

Text: Exod. 25:8-9

Title: "What was the tabernacle?"

Time: 3/12/2022 am

Place: NBBC

Introduction: We have come to the final section of Exodus in our study of the book. *Exodus* means *the way out*. It was written by Moses as his inspired eye-witness account of God's dealings with the offspring of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in fulfillment of the promise He made to Abraham in Genesis 15:13-14, "And he said unto Abram, 'Know of a surety that thy seed shall be a stranger in a land that is not theirs and shall serve them; and they shall afflict them four hundred years. And also that nation, whom they shall serve, will I judge: and afterward shall they come out with great substance.'" The Exodus was God's idea.

The "strange land" of that promise was Egypt, and the affliction came when a Pharaoh arose who no longer recognized Joseph's contributions to their land. It came in the form of chattel slavery. God worked a miracle to free His people from this slavery, and this redemption pictures the miracle He can accomplish for the poor lost sinner in bondage to the presence, power, and consequence of his sin.

Triggering that redemption is the blood of the Passover lamb. The little lamb or kid was slain on the night the death angel of the tenth plague was to pass through. Where its blood was applied to the lintel and doorposts of a home in the shape of a cross, the judgment of God's death angel passed over, and the household was saved. When it comes to the salvation of a poor lost sinner, Jesus is the Lamb of God slain from the foundation of the world that the judgment of God might pass over us too.

That miracle of redemption takes the reader of Exodus through the first eighteen chapters of the book. Beginning in chapter 19, God's Word through Moses begins to explain what the changed life of a redeemed child of God is like. In chapter 19, that explanation begins with the truth that the life of the redeemed is a covenantal life, a life secured under the promise of God. Next, the section we just finished, chapters 20-24, explains that the life of the redeemed is a lawful life. Whereas once God's law condemned us, now it is written on our hearts and has become our delight.

With this final section of the book about the tabernacle, we learn that the life of the redeemed is a worshipful life. Jesus told the Samaritan woman at the well, "Ye worship ye know not what: we know what we worship: for salvation is of the Jews. But the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeketh such to worship him. God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth" (John 4:22-24). Our God seeks to be worshipped. The Father redeems a people that they might trust His promise, obey His laws, and worship Him in Spirit and in truth.

Jesus says of the Jews, "we know what we worship." In the chapters of Exodus, which we are going to be studying together in the coming weeks, the Jews begin to learn what Jesus said they had come to know. They learn how to worship their Redeemer, and at the center of this instruction is a small structure that can be described accurately as a tent. Most of what remains in Exodus is about this tent and what it teaches us about worshipping the true God.

This morning I want us to take a bird's eye view and answer the question, "What was the tabernacle?" It was a structure; and it was a tent; but it was also much more. I want us to understand five answers to this question this morning.

I. The tabernacle was God's holy place (Exod. 25:8; 29:43).

Illustration: *Glory* is one of those terms that can be difficult to define. You know it when you see it, but you cannot define it precisely. As creatures made in the image of God, humans are especially able to apprehend the glory of things in a way that other creatures are not. For instance, both bears and humans go fishing. When a bear catches an enormous river trout, what does he do? Well, he eats it, curbs his hunger with it, and so looks for another.

What does a human fisherman do when he catches an enormous river trout? Well, he first notices that it is a beautiful rainbow trout. Then he spends some time being amazed at its size and reflecting on how rare a catch this is. If he is alone, he worries that none of his friends are going to believe him when he tells them about this tremendous catch, so he whips out his cell phone and takes a selfie that he can send to all his friends. And then he builds a fire, seasons the fish just right, and enjoys not only the taste of that delicious meal, but also the sense of accomplishment and blessing he feels from a great day fishing.

A bear cannot apprehend the glory of fishing. A human can.

Application: When humans apprehend the glory of something or someone, they come to appreciate its true value and to enjoy its great features. The first question of the *Westminster Catechism* is, "What is the chief end of man?" That is a big question. It also gives the Bible's answer: "The chief end of man is to love God and to enjoy Him forever." To apprehend the glory of God is to love and enjoy Him forever.

The text tells us that the tabernacle is a *sanctuary*, which in the Bible means a *holy place*. It also tells us that what makes this place holy is that God's glory is there in a way that it is

not in other places. As a holy place, made so by the glory of God, the tabernacle was to be set apart for special worshipful purposes, and the overriding purpose was for worshippers to apprehend God's glory.

If catching a fish out of a river is glorious, how much more glorious is the God who made the fish and the river and the water in the river and the fire that cooks the fish, etc.? God wants His redeemed people to worship Him by recognizing, not only the glory of things like a fish in a river, but also its Creator's glory in His holy place. Do we see the importance of this experience in our lives?

Those who see the glory of God in His holy place see Jesus Christ. John uses the word *tabernacle* as a verb in John 1:14, where he describes the incarnation of the Son of God, the eternal Word. *Incarnation* means *to take on human nature*. When Jesus was conceived in the womb of Mary, the second person of the Trinity obtained human nature. When John explains this, he literally says God's Son *tabernacled* among us: "And the Word became flesh and dwelt [tabernacled] among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory of the only begotten Son, full of grace and truth."

We worship when we apprehend the glory of God in His holy place; we worship when we behold the glory of God in Jesus Christ. Have we come to worship God this morning?

II. The tabernacle was God's home (Exod. 25:8; 34:26).

Illustration: You have heard the adage from *The Wizard of Oz*, "There's no place like home." That is true. There is something special about home. It is the house that belongs to me; the place where I dwell; the place where I live with my family. In a very real sense, for me, wherever Maureen is, that is my home.

