

Text: Exod. 25:10-22, 37:1-9

Title: "God's design for the ark of the covenant"

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Introduction: Some of you have great gifts to build things with your hands, like Bezalel and Oholiab of the book of Exodus. I do not count myself numbered among you. In fact, I can only remember ever building one thing out of wood that is still in use today. It is a small box made of walnut and lined with cedar that is called a *hope chest*. A hope chest is a box in which a lady may store things in the hope that she would someday be married. I built this hope chest for Maureen when we were engaged. It is special to me, in part, because my grandfather helped me with the work. Its dimensions are about $2 \frac{1}{3}$ cubits long (40 inches), about a cubit wide (18 inches), and just over a cubit tall (20 inches).

When we read the word *ark* in our English Bibles, we are either reading about Noah's ark, a big sea-worthy ship, or the ark of the covenant, a chest that is similar in some ways to the piece of furniture I made for Maureen. In Hebrew, these are two different words. The word used for the ark of the covenant simply means *a box* or *a chest*. In Gen. 50:26, the box is a coffin. In 2 Kings 12:9, the box is used for collecting an offering to repair the temple.

Here, the box has a sacred use. It is the central piece of furniture for God's tabernacle, which is designed to deliver a message from God to His people. Just like I wanted to deliver a message of my covenantal love to my wife-to-be with a hope chest, the God of Israel designed this box as a message of His covenantal love for His people. That is why this box is called "the ark of the covenant" (Num. 10:33).

This morning I want us to interpret this message of covenantal love in three ways. The message of the ark of the covenant includes the love of God's Son, the love of God's throne, and the love of God's salvation. We find Jesus Christ at the center of this symbolism. He is God's Son; He is the Great King; and He is the Righteous Sacrifice.

I. The ark reveals the love of God's Son – Jesus is the God-Man (25:10-11).

Illustration: "The golden ratio" is a part of the history of art. Some 2,500 years ago a Greek sculptor and mathematician named Phidias theorized that a ratio of 1:1.618 created an aesthetically pleasing proportion. He used it in his work as a sculptor. Other famous artists like Botticelli and Da Vinci also used this golden ratio in their work. Today, the ratio is used to identify facial beauty. Studies have shown that in all cultures, a beautiful face is judged more beautiful the closer it comes to the golden ratio between a face's width and height. If a face has a higher ratio, it is less beautiful because it is too long and narrow. If it has a lower one, the problem is it is too short and wide.

Application: I mention that because we have an emphasis on the dimensions of the ark of the covenant here, which is difficult to interpret. Its length was to be 2.5 cubits, and its width and height 1.5 cubits. Why so? There are many theories, but I would suggest that these dimensions are a simplified version of the golden ratio (1:1.667). In other words, the Lord designed something beautiful when He designed the ark, and these dimensions contribute to its beauty.

As a representation of the love of God's Son, the ark would have to be something well pleasing in the eyes of the Lord. God the Father sees the beauty of His Son. Isaiah's promise

of the coming of Messiah said so: "Behold my servant, whom I have chosen; my beloved, in whom my soul is well pleased" (Matt. 12:18; Isa. 42:1).

At both the baptism and the transfiguration of the Lord Jesus, the Father says from heaven, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased" (Matt. 3:17, 17:5). To be in Christ is to have the Father see us the way He sees His Son. Jesus is well pleasing in the Father's eyes, and if we are in Him, because of Him so are we.

Less mysterious is the symbolism of the shittim wood and the pure gold used to construct the ark.

The pure gold represents the deity of Christ. Pure gold can be hammered into a shape as with the cherubim (v. 18), but the gold of the ark and the gold of the mercy seat are not hammered. Jesus was not created, but rather He is the eternal God in the beginning. John 1:1-3, "In the beginning was the Word (Jesus), and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by Him, and without Him was not made anything that was made." In the pure gold we see the pure deity of Jesus Christ, that He is God.

The message of the shittim wood is that God's Son would become man. Like the ark was both pure gold and shittim wood, in one indivisible box, so also Jesus Christ is both God and man, but in one indivisible person. The wood does not mix with the gold, and the dual nature of the Lord Jesus is never comingled or confused.

The shittim wood is the acacia tree, which is known for its incorruptibility. An article posted on the website of Old Dominion University said this about acacia wood:

“Because of the slow growth of the tree, the wood is hard and dense. The heartwood is dark red-brown and attractive when polished. This wood is resistant to decay because the tree deposits in the heartwood many waste substances, which are preservatives and render the wood unpalatable to insects, making the wood dense and difficult to be penetrated by water and other decay agents” (<http://ww2.odu.edu/~lmusselm/plant/bible/acacia.php>). The ark of the covenant would last nearly a millennium until Nebuchadnezzar burned the temple in Jerusalem.

The incorruptibility of the shittim wood reminds us of the incorruptibility of the body of Christ: “For thou wilt not leave my soul in hell; neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption. Thou wilt shew me the path of life: in thy presence is fulness of joy; at thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore” (Ps. 16:10-11).

