

# God in our Midst

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[ 0 : 00 ] Well, today we finished the sermon series on the book of Exodus, and it's been a long sermon series. We've started back in September, and if you remember right, we started with David Short flat on his back in the parking lot, preaching this sermon at the beginning of Exodus to ambulance attendants.

David is not in attendance today, but it's not because he's sick or anything. It's just a Sunday off for him. And we have, as Eric said, been on a journey since then, on a journey with the people of Israel in this book of Exodus.

It's an amazing book, and many of you have been not only listening to a series of sermons week by week since September, but you've been studying it in various ministries throughout the church as well.

Well, I think that probably all of you have found that spending time in this book means that you are actually changed by God's word, because in Exodus we see God's purpose for us.

We see his good news. We see Jesus. We see his very nature revealed to us, and it is very good. And we finish off this book of Exodus in chapter 40 by seeing God's great purpose actually laid out for us, his purpose for the world, his purpose for his people as well.

[ 1 : 37 ] And that purpose has been made very clear throughout Exodus, and I want to remind you of it, that God goes to great lengths. He goes as far as raising up his own people and rescuing them, a whole people out of Egypt, for one reason, so that he might dwell with his people.

And that's an amazing thing in itself, but he works to dwell with the people that actually rebel against him in worshipping a golden calf.

And you see, that can only be because of his nature that we see here, that he is merciful and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin.

You see, he is the God of grace, and it is only that grace that allows his people to be in his presence, that he might dwell with him, and that they can know him in this intimate way.

So this is what Exodus has been about. God acting out of deep, steadfast love for his people, simply because he wants them close to him.

[ 2 : 50 ] He wants them to love him in return. And that's the gospel. You see, that's why God, in this incredible book, hears the prayers of those who are suffering.

He frees them from slavery. He rescues them by the Lamb at Passover. He defeats the superpowers that are arrayed against God and against his people.

It's why God provides for his people in the desert. It's why he gives them a mediator, Moses, who intercedes for them and helps them to know God. It's why God speaks to them so clearly at Mount Sinai with the Ten Commandments.

It's why God forgives them by his grace. And finally, as we see here, it is why he finally comes down to dwell with them in that tabernacle.

His clear plan is to live with his people. Now, I know that all of you are living very complicated and busy lives. But if you believe in Jesus Christ, there is a very clear plan for your complicated lives.

[ 3 : 59 ] You remember what Jesus said just before he suffered, died, and rose again. Jesus said these amazing words, which have a lot to do with Exodus. He said, Now, there's a lot of things in our lives that trouble us.

There are a lot of things that give us anxiety. We may be facing stress or pain or uncertainty about the future. We may wonder where our lives are heading.

But Jesus teaches us in those words that we are to fill our hearts with the truth that he has prepared a place that God might be with us. And that he even now is taking you and me to that place.

He tells his disciples to allow that truth to push all the other things that unsettle your heart away. That Jesus himself is the great guarantee that God our Father stops at nothing, as we see in Exodus, to dwell with you.

And so I want to bring us back to Exodus, because it brings this truth of the gospel home to us. You might know that the last third of Exodus is devoted to the tabernacle.

[ 5 : 37 ] And I'm very thankful that David preached on the tabernacle three weeks ago, because it makes my sermon much shorter this morning. You'll remember that David walked a fine actor through the church to show you what the tabernacle looked like.

The children in Sunday school are going through this as well. It's great if you go to some of the Sunday school rooms, you'll see great reenactments of what happens in Sinai.

You'll see mountains there with tents, and you'll see the tabernacle there, and you'll see fire on top of a mountain. It's quite spectacular. So we've been talking about this.

And when we look at Exodus, a huge amount of space has been devoted to it. We might wonder, why is it that Exodus spends that much time? Well, it's because the tabernacle is the crucial aspect. It is the theme that runs through the Bible, reveals the purposes of God. In a sense, that tabernacle is a miniature model of creation as God intended it to be.

[ 6 : 42 ] with relationships between people and God that are restored and healed, relationships within creation healed and restored as well.

And so in the middle of this broken and sinful world, it's like God brings a restored and renewed creation into the middle of it. And that's why if you go home this week and reread chapters 35 through 40, because I'm not going to be looking at that much, you will see depictions of fine minerals and fabrics and leather and wood and oil and incense and precious stones.

