

Preparing the Royal Residence

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Date: 03 February 2008

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[0 : 0 0] Well now if you would open your Bibles at Exodus on page 69, we're going to do chapters 25, 26, 27, 28, 29, 30 and 31.

Why don't you feel a little bit of the pain of that so I had some of the curtain rods read for us in the second lesson. So it's on page 69 and I'm deeply disturbed that Dan should drop a few lines from the creed.

I'm wondering who to report him to. In the late 1800s, if you went to London in England, the one church that you had to go to was the Metropolitan Tabernacle where you could hear the remarkable Baptist preacher, Mr. Charles Spurgeon.

And I have here from the London Times, I think it's from the London Times, an advertisement. taken from September 1888. The Reverend C.H. Spurgeon's Metropolitan Tabernacle is advertising a series of addresses on the tabernacle in the wilderness, explaining the way to be saved to be delivered by Mr. Benjamin Short, evangelist from Australia.

There's more. The lecture will be illustrated by a magnificent model of the tabernacle, 168 feet square with various diagrams.

[1 : 3 1] I think that's good. And then Mr. Spurgeon writes, And then the paper goes on to say, and I just finished with this, Mr. Benjamin Short of Sydney, after 29 years' residence in Australia and New Zealand, is paying a brief visit to his native country.

Mr. Short is a regularly accredited evangelist of large experience, who, after a highly successful business career, is giving himself wholly for the remainder of his life to mission work.

To the energy which a younger man might envy, Mr. Short adds the advantage of a voice which it is a treat to listen to.

Now that's the first time an Australian accent has been held up. And the high spiritual endowments of one who has acquired, by years of earnest effort, the power to persuade to good and beguile from evil.

Isn't that great? That's my great, great grandfather. How about that? We have... No, no, no. He was brethren.

[2 : 5 9] His son also was Benjamin, who married an Anglican.

He was the black sheep of the family. Now, I could tell you lots of stories about great, great grandfather, but I want to take you back to the Bible.

You may know that these chapters on the tabernacle have been a happy hunting ground for all sorts of wild and crazy Christian speculation ever since the church was founded.

Every curtain rod and curtain ring suddenly becomes symbolic of some great and eternal thing. And I think if you read through the book of Exodus, when you come on these chapters, it's like skiing down the hill and suddenly you hit the mud.

You know, we've been moving so fast with so much drama and now we get seven chapters on how to build a special tent. When I was in seminary, I chose to do a project on these chapters because I just couldn't understand why Moses would interrupt this brilliant narrative arc with chapter after chapter on, you know, priests' ephods and undergarments and, I mean, we've had plagues of locusts and we've had hail of fire and we've had parting of the sea and, you know, now we have seven chapters here and then another six chapters, 13 chapters in all of blue curtains, red curtains, scarlet curtains, rods, rings, stones, altars, priests, literally thousands of details.

[4 : 44] I had a huge surprise and I discovered that great-great-grandfather Benjamin was right. This is the point of the book of Exodus and it is like the Bible in miniature and you get some idea of the importance because 13 chapters are given to it and I want you to, I would really love for you to feel as we go through this section that our hearts are being drawn back to the Garden of Eden and forward through Jesus to heaven and we see who God is and who we are and it's just a delight and the more you look at it, the more wonderful it is.

Where are we? Well, God has rescued his people and brought them to himself at Mount Sinai. Remember chapter 19? Then he gives them the Ten Commandments, chapter 20 and last week we saw that stunning passage where God invites Moses and 70 of the elders up on the mountain and he shares a meal with them.

And now God, now Moses is at the top of the mountain, you remember, and for 40 days and 40 nights he stops at the top of the mountain and during those 40 days and 40 nights what God does is give him these instructions and this is what he tells him to do.

He says, I want you to build, I want you to get all the people together and bring their gold and precious stones and linens and embroidery and art and craft and build an ark then a table then plates and jugs and bowls and a lampstand and a tent and a courtyard and utensils and an altar and barbecue tongs and priest's clothing and then there's instruction on how to ordain the priests and wash them and make them holy and then there's instruction on the sacrifices and then in chapter 31 there's this amazing little detail where God says, my spirit, my Holy Spirit will hover over the creation of this thing which is like Genesis chapter 1 of course.

Now, I'm a visual thinker and I find all these details hard to keep in mind so I wonder if you'd take out your bulletin please and turn to the back where I have the tabernacle diagram.

