

Architecture of God's Dwelling Place

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[0 : 0 0] I want to start off by saying that I think you can tell a lot by the way buildings are laid out. So just take the kitchen, for example. Over many decades and centuries, we have seen its evolution.

So many of you will remember Downton Abbey. I took that photo myself, actually, when I was there. People remember Downton Abbey? Yes?

Do you recall where the kitchen was? Anyone? Downstairs, correct. Well, actually, there's no downstairs in the real castle, by the way.

That was just on location somewhere in the BBC Studios. But anyway, it's downstairs because it's well away from the dining room, which is upstairs, where all the upstairs people, the aristocracy, would be sitting down to eat.

And that conveys a message, doesn't it? It conveys the message that cooking and food preparation was menial tasks done by the servants. It was unsightly. And sometimes when you're working with the raw ingredients of, you know, animals, there'll be blood and guts.

[1 : 1 0] You know, yuck. And then afterwards, of course, the dirty dishes, they get washed downstairs. And so for much of the 20th century, this mentality actually lingered even in the humble family home.

The kitchen was separated from the dining area. Mom was said to be slaving in the kitchen, right? Tied to the kitchen sink.

But then about 20 or 30 years ago, something changed. I still remember the time that we drew up our plans for our first renovation. We had done the layout with the builders and then we took it to the draftsman to draw them up.

And when he looked at it, he said to me, or to us, to listen to myself, that we were very daring. Why was that? Because we wanted an open-plan kitchen.

Such an innovation. Nowadays, of course, every new home has an open-plan kitchen, right? If you don't, that means you just got it wrong.

[2 : 1 7] And what that says then is that the concept of cooking has changed, hasn't it? It's now considered a pastime or entertainment or theater even.

I mean, we've got TV shows just on cooking. It's cool now to be a celebrity chef. Master chef, as I think we've just spoken about, is coming back tomorrow.

And if you turn it on, I'm not plugging the show by any means. But there might be more illustrations or sermon illustrations in the next few weeks on that. But anyway, if you turn it on, invariably, I bet you, the contestants will be talking about how cooking is their lifelong dream, the passion that they're finally able to fulfill if they win MasterChef.

Cooking now is to be such an enviable profession, a passion that you could follow.

So nowadays, we would have our dining table right beside the kitchen, wouldn't we? So that we can see what's going on in the oven, what's happening on the stove.

- [3 : 26] When we talk about raw ingredients, we do so lovingly, don't we? People speak of its provenance, where it's come from, or how it's ethically sourced or organically grown.
- Imagine Lord Grantham coming into a modern home today and being made to sit next to the kitchen. I think he would be flabbergasted, wouldn't he?
- Anyway, the point being is, the layout of the building says a lot, doesn't it? And this is true of the tabernacle as well. Last week, we saw some items within it, and I pointed out about how it's pointing to God's dwelling and ultimately to its significance being fulfilled in Christ.
- This week, we're going to look at the architecture of the tabernacle itself. Now, I have to confess that when I first read the passage, I had no clue what this tabernacle looked like.
- I just read it a few times, still didn't know how it was all going to hang together. But thankfully, there are other scholars who have managed to put things together for us, and so we've got graphics on Google, which I've chosen one, I think, particularly helpful image, which I think is on the next slide, and it's a cutout of the tabernacle.
- [4 : 42] So just have that vision in your mind. As we go through it, it will make more sense. But the thing to notice about that diagram is that there are four layers. So the two inner curtains, and then the two outer coverings, which appear to be pegged to the ground.
- The tabernacle itself is rectangular, and it appears that at the back, the curtains and the coverings overhang to cover the back. The front, you will see, however, has a different curtain, as the passage would explain as well.
- So the passage itself, which is really just a list of instructions, can be divided up as follows in your table. So verse 1 to 6 relates to the inmost curtain, 7 to 13, the outer.
- Then verse 14, A and B, cover the two coverings that go on the outside. The instructions of the frames are then from verse 15 to 30.
- We have the curtain separating the holy and the most holy places. And then finally, we have the entrance curtain. Now, last week, I made much of God's dwelling among His people, how it's His ultimate goal for creation.
- [5 : 55] It's the climax that we see here now in Exodus. But we very soon discover, don't we, that God is not into open plan living.
- His idea of dwelling with us isn't to sit together around an open fireplace and sing Kumbaya together. Instead, what we're seeing is layers upon layers separating God from His people.
- And we haven't even got to the courtyard yet, which is next week's chapter. And what it conveys is the idea of holiness, separateness, the distinct sense that God is not like His people.
- He's holy and His people are not. Nowadays, we have an image of the loving God, so caricatured, and unfortunately by people like me, ministers in the church, that it denies almost God's holiness.
- As a consequence, we're given the sense that any human has a right to be in God's presence. That when we see Jesus, for example, we just give Him a pat on the back, put our arms around Him, and think that we're best mates with Him.
- [7 : 04] Now, perhaps when we get to heaven one day, or the new creation, we could indeed do that. But from the outset, this is not the case, is it? Humans lost that chance of open plan living with God when we were banished from the garden.
- And much as we saw last week, the tabernacle alluding or pointing back to that garden with the lampstand, for example, it's really only a reminder of an elitic setting which we have now lost.
- There is separation, which is reinforced with these four layers of the tabernacle. And so let's look a bit more closely with the first layer, which is the most interior.