And all of those things are symbols of all that is beautiful in creation. You're also going to see symbols of reconciliation and forgiveness and peace with God in the altars that are set up.

And finally, you see in the ark, in the most holy place of the tabernacle, an ark that symbolizes the throne of the invisible God, so that in that perfect restored creation, God is living.

He is present there with his people. And this is all made, you see, those chapters in accordance to a very detailed blueprint that God gave through Moses.

[ 8 : 01 ] Literally, they are blueprints from heaven. You can say that the tabernacle comes down from heaven and invades earth. That's how extraordinary this tabernacle is.

God in all his goodness comes to dwell in the middle of a creation that has gone wrong. And you can see that movement. If you look at chapter 40, that's on page 85, verse 33.

You're going to see the movement of God coming into the midst of his creation. Immediately after verse 33, Moses has been very busy.

He has just finished setting up the whole tabernacle. Remember how large it is. The area is bigger than this church. And then Moses finished the work at the end of verse 33.

And immediately the cloud covered the tent of meeting and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle. So much so that Moses is not able to enter the tent of meeting because the cloud abode on it.

[ 9 : 15 ] Now that, there is a movement that happens. The unapproachable presence of God on the top of Mount Sinai comes down into the tabernacle in the middle of the camp of God's people.

Heaven comes to earth. And that's God's grace. That is the shape of the gospel, that God in his love comes to meet us. In that sense, Christianity is not a religion.

It's not about us trying to reach God, to find him, to somehow secure his favor. It is about God in his grace and his mercy coming to sinful people and living with them.

It is a gift that we cannot really fully appreciate, but one that we begin to understand more and more as we see the tabernacle. Now I want to just look at one more thing about the tabernacle from Exodus in chapter 29.

So if you go back to page 74, actually it's 75, right at the top left-hand corner, at verse 43, you see here the purpose of the tabernacle.

[ 10 : 27 ] And it's made really clear to us. It's a very good passage for us to remember. God says this. He says in verse 43 of chapter 29, There, in the tabernacle, I will meet with the people of Israel, and it shall be sanctified by my glory.

I will consecrate the tent of meeting and the altar. Aaron also and his sons I will consecrate to serve me as priests. And I will dwell among the people of Israel and will be their God.

And they shall know that I am the Lord their God, who brought them forth out of the land of Egypt, that I might dwell among them. I am the Lord their God. You see what's being said here.

Three times God says that I might dwell among them as their God. And you hear the word meeting emphasized several times as well. It is the place where God not only lives, but meets his people. And it is a place where there is intimacy of the relationships. And as Eric told you in the very active children's talk, which I am glad to see has actually wakened you up, this is a passage that reminds us of the whole journey of the Bible.

[ 11 : 43 ] In reading it, you think of the Garden of Eden. You think of right relationships with God and his people. You also think of the new heaven and the new earth in Revelation 21.

When John saw it, he says, I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, Behold, the dwelling of God is with people. He will dwell with them.

And they shall be his people. And God himself will be with them. Over and over again, emphasizing the presence of God with his people. And as a result, he will wipe away every tear from their eyes. And death shall be no more. Neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore. For the former things have passed away. So you see, the tabernacle is a taste of what was in the Garden of Eden, but it is also a foretaste of the day when Jesus perfectly restores creation by the power of his resurrection.

And that day is the day of healed relationship, which forever reverses sin and its effects. Anything that separates us from God and from each other.

[ 12 : 51 ] This is the inheritance that we wait for if we have faith in Jesus Christ. And you see, that's why the tabernacle is so very, very important to us.

But the question must come to us, how does that tabernacle, how does that affect me in February 2008, as I leave St. John's, as I go into my life that I live out each day, a life that is filled with many distractions, a life that is filled with busyness, that is sometimes filled with great pain, that is filled with joys that are here in earth as well, how does that affect me?

And I just want to look at two things, and it actually affects us in many more. But the first thing I want to look at is that it affects us because the Bible tells us that you and I are tabernacles, that we are tabernacles.

This is a very hard thing to wrap our minds around. When Solomon built the temple, this glorious temple, the first thing he prayed was, he said this, Will God indeed dwell on earth?

He's incredulous. Behold, heaven and the highest heaven cannot contain thee, how much less this house which I have built.