Application: The Bible calls the tabernacle God's home, His dwelling place and His house. We know from Num. 2:3-9 that the tabernacle was to be placed in the middle of the camp with three tribes to the east, three to the north, three to the west, and three to the south. God is worshipped as the one who is at home, dwelling in the middle of His people.

Remember that the Bible begins with God doing that with Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. But already in the third chapter of Genesis, we find that man sins, that sin breaks man's fellowship with God, and man is expelled from the presence of God. God is no longer at home with him. The Garden is now guarded against reentry by flaming swords.

But the message of the tabernacle is that redemption reverses that sad situation in the life of the sinner. The tabernacle teaches us that God is at home again amid the redeemed.

The tabernacle also teaches us how that is done. As Moses describes the furniture of the tabernacle, he begins with the ark of the covenant that was placed in the holy presence of God, and he ends with instructions for the bronze altar upon which animals would be sacrificed. Sinful man could not go into the holy of holies to God, but God could go into the courtyard to sinful man. He could meet him at the altar of sacrifice. Through the sacrifice of Calvary, represented by the bronze altar, God could dwell with man again.

And here again we find Jesus, whose name is Immanuel – God with us (Matt. 1:20-23, "But while [Joseph] thought on these things, behold, the angel of the Lord appeared unto him in a dream, saying, 'Joseph, thou son of David, fear not to take unto thee Mary thy wife: for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Ghost. And she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name Jesus: for he shall save his people from their sins.' Now all this was done, that it might be

fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet, saying, 'Behold, a virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel,' which being interpreted is, God with us"). Is God with you? Are you with Him? Has he found you at home at Calvary?

III. The tabernacle was God's design (Exod. 25:9, 40).

Illustration: I do not know much about the construction industry, but I can venture a guess that when it comes to buildings, very few of them go up having followed the architect's designs to the last millimeter. The architectural designs of humans are prone to error and often have to be adjusted.

Application: One of the things God wants us to learn from the tabernacle is that when it comes to the way the redeemed people of God worship, the Architect and Designer of that worship is God Himself. Our text emphasizes the truth that the details of God's design were to be followed exactly in an interesting literary way. The reason there are so many chapters in Exodus on the tabernacle (25-40) is in part because the first chapters explain the blueprint of the structure and the later chapters explain the building of the structure. The building chapters are repetitive, item by item, of the blueprint chapters. That feature of the text emphasizes that fact that the Designer's specifications were followed exactly.

Jesus is God's design for our redemption from sin's bondage. We cannot design our own. Acts 4:12, "Neither is there salvation in any other; for there is none other name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved." For us to be saved, we must have a Savior who is exactly Jesus Christ. He is the one God designed for our salvation.

Remember too what Jesus told the Samaritan woman about the worship of the Samaritan culture. He said, "Ye worship

ye know not what: we [Jews] know what we worship." God not only designed our Redeemer; He has also designed the worship of our Redeemer. The tabernacle was His design for the worship of Old Testament believers prior to Solomon; the local church assembly is His design for the worship of New Testament believers like us today (Heb. 10:19-25). Are we following God's design for worshipping Him?

IV. The tabernacle was God's meeting place (Exod. 29:42-43).

Illustration: The road our firehouse is on is Meetinghouse Hill Rd. It is called that because the meetinghouse of the Presbyterians used to be up that hill. That label *meetinghouse* comes from one of the names God gives Israel's tabernacle.

Application: Hebrews 10 tells us that, when we assemble as God's church, we draw near to our Great High Priest, the Lord Jesus Christ. In Matthew 18, the one gospel passage that mentions the local church, Jesus promises to meet with two or three who are gathered in His name.

Illustration: My wife will tell you that it is one thing to be at home with me, and another entirely different thing to meet with me. Sometimes she calls that meeting "couch time," but it is always a time and a place during which we give each other our attention.

To worship the Lord corporately is to meet with Him as His people at a certain time and in a certain place. Those times of meeting at the tabernacle would be defined later on for Israel. For us, it is whenever we agree to meet as a local church, especially on the Lord's Day following the example of the risen Christ and His disciples. Meeting this way is very important when it comes to worshipping in spirit and in truth. When we do so we meet not just one another. We meet the Lord Himself together.

V. The tabernacle was God's testimony (Exod. 25:21, 38:21).

Application: One of the important pieces of furniture we will study is the ark of the covenant, which was placed in the holiest place within the structure. The two tables of stone made the ark of the covenant the ark of testimony, and the same is true for the tabernacle as a whole. It is the tabernacle of testimony because God's Word was there. Jesus is the Word, the light of the world, and the world needs His testimony. There is a mission when it comes to worship. The mission is that Jesus is worthy of the worship of everyone, so we are to make disciples, baptize them, and teach them all the commandments of our Savior.

Conclusion: The tabernacle was God's holy place, God's home, God's design, God's meeting place, and God's testimony to the world. As such, it is all about God's Son, Jesus Christ. Can you see His glory this morning? Can you see He is worthy of our worship in God's holy place, at home with Him, according to His design, to meet and testify of Him?

"A man came—I think it was actually in Philadelphia—on one occasion to the great George Whitefield and asked if he might print his sermons. Whitefield gave this reply; he said, 'Well, I have no inherent objection, if you like, but you will never be able to put on the printed page the lightning and the thunder.' That is the distinction—the sermon, and the 'lightning and the thunder.' To Whitefield this was of very great importance, and it should be of very great importance to all preachers, as I hope to show. You can put the sermon into print, but not the lightning and the thunder. That comes into the act of preaching and cannot be conveyed by cold print. Indeed it almost baffles the descriptive powers of the best reporters."

—David Martin Lloyd-Jones,

*Preachers and Preaching*