We find in verse 1 that ten curtains are to be made of finely twisted linen and of color blue, purple, and scarlet. Now, I'm not quite sure what the colors are, but I think with the cherubim, they are to simulate, I think, heaven.

All this is to be done by a skilled worker, that is, to be done with the finest of craftsmanship. The curtains are joined into two lots of five, using loops and significantly, gold clasp or hooks are to be used.

[8 : 20] Then on the next slide, in verse 7, we get to the curtains of goat hair. The dimensions here are slightly larger than the inner one so that they can cover the linen curtains.

They are also to wrap around at the rear. And now, instead of gold clasp, they are to be made of bronze. And this difference in material, I hope you're going to see why in a short while.

Then in verse 14, we have two layers of leather, as we said, ram skin first, and then of another durable leather. Now, crucially, what this means, as one commentator has observed, is that leather implies dead animal skin.

All right? Dead animals. And from there, we get to verse 15 to 30. We come to the frames of the tabernacle. Now, we wouldn't go through all of it, but again, we see that they're overlaid with gold.

So are the rings through which the crossbars would go. So all the internal parts, then, are made from gold. The bases that is, into which the frames would go, are made from silver.

[9 : 31] And I think perhaps that's because they could be seen, perhaps, from outside the tabernacle. Or it could be that, perhaps, it was touching the ground. But when we then come back to the curtain for the most holy place, we come back again to that same material for the innermost layer, with cherubim, and to be made by a skilled worker.

And so, in particular, verse 35, it says, hang it with gold hooks on four poles of acacia wood overlaid with gold and standing on four silver bases. Hang the curtain from the class and place the Ark of the Law, the Covenant Law, behind the curtain.

The curtain will separate the holy place from the most holy place. Put the atonement cover on the Ark of the Covenant Law in the most holy place. Place the table outside the curtain on the north side of the tabernacle and put the lampstand opposite it on the south side.

So, on the next slide, you'll be able to see a cutout again and you'll then be able to see the location of the curtain, the Ark, the table, and then the lampstand facing it.

Well, let me finish then with the entrance curtain and then we'll come back again just to talk a bit more about the layout. So, again, the entrance curtain made up the same material of linen, same colors, but this time, no cherubim.

[10 : 49] because the entrance curtain, I believe, is visible from the outside. It says there that the poles are also made from gold, but unlike that graphic, I read the text again, it doesn't quite say, actually, that the poles need to be outside.

So, I wonder whether it's because it's still gold because the curtain, the entrance curtain, sits in front of it and so not visible from the outside. But in any case, the base, the four bases are now bronze, even lower quality than the silver bases for the others.

So, hopefully, that picture, that graphic there gives you a good picture of what it looks like and what's going on. But the more important question, I guess, is what does it all mean?

What does it signify? And as I alluded to earlier, I think it's a representation of God's holiness. holiness. It's a direct contrast to the people's lack of holiness outside the tabernacle.

The further you go into the tabernacle, the holier it becomes, as it were. Plant-based linen is meant to signify life, whereas leather points to death.

[12 : 04] Animal hair, which you take from animals but keep them alive, is somewhere in between. Likewise, gold, the most valuable, is in the innermost part of the tabernacle.

As you move out, you then move to silver and to bronze. And the fact that the inner curtains are embroidered with angels, whereas the entrance curtain doesn't, isn't, means that the inner represents holiness, the holiness of heaven, whereas outside is where earthly people, unholy people, reside.

Now, I don't want us to get the wrong picture that somehow we think, you know, the air inside the tabernacle is somehow purer, you know, that God's spirit literally resides in the tabernacle.