[7 : 11] St John's, this building is about two thirds the size of the tabernacle so this building would fit inside the tabernacle with a third to spare and I'm going to ask Dan to play the part of Aaron to walk us through what it would be like entering into the tabernacle so go to the doors Dan which actually that direction should be east and he's going to enter at the right hand side of the diagram as you can see it there.

You with me? And first he comes across a screen as he approaches and he comes through the screen as the priest and he's got he's got a goat in one hand stop there that's good Dan and he's got a family who have bought the goat to be sacrificed for their sins so Aaron takes his hand and places it on the head of the goat and confesses their sins on the goat then he takes a knife and kills the goat oh he got better than at nine o'clock I'll tell you then he places the goat on a massive altar and burns the goat as a sacrifice to God and he takes the blood from the goat and turns around and sprinkles it on the family sins are forgiven then he comes forward to a wash bowl which is about there and in the wash bowl he washes himself as a priest and he comes forward to the actual tent that's the outer court you see which does not have a roof over it and when he comes to about here he comes to the tabernacle proper stop that's where the let's say that's the second veil he goes through the second veil and into this room which is called the holy place and in the holy place to his right is a table with jugs and bread and plates and those sorts of things on this side there's a lamp stand with seven lamps and beautiful solid gold and in front of him if he steps forward there's a little altar of incense that burns cinnamon and acacia and myrrh and the most beautiful odours day and night and then through another curtain there's the inner room which is called the most holy place and there in the most holy place is the ark and inside the ark are the ten commandments thank you Aaron that was good now we don't have time for many details but the question is why does God do this and how does God do this they're the two questions

I want to ask so firstly then why does God give seven chapters of instruction to Moses why does he want why does he want him to build this intricate tabernacle and if you look down at chapter 25 verse 8 he says let them make me a sanctuary a holy place that I may dwell and that's the same root as tabernacle I might dwell in their midst according to all I show you concerning the pattern of the dwelling tabernacle and all of its furniture so you shall make it and then over in chapter 29 verse 43 speaking of the ark there I will meet 29:43 there I'll meet with the people of Israel it shall be made holy sanctified by my glory I will consecrate make holy the tent of meeting and the altar

Aaron also and his sons I will make holy to serve me as priests and I will dwell among the people of Israel and I will be their God and they will 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 the tabernacle is a luxury tent the people of God are camping and God wants to come and dwell in the midst of his people it's like a mobile residence if you will a little place where the God of all the earth wants to come and live with his people it's beautiful it's like a continuation of last week the meal on the mountain God doesn't want that meal just to be a temporary one-off thing as I say but since the beginning of creation God wants us to be in friendship with us with him to dwell with us that's what God wants he wants communion with us you know in some religions people are taught to submit to their God but the biblical

God wants us to participate in his life that's the bottom line and all the details of curtain rods and curtain rings they're all shaped around the one who wants to come and dwell he will be the central resident all the other camp all the other tribes will put their tents around this tabernacle and because God is holy he has to sanctify make holy everything every barbecue tong every piece of furniture the priests so that his glory can dwell in the midst of his people and the thing about it is there's nothing random about the construction of the tabernacle did you notice in 25:9 God says build this according to the pattern that I give to you and he mentions this a couple of other times in these chapters in other words God is saying this tent and the ark and the tabernacle are based on a spiritual reality of my dwelling in heaven it is like a physical representation of what's really going on

[13 : 19] God's home in heaven isn't that amazing the tabernacle is like a copy of the heaven reality a symbolic representation patterned on God's heavenly dwelling it's as though God who lives in heaven wants to come and dwell on earth and so this is the pattern which is just another sign of God's astounding grace and humility and that's why it has the feeling of creation and heaven at the same time the splendor of the precious jewels and the stones and the fabrics and the poles are all reflect and all affirm the creation even the stones on the priest's breastplates come from Genesis chapter 2 the perfect dimensions which are all seven fold are like God bringing order into chaos as he did in Genesis 1 and the presence of God which sits enthroned on the cherubim above the box above the ark show that God has not given up on this world but he wishes to bring his presence into this world he hasn't given up he hasn't forgotten the beauty of creation and his purpose of blessing and so he sets up a little cosmic holy world if you will in the midst of this lost world are you with me if you just take the lamp for an illustration it's made out of pure gold and it's carved with flowers and almonds and fruitfulness and it blazes like a little burning bush if you will and it's the symbol of part of the symbol of God coming to dwell and it echoes the tree of life from the garden of Eden it's like God is taking all that we lost in the garden and bringing it to us and making it available to his sinful people outside of the garden by means of these symbols symbols it's why symbols we know are very important aren't they symbols they stir our affections they make us long for something greater and symbols when they're given to us by God communicate something of the heart of God and kindle our love for him that's why there's no surprise that there's this table with jug and cups and plates and bread for the priests