This passage speaks of the resurrection and ascension of Christ. You notice in verse 11 that the ark had a golden crown. Hebrews 2:9 says of the risen and ascended Christ, “But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honour; that he by the grace of God should taste death for every man.”

The ark reveals the love of God’s Son. God’s Son became a man, Jesus Christ. Jesus is both God and man. Do you believe that He is who the Bible says He is, that He came to earth sent from heaven, was born miraculously of a virgin, and now is risen and ascended? As we gaze upon this message of the ark this morning, God wants us to believe.

II. The ark reveals the love of God’s throne – Jesus is the Great King (25:12-15, 18-20).

Illustration: My wife's hope chest is nice, and you can sit on it and use it as a bench if you want. But no one would ever mistake it for a throne.

Application: We read in this passage about golden rings and gold-plated poles for carrying the ark, and about cherubim on the edges of the mercy seat facing it. God includes these components in His design because He wanted to be clear that this little box was nothing less than His throne on earth. The poles meant that the ark had to be treated as God's throne, carried reverently only by the poles and only by the assigned Levites and priests.

The cherubim meant that God would dwell in a special sense between them. Dwelling there He would do what verse 22 says He would do - command and rule Israel from there. This would be His throne.

Cherubim are the guardians of God's holy presence. You may remember that they guarded Eden against the return of a fallen and expelled Adam and Even in Gen. 3:24. But the passage emphasizes something about the cherubim that one would not expect for the throne of God. We are told that their wings are extended over this throne of God on earth (v. 20). In Ezekiel 10, the prophet's vision of God's heavenly throne sees that the throne is above the cherubim.

In heaven the cherubim are under God's throne. On earth, they are above it. And this reminds us of what Psalm 8 says about the promised Messiah. Again, the quotation of Heb. 2:9 captures the truth well: "But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honour; that he by the grace of God should taste death for every man."

2 Samuel 6 tells the sad story about the day David forgot that this little box needed to be treated as God's throne, and it cost a fellow-Israelite his life (vv. 1-10). David had great enthusiasm, great intentions, and great love for God. But David did not have obedience that day. He wanted to do the right thing, but He did it in the wrong way.

What makes Jesus our Great King is not our enthusiasm, nor even our feelings of love for Him, nor our plans to accomplish great feats for Him. What makes Him our King is our humble commitment to listen to His commands and to obey Him. We need to do what He says and do so the way He wants it done.

Our only proper response to this message of the ark is repentance to the Lord for our acts of disobedience. Too often we have put ourselves on the throne. We must recommit ourselves to obey Him. Disobedience always has temporal consequences, but the good news of the gospel is that God's throne is a throne of grace (Heb. 4:16), and that brings us to our last interpretation of the symbolism of the ark.

III. The ark reveals the love of God's salvation – Jesus is the Righteous Sacrifice (25:16-17, 21-22).

Application: Here we read about the mercy seat of the ark and the two tablets containing the Ten Commandments, which were placed inside the ark.

Unlike the body of the ark, the mercy seat had no shittim wood. Here we have only deity, not humanity. The mercy seat seems to symbolize especially God the Father.

Two other things are very important to our understanding of the significance of the mercy seat. One is mentioned in

our passage, the Ten Commandments. The Ten Commandments were a part of what Moses calls the book of the covenant in Exod. 24:7 – God’s law.

That passage also mentions something else important to the mercy seat. It mentions the blood of the covenant (v. 8). As we read on in our Old Testament, we find that the mercy seat will receive the blood of the covenant on Israel’s day of atonement (Leviticus 16).

So, on the day of atonement, the book of the covenant below the mercy seat meets the blood of the covenant on the mercy seat, and the mercy seat represents God the Father. The mercy seat is founded on the Father’s holiness, the righteousness of the law and its righteous penalty for violating the law. But also, the Father finds those demands met through the blood of the covenant that atones for sin.

The blood comes from a righteous sacrifice, Jesus Christ. He fulfilled the law, and He took our penalty for breaking the law. And so, the ark reveals the love of God’s salvation. Jesus Christ is our righteous sacrifice. Through Him the Holy Father becomes for us the one who gives us mercy.

So how must we respond to this message of the ark? Our only response this morning can be the kind of thanks that would cause us to give him our lives. “Jesus paid it all; all to Him we owe.” Have you thanked Him for providing salvation for you? Have you seen how much you owe in return?

Conclusion: God’s design for the ark of the covenant tells us about His loving Son, His loving throne, and His loving salvation. Jesus is the God-Man, the Great King, and the Righteous Sacrifice. We have the privilege to hear the ark’s

message and respond in faith, in obedience, and in thanksgiving. Not even the cherubim are so blessed as we.

Verse 2 of Charles Wesley's hymn, "And Can It Be?" reminds us that the privilege we have to respond to the message of the ark is not one that even the cherubim represented on the ark could experience or fully understand:

"Tis myst'ry all: th' Immortal dies:
Who can explore His strange design?
In vain the firstborn seraph tries
To sound the depths of love divine.
'Tis mercy all! Let earth adore,
Let angel minds inquire no more."

"His strange design" is God's design for the ark. It is mercy all, the symbol of God's covenantal love for us. Do you know the depths of this love divine?

"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