[ 14 : 14 ] How much less can the God who fills the universe come and live in the temple? And that's true of the tabernacle too. It is a mystery. It is an incredible miracle that happens that the God who made everything would reside in this tabernacle.

But in Jesus, we see how it is possible. In Jesus, we see in John 1 that the Word became flesh and he tabernacled with us.

He dwelt among us, full of grace and truth, and we have beheld his glory, glory as the only Son from the Father. You see, Jesus came from heaven to dwell with us in the middle of this broken world as the tabernacle of God.

And so when people place their trust in him, we know from Scripture that God the Holy Spirit comes to dwell in each of us as well, right at the center of our broken lives.

You and I become like tabernacles. This is why Paul says in 1 Corinthians 6, Don't you know that your body is a tabernacle or a temple of the Holy Spirit within you whom you have from God?

[ 15 : 23 ] You're not your own. You've been bought with a price. So glorify God in your body. You see what's going on here. The Bible is telling us something completely counter-cultural.

The world says use your body to fulfill your wishes and your desires. But God says use your body to fulfill his desires because you are his temple.

And I think this is one of the great gifts of Lent that it reminds us to take inventory of our lives and to consider what we are doing with our bodies. What do you use your body for?

Is it to glorify God? What are the things that you can repent of that does not glorify him? What are the things that I can change in my relationships, in my thought life, in the things that I say so that I really reflect the truth that God has made me his tabernacle, his temple in this broken world?

And the second thing I'd like to say about the tabernacle is that not only does it mean give us an understanding of what God does for us and making us his tabernacle, but knowing what the

tabernacle is replaces anxiety with a strong sense of God's purpose and his leading.

[ 16 : 48 ] It replaces anxiety. So at the end of chapter 40, at the very end of Exodus, chapter 36, so it's right at the very bottom of page 85, it says that throughout all their journeys, wherever the cloud was taken up from over the tabernacle, the people of Israel would go onward.

But if the cloud was not taken up when they did not go onward, then they did not go onward until the day that it was taken up. For throughout all their journeys, the cloud of the Lord was upon the tabernacle by day, and fire was in it by night in the sight of all the house of Israel.

You see what's being said here is that it becomes clear that because God comes to dwell in the tabernacle, God will fulfill his purposes for his people. He's going to travel with them to the place that God has promised to them.

We know that at Sinai, the people of Israel were in a time of anxiety. When they left, they must have wondered where are we going? Who will our enemies be?

Who's going to be our friend? How are we going to survive in the desert? Well, the great blessing of the tabernacle is that it was movable, that God moved with them and ahead of them.

[ 18 : 22 ] And the thing that's emphasized at the end of Exodus is that it happens in all of their journeys. The presence of God was with them. And this was their great strength and their great comfort.

It meant that the God who began the rescue of them in Egypt through the Red Sea and in the desert would actually carry out his work to completion.

The great work was to wait on the presence of God to go where he goes and to stay where he stays. That was their great work in response to what God had been doing.

And I think for us, we need to understand that we are on a similar journey. That God has assured us of the final destination. that it is the place of being present with him in perfect relationship with him. But in the meantime, we are on a journey as well. We are on a journey where God is with us. In Matthew 28, the disciples doubted Jesus, some of them.

[ 19 : 27 ] He gave them a commission of a worldwide mission. And he tells them to make disciples of all nations. But he ends that commission by saying this incredible phrase.

He says, I am with you always to the close of the age. And always literally means every day I am with you to the close of the age.

You see, through Jesus, you see echoes of the final verses of Exodus, of the book of Exodus. God has put us on a journey in each of your lives and at St. John's as a parish as well.

And it's a journey that we cannot predict. It is a journey that may give us some anxiety as well. But what is certain is that like Exodus, the God who has rescued you from darkness into his marvelous light will lead us to the close of the age through Jesus Christ.

He will lead us to the new creation that the tabernacle is a foretaste of. Not only will he lead us, but he will be present with us. We will be in fellowship with him. We will move when he moves and we will stop when he stops.

[ 20 : 39 ] That's why we have joy right now in our salvation. Jesus makes each of us his tabernacle. He makes his congregation his tabernacle, which means that he leads us and we move with him on that journey.

And so our great work is simply that we follow him and that we enjoy his presence, love the presence, love the relationship that God has given to us through Jesus Christ our Lord and ask for his strength that we might be faithful to him in that journey.

Amen.