on our buildings. This place has enabled Christians to gather and hear about Jesus for 150 years. But even if the Anglican Diocese evicts us from this place and we have to meet in a dingy hall or Ruffy Lake Park or Perish the Thought at the back of McDonald's, we need to know that we have full access to the throne room of God because of the ministry of Jesus and not because of the bricks and mortar here in this place.

[17:45] My family are desperately sad to leave HCD, but some people have already said nice things to us. But you don't have to worry if I leave because I do not bring you closer to God.

I don't even compete with Jesus. That is his job and not mine. And so if you want to be in relationship with God, just speak to him yourself in Jesus' name.

If you want to learn about God, read about him yourself in Jesus' words. Do you want God's presence? There's Jesus pouring out his spirit on the world. Do you want God's pardon?

There's Jesus dying on a cross. He's forever interceding with us, for us at the right hand of the Father. You see, we might look at holy places with reverence and awe and be wowed by the history and the grandeur.

We might look at the tabernacle with all the bling and the rich stuff and think, wow, God really lived there actually for a time and be overawed. But all of them would look at us, Solomon, David, Moses.

[18:45] They would look at us and say, wow, you've got the ministry of Jesus. Wow, you are the blessed ones. And so let's never go back to something lesser than the access that Jesus has already won for us by his body and blood through his life.

Let's pray. Father God, we are so grateful that you would bother to want to have relationship with people like us.

Thank you that you are so, the whole Bible, you are determined again and again and again to persist with people like us, that you would actually want us in your throne room. Unbelievable.

And Father, we are so grateful for the ministry of Jesus that we are the blessed ones, that we have something in Jesus that the tabernacle only had in a very limited form.

Father, help us not be overawed by holy things, by church things. Help us not compete with what Jesus has already done. We're so grateful for the access into the very throne room of heaven because of his body and blood.

[19 : 52] May we never take it for granted. In his name. Amen.