No, this is really just a symbolic message that God is trying to convey, that God desires to dwell with his people and his dwelling is symbolically located in the holy of holies, the most holy place.

And he's going to great lengths to do that. And yet, the spiritual reality is that God is holy and his people are not.

[13 : 16] And there is something getting in the way between true communion and fellowship between God and his people. That's the picture that he's trying to portray and that he wants his people to understand.

And when we get to the layout, the most holy place, we get that really pointed reminder, don't we? Because even, that is even separated from the holy places in it.

The most holy place and the holy place is separated by the curtain. In it, in the most holy place is the ark, God's footstool, which we talked about last week.

And as we shall see in coming weeks, the most holy place is not even a place that anyone can go to except for the high priest. and only then once a year.

That's how restricted access is. And so, if you ask me and I look at all this, it's rather sobering, isn't it? Achingly so, because here is a God who so loves his people that he's going to great lengths to dwell with them and yet, as he does, he has to keep them at arm's length or else his people will be consumed by his holiness.

[14 : 35] It kind of reminds me, not quite, but sort of, about like Bubble Boy. Remember Bubble Boy from Seinfeld? He had to be kept away from, you know, sterilized.

He needed to be lived in a sterilized environment, kept away. Of course, God is not Bubble Boy. He's not sick or anything. We are the ones that are sick. But it's that sense, isn't it? That it's, you know, try as we might to even get a touch.

We can't because of God's holiness. And so, this is the picture that God's people, Israel, had year in, year out for hundreds and hundreds of years.

When they went from the tabernacle to the temple, that's the same picture they got. When they went off to exile and then came back and they had to rebuild the temple, they had to do it again. year after year, this would have been the message that kept coming through to them generation after generation after generation.

Handed down from one generation, parents to children, and on and on and on. God is holy and we are not holy. And then, fast forward, it's into this very picture that Jesus comes.

[15 : 54] And that's why when we read John chapter 1, particularly verse 14, the picture is meant to be really, really striking. It's meant to make the Jew sit up and pay attention.

Because in verse 14, it says, the word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.

The word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. Remember, in the very first verse, the word was God, the word was with God.

So, the word is God. And those words made his dwelling, if you hear it in the Hebrew, would have been the very same words that they would have used for the tabernacle.

So, you could actually translate it something like, the word became flesh and tabernacled among us. That's how they would have heard it. John is deliberately referencing the tabernacle here and saying, as I already said last week, that God's way of dwelling with us now is ultimately by sending his son, Jesus, to come among us.

[17 : 08] And also, if you read the reference to glory in that verse, it's again a reference to the glory of God, which Israel witnessed on Mount Sinai and then at the tabernacle in the temple when the cloud of glory descended onto the tabernacle.

So, that is the picture that we then get in the New Testament when Jesus comes as the son of God. And so, I want to reflect a bit on how we now see Jesus in the light of this picture of him as the fulfillment of the tabernacle.

Because, although some things remain the same, others change as a result. Now, of course, what hasn't changed is God is holy and his people aren't.

So, Jesus, the son of God, he's still holy and those around him, his disciples, the crowd, everywhere he went, the people that were with him are not holy, were not holy.

Unfortunately, the things that keep God at arm's length from his people were still an issue. And yet, in Jesus, we find finally a human who is holy.

[18 : 18] And, he could walk among us and dwell with us without having to put up curtains. So, he didn't walk around and then there was this thing around him and people had to keep.

In fact, what happens was that when the sick and the lame touched him, instead of being destroyed, they were healed, weren't they? They could see him and as they saw him, they could see God's glory.

And so, whereas in the Old Testament, holiness was signified by gold and blue and scarlet linen and cherubim and separation, in Jesus, true holiness now is seen in what John describes as grace and truth.

Jesus had the glory of his Father full of grace and truth. Now, I don't want you to be mistaken. Grace and truth was there in the Old Testament as well.

There's no difference between the character of God in the Old and Jesus in the New because if you look at Exodus and we'll see that in a few chapters, it says that...

[19 : 31] Sorry, is everything okay there? It's okay, I'm pulling an accident.

Okay. Who is that? Oh, Quentin. Okay, Victor's a doctor, so...

Okay, let me just pause.

We'll just pray for Quentin and then I'll keep going. Father, we ask that you just put your healing hand on Quentin right now and just help him to...

Yeah, just to stabilize and we pray that the ambulance will come quickly and that Victor and others will be able to look after him. But we entrust him into your hands right now.

[20 : 50] In Jesus' name we pray. Amen. Amen. Amen. Okay.

