

Text: Exod. 25:23-30; 37:10-16; Lev. 24:5-9

Title: Christ in the table of shewbread

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Introduction: Last June my wife and I had the joy of staying with my daughter and son-in-law as we attended the IBFNA conference in Hanover, PA. One of the highlights of the week was their treating us to dinner at what must be the best restaurant in Emmitsburg, MD.

Kara's mother-in-law joined us, and while we were enjoying the meal, Maggie took one of the fancy cloth napkins on the table and folded it into a nice design, after which she and my wife enjoyed discussing their napkin-folding ideas.

When you go to a place like that for a meal, you realize that you are doing much more than eating. You have come to the fancy restaurant, not merely to eat, but to dine. One blogger explained the difference between eating and dining this way:

“To eat is to put food into the mouth, chew and swallow it, as in ‘he was eating a hot dog.’ Dining, however, indicates a table in a restaurant or at home for an evening meal. Eating can be accomplished in your car, over your kitchen sink or while sulking in your bedroom. But dining requires a table and a greater personal investment in enjoying a meal, whether alone, with family or friends. It means that participants bring something to the table and that food is part of a larger ceremony, rather than just filling an empty stomach. No matter how your table is set, whether for one . . . or for a crowd, in all cases it is so much better than just eating” (<https://lacuisineus.com/the-importance-of-being-a-dinner-table/>).

We have come to the table of shewbread in our study of the furniture of the tabernacle, and as we do so we find that this table is about much more than eating. It is not about eating, but rather about dining.

The table presents a meal that requires our personal investment to enjoy it. It is carefully designed, set, and provided for by none other than the Lord Himself. And in so doing, our God invites man to come dine with Him. David understood this amazing truth when he wrote the 23rd Psalm: "Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of my enemies" (v. 5). Perhaps he was remembering the time he and his men ate from the table of shewbread while fleeing King Saul (1 Sam. 21:1-6; Matt. 12:3).

As we interpret the symbolism of this table of the Lord for His people, we are going to find its message is centered in Christ. We will do so in three ways. We will see (1) Christ in the design of the table; (2) Christ in the setting of the table; and (3) Christ in the bread of the table.

I. Christ in the design of the table (25:23-28).

Illustration: You may remember from our study of the ark of the covenant that the components of the ark's structure, shittim or acacia wood overlaid with pure gold, were symbols of the two natures of the one person, Jesus Christ, who is the God-man. The pure gold represents His deity, and the durable shittim wood His incorruptible humanity.

Application: We find that same design specification in two other pieces of furniture in the Holy of Holies, the outer room of the tabernacle. We find this structure in the table we are focused on in this passage, and it is also the design of a third piece of furniture called the altar of incense,

described in Exod. 30:1-10, after God's design for the priestly garments is given. These three pieces of furniture correspond to the threefold mediatorial ministry of Jesus as the Christ.

Jesus is the Christ because He is God's Messiah. *Christ* is the Greek way of saying the Hebrew *Messiah*. *Messiah* comes from the verb meaning to smear, and it refers to the Old Testament practice of anointing with oil. *Christ* and *Messiah* mean *Anointed One*.

In the Old Testament, anointed ones were the occupants of one of three important leadership offices God designed for Israel – the prophet, the priest, and the king. Each of these leaders had to be anointed with oil to accomplish his ministry.

The Old Testament is the history of imperfect anointed ones: prophets, priests, and kings whose sins ultimately caused the nation of Israel to collapse under the judgment of God. Throughout this history, a perfect prophet, priest, and king is promised who would save and restore Israel as the people of God. Jesus is this promised Messiah.

Among the furniture of tabernacle, the pieces that were constructed of shittim wood overlaid with gold point in a glorious way to the ministry of Jesus Christ, the God-man, as the promised Messiah. In the ark of the covenant, we find the throne of a king. In the altar of incense, we find the prayers of a priest. And in the table of shewbread, we find the prophetic ministry of the one who feeds His people with bread of heaven and the water of life, His Word.

In the discourse of the Bread of Life, Jesus says this about His words: "It is the spirit that quickeneth; the flesh

profiteth nothing: the words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life" (John 6:63). As the Lord invites us to dine at this table, He invites us to hear Jesus's words, for He alone is the way, the truth, and the life. No man comes to the Father but by Him (John 14:7).

Illustration: You may also remember, from our time studying the ark of the covenant, my mentioning the golden ratio (1:1.618) and the importance of its beauty to the history of art. We saw then that the dimensions of the ark closely approximated that ratio, and that fact reminded us that Christ was well-pleasing in the eyes of His Father.

Application: The dimensions we have for the table in our passage here, however, are not at all close to the golden ratio, and so perhaps here we can see that in the eyes of man, Jesus was not beautiful at all.

Isaiah prophesied that the Promised One would lack beauty in the eyes of man: "For he shall grow up before him as a tender plant, and as a root out of a dry ground: he hath no form nor comeliness; and when we shall see him, there is no beauty that we should desire him. He is despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief: and we hid as it were our faces from him; he was despised, and we esteemed him not" (Isa. 53:2-3).