God wants to share his fellowship meal with them and that's why it's no surprise that Jesus uses the symbolism of the meal the covenant meal the bread and the wine in the symbolism of the Lord's Supper when we feed on Christ in our hearts by faith we have spiritual fellowship with Christ and with one another and we long for the day when we will sit at table with him in the kingdom this is the whole point of the Exodus it's not just to bring his people out of slavery it's not just to show that he is Lord of all the earth it's to be with us it's to meet with us it's to have fellowship with us that we might participate in life that's the why and secondly the how how does God intend to come and dwell with his people and the answer is the ark and I want to speak for the rest of our time really on the ark I don't know if you've ever thought about it but when the tabernacle was up and running it would have been almost too beautiful for words but also an assault on the senses constant sacrifice the blood of animals the barbecuing of meat the sweet smell of incense the cloud of God's presence dwelling there fire, smoke, light and sound a huge churning roiling reality at the centre of the camp with smells and sounds and sights of death and life of terror and beauty of glory and forgiveness of holiness and hope and at the heart of the tabernacle is the ark of the covenant the box it's the first thing that God tells Moses to make and everything the curtains and the sacrifices everything reflects the ark and the ark presents us with two opposite realities two almost conflicting realities and I want you to think with me on this the first is the ark shows us the reality of our sin see we've joined

Adam and Eve in their rebellion against God we live outside the garden we can no longer walk with God just as we are God's holiness is now unapproachable again and again and again through these chapters read them please again and again God says if you do this if you don't make these preparations you will die if the priest goes in without washing he will die and later on tradition has it that when the priest went into the Holy of Holies once a year he went in with a rope tied around his leg in case he did die and we know later in the Old Testament when someone casually put out their hand and touched the ark he died as well why?

the reason is because in the box covered with gold is the Ten Commandments that's why it's called the Ark of Testimony it's God's testimony to what is good and what is holy and the Ten Commandments are good and holy and explain what holiness is and what God requires but there's only one problem isn't there?

we all break them all the time we all break all of them all the time and even though the commandments are right and true and good sitting there in the box at the centre of the camp they expose our sin and our failing and the stubborn evil of our hearts at the centre of Israel's camp is a permanent reminder of the burning purity and glory of God as well as a reminder of our permanent grubby hearts and we cannot get around this brothers and sisters we have all sinned we all fall short of the glory of God we know this none of us can stand in his presence on our own merits none of us are clean none of us are holy by ourselves none of us have loved God with all our heart mind, soul and strength none of us have loved our neighbour of us as ourselves and this is the first reality of the ark it is the law the ten commandments which were given to show us how to live in love actually show us the infinite distance and alienation between us and God but there is a second and an opposite side to the ark and it is the lid the lid it is made of pure gold and it fits exactly over the ark and on top of the ark were carved of pure gold two cherubim these powerful angelic creatures wings and faces and they hold their wings up one on this side and one on the other side of the ark they hold their wings out to each other and their faces look down to the lid of the ark and that becomes the throne where God comes and sits and if you look in chapter 5 from chapter 25

[21 : 03] I'm sorry from verse 20 onwards the lid is called literally the atonement cover and it's this lovely translation of it here mercy seat and it was soon stained with the blood of bulls and goats which covered sin the lid is not just a covering for the ark the lid covers our failings of the ten commandments you see so as God looks down from heaven he doesn't as he sits on the throne and he doesn't just see how we've broken his ten commandments he looks down and he sees the blood which covers our sins which he has provided for the lid is the key and the centre of the tabernacle that is where God meets his people and the blood on the lid transforms the throne of judgement into the mercy seat which is wonderful and wonderful and wonderful

Matthias says this he's a commentator the lid represents the triumph of mercy over wrath of forgiveness over offence of admission over exclusion of the unmerited working of grace over well deserved judgement that's why God put cherubim on the lid when did we last meet cherubim you remember when Adam and Eve were evicted from the garden of Eden God put cherubim at the gate the flaming sword turned every way so that no human could come back in and plunder the tree of life and be lost forever and now as the throne of God on top of the ark the cherubim gaze downward on the blood of atonement the blood of covering which is shed adoring God's grace and his welcome of sinners this the lid the ark this is the way past the cherubim this is the way back to the tree of life this is why God can now come and dwell with his people he provides the way it's wonderful and if you if you're interested look through all the details and you'll see that the priest goes in the high priest goes in with the judgment of God on his breast and the judgment of God is these are my people they are my precious possession my precious jewels