Okay. So we come back to, as I was saying, it's not like God is different in the old and Jesus in the new, that Jesus is grace and truth in the New Testament and it's not so with God because as we see in Exodus chapter 34 and verse 5, this is what God says of himself.

The Lord, the Lord, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin.

Yet he does not leave the guilty unpunished. He punishes the children and their children for the sins of the parents to the third and fourth generation. This is a picture, isn't it, of grace and truth, even in the Old Testament, even in Exodus.

So you see, the tabernacle as God's dwelling was only ever a shadow of the reality. It was an important shadow but really, what God was doing was to try and point us to something else, something far more important, the true reality.

[22 : 02] And in Christ Jesus, we finally understand the reality of who God is. In Jesus, we really do have God in all his holiness dwelling among us.

And what's more, whereas with the tabernacle, the people continue to see how far short they fell, with Christ, what we see is that we have the hope of being holy just as God is.

Not by our own merit, but because of Jesus' death for us on the cross. But as Christ's body, we too are then now to be God's holy people.

In fact, we are in Christ. We truly are. But even as we've already been made holy by the blood of Jesus, and that's, all of us need to do that by putting our faith in Jesus and in his work on the cross.

But then what happens is that as a right response, we are then to live out that holiness. Holiness now is no longer about wearing clean clothes or washing yourself or any of those kind of things.

[23 : 09] Rather, holiness is about being full of grace and truth in our words and in our behavior to be Christ-like. It's not just about being moral and upright as some people think, being holy, holy, holier than thou, you know, smoking, drinking, although, you know, those are not good for your health, so don't do it.

But no, holiness is about living in love for one another. It's about showing patience and forbearance, being kind, willing to forgive, working to build others up, putting others ahead of ourselves.

That is the mark of holiness now, not just for us individually, but as we live together as a church, as God's people. And when we do these things, we then set ourselves apart from the world.

Because again, holiness is not about physically separating ourselves from unholy people. Because Jesus didn't do that, did he? He came and dwelt as the Holy One among sinners like us.

So when we are holy, it's not physically separating, but being in the world, living like Jesus, and yet set apart because we are full of grace and truth.

[24 : 27] And so one more final thing then, and that is, if Jesus is now the fulfillment of the tabernacle, if God now dwells with us in Christ, then we need to be careful too not to situate God's holiness in things and buildings, objects or buildings.

So for example, this church, it's not more holy than the pickering room outside. It's not. It's somehow also actually sometimes not helpful to call this the sanctuary, as though this is a more holy part of the church than others.

This raised area here is not more holy than the area that's down there. There's no most holy place and holy place in this anymore. This is a communion table for a reason. It's a table.

I don't mean by that that you disrespect it and start jumping all over it, right, as you don't do on the pews. But we ought not to be saying, oh, we can't touch this, we can't touch that because it's holy. Because holiness is not about that anymore with God, is it?

Now, I know that it's just words and so I don't want to sound like I'm being legalistic or a pedant. I don't make a big deal if you sort of, you know, call this a sanctuary, that's fine, I'm not going to correct you.

[25 : 44] But sometimes it's through the use of certain words habitually over and over again that we can build up an incorrect view, can't we, of God's holiness.

And so if the effect of using the wrong words is that over time then we begin to think wrongly about where God's holiness is, not in Christ but in things or in things that we do or whatever, then actually that's not very good, is it?

We're taking our focus away from Jesus who is the only source of holiness for us. and when we start to then trust in these things so that we have to come into the church in order to be holy as it were, something like that, then it's actually really a form of idolatry in the end, isn't it?

We're dishonoring God and Jesus by doing that. So I want to raise that not because I want to correct you, I want to sort of then, you know, we don't want to then say oh you're saved by faith or trusting in using the right words.

We're not saved by using the right words. We're saved by the blood of Jesus but having said that, it's right to use words correctly as well we can so as that we keep learning and teaching ourselves what is the right way to look at God's holiness.

[27 : 01] So here is the truth and worthy of all acceptance. The word became flesh and tabernacled with us. So let us draw near through faith in Jesus and come into God's presence to dwell with him forever.

Let's pray. Father, thank you that in Christ we are able to draw near to you, our holy God, without being consumed in our own unrighteousness. For those of us who desire to have you dwell with us, please give us faith in your son Jesus and his work.

Help us to live as your holy people. Set us apart to be a light to the world, drawing others to you through your son Jesus. In his name we pray.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Marshaal. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.
Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

[28 : 12] Amen.