How does Jesus look in your eyes? Have you seen the beauty of His glory, or have you despised and rejected Him as merely a man of sorrows? Do you see that He is God's Promised prophet, priest, and king, or do you deny Him these titles? What do you believe about the Christ?

The hymn writer P.P. Bliss begins "Hallelujah! What a Savior": "Man of sorrows, what a name, for the Son of God who came, ruined sinners to reclaim. Hallelujah! What a

Savior!" There is a kind of glory in our Savior's lack of beauty. Many of our Christmas carols celebrate that glory (Ex: "How Should a King Come?").

"How should a King come?

Even a child knows the answer of course,
In a coach of gold and a pure white horse,
In the beautiful city in the prime of the day,
And the trumpets should cry as the crowds make way.
And the flags fly high in the morning sun,
As the people all cheer for the sovereign one.
And everyone knows that's the way it is done.
That's the way a king should come.

"How did the King come?

On a star-filled night into Bethlehem
Rode a weary woman and a worried man.
And the only sound on the cobblestone street
Was the shuffle and the ring of their donkey's feet.
And they came to the inn and finding no room
They settled for the barn, not a moment too soon.
Everyone should know that's the way it was done.
That's the way the king has come."

Before we depart from these meditations on the design of the table, let me highlight the fact that the table has two golden crown moldings (vv. 24-25), whereas the ark had the one. One author interprets the difference this way: "The two crowns are suggestive of Him crowned: with thorns on the cross, and then with glory on the throne" (Stephen Olford, *The Tabernacle: Camping with God*, 118).

Jesus was crowned with a crown of thorns just prior to His crucifixion. P.P. Bliss: "Bearing shame and scoffing rude, in my place condemned He stood, sealed my pardon with His blood. Hallelujah! What a Savior!"

And Jesus was crowned with glory and honor in His resurrection and ascension to the right hand of the Father. P.P. Bliss: "Lifted up was He to die, 'It is finished!' was His cry, now in heaven exalted high. Hallelujah! What a Savior!"

You and I may not be able to write Christmas carols or hymns the way P.P. Bliss did, but as we examine together God's design for this table, we can believe what he believed. We can in our hearts trust Jesus for our salvation and say of Him, "Hallelujah! What a Savior!" Do you believe what we see about Christ in the design of the table?

II. Christ in the setting of the table (25:29).

Illustration: You may remember that the mercy seat of the ark of the covenant was pure gold, and we said at that time that pure gold without the shittim wood symbolized deity without humanity. We saw God the Father in the mercy seat, and we learned that our salvation from sin was the exercise of the Father's mercy on us in response to the blood of Jesus, the Lamb of God sacrificed for our atonement.

Application: You will notice that the table of shewbread is set with vessels of pure gold. Here too, we do well to think of deity without humanity. Whereas, the mercy seat representing the Father receives the blood of Christ and extends mercy to the condemned sinner, the setting of the table distributes the bread of Christ and applies His life to the dying sinner. This is the work of the Holy Spirit. He may be at work right now in your heart, turning you from a life of unbelief, and creating in you a new life of faith.

Along with the loaves of the shewbread, the setting of the table includes cups and bowls for holding wine which were used to pour out drink offerings as part of the ceremony of

this dinner with the Lord. The pouring out of a drink offering reminds us of two truths, one about Christ and one about the Apostle Paul.

In Philippians 2 we are told that Jesus as the God-man emptied Himself (v. 7) in fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy of the Promised One: "Therefore will I divide him a portion with the great, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong; because he hath poured out his soul unto death: and he was numbered with the transgressors; and he bare the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors" (53:12). Jesus gave His all for sinners like you and me.

Paul's example teaches us what we must do in return. Sitting in Nero's prison awaiting execution for preaching the gospel, Paul wrote, "For I have already been poured out like a drink offering, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith" (2 Tim. 4:6). Because Jesus poured out His all for us, we must do so in return for Him by fighting the evil, finishing the race, and keeping the faith.

The power of the Holy Spirit enabled Jesus to give His life for us (Isa. 61:1-2a), and it is only through His power in us that we can give our lives back to Him.

III. Christ in the bread of the table (25:30).

Application: It is interesting as we study the bread of this table to remember that Jesus was born in Bethlehem, a town whose name means "The House of Bread." Jesus came from the house of bread because He is the Bread of Life (John 6). We celebrate that in the table the Lord has designed for us as New Testament local churches. The bread is His body broken for us. We do this in remembrance of

Him. Israel kept their table ceremony for the same reason (Lev. 24:5-9).

Conclusion: One interesting note about the term *shewbread* is that the phrase is literally *bread of faces* in the Hebrew. The idea is dining, not just eating. The idea is that God desires to sit face to face with you and I as members of a local church to feed us through Christ the bread of life.

Jesus told the local church of Laodicea in Rev. 3:20, “Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come into him, and will sup with him, and he with me.” Can we hear the knocking on our church’s door as we have learned about the table of shewbread this morning? Have we opened the door of our hearts to Him? Do we understand the privilege of dining with our God through our Savior? What wondrous love is this? What must be our fate if we refuse his invitation?

“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,

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