I wish I had time today to look at more of this I think you can build a theology of Christian aesthetics from the ark that's in the tabernacle and you can see some of the connections through Christ to creation and heaven but I want to finish and I want to just point out to you that this this is the message of Exodus this is where we've been going and there are three fulfillments three primary ways in which this is all fulfilled for us the first and most obviously is Jesus himself we know that Jesus is the tabernacle do you remember in John's gospel when John says how Jesus left heaven and became a human it says that the word became flesh and tabernacled it's exactly the same word amongst us full of grace and truth the whole fullness of God dwelt in Jesus Christ he came as the lamb of God he's the one that was sacrificed he came as the high priest taking his own blood into the holy place so that we have access to God and in Jesus death our sins are not just covered they're obliterated it is through his blood we enter the most holy place it's through faith in him we have access to the father which has radical implications for what we do together as a church and has radical implications for life but we don't have time to look at them

I just point out to you that Jesus is the first fulfillment the second fulfillment as Dan said today is us it's the church and every congregation we are the tabernacle of God because God by his Holy Spirit dwells amongst us in 1 Corinthians the apostle says do you not know that you not singular you plural are God's temple are God's temple and the God's spirit dwells in you if anyone destroys God's temple God will destroy him for God's temple is holy and that temple you are it's pretty good isn't it writing to a Christian congregation which is struggling with arrogance and division and sexual immorality and in Ephesians the apostle says that the church not the building we are built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets

Christ Jesus is our cornerstone in whom the whole building is joined together and grows into a holy temple of the Lord in whom you are built for a dwelling place of God in the spirit it's astounding isn't it it's one thing to say that Jesus is the fulfillment this is a totally different thing to say that we as God's people are the fulfillment and the only way of course that can be true is if we do build on the foundation of the apostles and prophets and if we do have Christ Jesus as our cornerstone and remain true to the gospel and build on Jesus Christ and the more we build on him and the more we trust him and the more we live lives as holy people being transformed by his word and not by the culture the Holy Spirit dwells amongst us and as we allow God's spirit to write the law in our hearts we grow to be the holy tabernacle loving God loving our neighbors we are the second fulfillment and of course there is a third fulfillment not just Jesus and not just us but we wait for the great consummation in heaven if you have your

[27 : 23] Bible on your knee would you open it to the last book of the Bible I want to read a few verses from Revelation 21 as we finish Revelation 21 page 241 at the back verse 3 I heard a loud voice from the throne saying behold the tabernacle dwelling of God is with men he will dwell with them and they will be his people we are looking into heaven and God himself will be with them he will wipe away every tear from their eyes death shall be no more neither shall there be mourning nor crying nor pain anymore for the former things have passed away and he who sat upon the throne said behold I make all things new also he said write this for these words are trustworthy and true and he said to me it is done

I am the alpha and the omega the beginning and the end to the thirsty I will give from the fountain of the water of life without payment he who conquers shall have this heritage and I will be his God and he shall be my son but as for the cowardly the faithless the polluted as for murderers fornicators sorcerers idolaters and all lies their lot shall be in the lake which burns with fire and sulfur which is the second death it's a solemn passage but it gives us a brief view into heaven and what we find is that it's much better than the garden of Eden all that was good in the garden is there and it's now in a city and all the beauty and glory of the symbols of the garden are transformed so now that we don't just wear gold on the outside now gold a kind of a translucent pure gold becomes the streets of the heavenly city and the paradise is filled with people people from whom evil is banished and everything that is wicked is put outside and it's very striking that the first on the list are those who are cowards not anxious not fearful but those who worship what is comfortable those who compromise the holiness of god preferring the approval of men than gods but it is meant to be an encouragement to us we look back today and we see the death of Jesus Christ we see our great high priest who has taken our sins we are conscious as we look around at each other the Holy Spirit is in our midst bearing fruit and we look forward to the promise that God will dwell with us and we with him face to face that we will have eternal and true intimacy with him where he'll wipe away every tear from our eyes where we will have unbroken unhindered access to his glory and to his power and to his presence and these words brothers and sisters are trustworthy and true amen