

Text: Exod. 26:31-37, 36:35-38

Title: The tabernacle's veil – the incubator of atonement

Time: 10/16/22 am

Place: NBBC

Introduction: One of the wonders of modern medical science is the incubator. The device is standard equipment for the neo-natal intensive care unit of a hospital. It has been described as a second womb for an infant, designed to protect a baby and to provide optimal conditions for his healthy development.

Incubators are veils from the outside world to provide an environment that can be adjusted to meet the baby's needs in terms of temperature, oxygen levels, humidity, and light. Without the separation that the incubator provides, the baby who needs it would not survive.

We have come to the Lord's instruction for a veil in the tabernacle. I would like to think of the veil of our passage as an incubator in reverse. Whereas a baby cannot survive unless it is covered in the incubator, in our passage sinful man cannot survive unless the glory of the Lord is covered by the veil.

That shekinah glory resided over the ark of the testimony behind the veil. The word translated *veil* in our Bibles comes from the Hebrew verb meaning *to separate* or *to divide*, and it literally means *a divider*, or what we might call *a partition*. Like an incubator, the separation of the veil is necessary for survival, in this case the survival of sinful man (v. 33, "unto you"; 35:12 "the veil of the covering").

Because God is holy and we are fallen creatures and sinful, we cannot experience the presence of God without being

destroyed. The purpose of the tabernacle is to point to God's solution to this problem. It symbolizes the way God designed to make His dwelling among His people possible.

The veil was supported by four pillars made of acacia wood and overlaid with gold. Here again the dual nature of the incarnate Son of God is front and center. He makes God's dwelling among His people possible.

The veil hung under the golden hooks of the curtains above it. These hooks above would have been located ten cubits from the west end of the tabernacle. So, with the veil forming a chamber ten cubits wide, ten cubits long, and ten cubits tall, the room it created was a perfect cube. It was named the holy of holies or most holy place. Behind the veil in the cube stood the ark of testimony (v. 34).

This most holy place was a place of great danger for sinful man. The Lord explains the danger of this place in Lev. 16:2, "And the Lord said unto Moses, 'Speak unto Aaron thy brother [whose sons had just been killed by the fire of God for their strange fire], that he come not at all times into the holy place within the vail before the mercy seat, which is upon the ark; that he die not: for I will appear in the cloud upon the mercy seat.'"

Only one exception was allowed to this command putting the most holy place off limits to sinful man. The exception was the annual Yom Kippur or Day of Atonement (October 5th this past year). Only through atonement could this veil between God and man be traversed, meaning that God designed other things to provide cover on this one day.

Leviticus 16 goes on to explain how only the High Priest could do so, and he could only do so with the blood of sac-

rifice, first for his own sin and then for the sin of the people (vv. 14-15). In addition, he had to bring incense burning on fire from the altar of sacrifice (vv. 12-13). Blood is shed and prayers ascend for atonement in this symbolism.

Charles Wesley's great hymn of the faith, "Arise, My Soul, Arise," celebrates the symbolism of the Day of Atonement as it points to the way the blood and prayers of our Great High Priest, the Lord Jesus Christ, deals with the danger of the most holy place in our behalf:

"He ever lives above, for me to intercede—
His all redeeming blood, His blood availed for me.
His blood availed for all our race; His blood availed for all
our race;
And sprinkles now the throne of grace.

"Five bleeding wounds He bears, received at Calvary.
They pour effectual prayers. They strongly plead for me.
'Forgive him!' 'O forgive!' they cry; 'Forgive him!' 'O for-
give!' they cry;
'Nor let that ransomed sinner die.'

"The Father hears Him pray, His dear Anointed One.
He cannot turn away the pleadings of His Son.
The Spirit answers to the blood; the Spirit answers to the
blood
And tells me I am born of God.

"My God is reconciled. His pardoning voice I hear!
He owns me for His child, I can no longer fear.
With confidence I now draw nigh; with confidence I now
draw nigh,
And 'Father, Abba Father' cry."

In Christ the most holy place is no longer a place of danger for the sinner, and God dwells among His people now fully reconciled to Him.

And so, when it comes to our interpretation of the veil of the tabernacle, we are again encouraged by our New Testaments to see correspondence here with the Lord Jesus Christ (John 1:15), and also His local churches (1 Tim. 3:15). I will make two interpretations in this regard this morning, and we will be helped by the book of Hebrews with each.

I. The veil corresponds to Jesus Christ as the way into the presence of God (Heb. 10:19-21).

Application: The veil is one of three entrance ways in the tabernacle's structure, all with the same beautifully designed material of blue, purple, and scarlet, just like the inner curtain draped over the roof. Each entrance way refers to the truth that Jesus Christ is the way, the truth, and the life. No man comes to the Father but by Him (John 14:6).

The colors tell us why Jesus is the only way back to the presence of God. The blue reminds us that He is God's Son from heaven, the purple that He is king, and the scarlet that He shed His blood and died for our sins. He alone is God's anointed Prophet from above, royal King, and sacrificing Priest. We come to the Father by Him and no one else.

In this New Testament passage, the author of Hebrews uses the veil as a symbol to tell us what Jesus did to make this possible. He says the veil is Jesus's flesh, and that it is through Jesus's flesh that we pass into renewed fellowship with God. In other words, we gain entrance into the holy of holies without being destroyed because of what the Son of God accomplished after He became a man.

Our author is referring to a miracle that happened when Jesus was torn apart by crucifixion on the cross of Calvary. As He hung there as an unrecognizable mass of suffering and blood, He was bearing the wrath of God for your sins and mine.

At last, the suffering came to an end when He cried out, "It is finished!" Then Matthew's Gospel records, "And behold, the veil of the temple was rent in twain from the top to the bottom" (27:51). The miracle confirmed that the veil protecting man from God was no longer needed. The sacrifice of Jesus was accepted. Atonement for sin was now accomplished by our Prophet, Priest, and King. There is no divider between God's presence and the believer's life.

There were two thieves who died with Jesus that day, and one of the two went to be with Him in paradise because He believed that Jesus was the Anointed One who was dying for his sin. He prayed a simple prayer: "Lord, remember me when you come into your kingdom."

The other thief never made it to paradise. He never prayed that prayer because he never believed that Jesus was the way back to the presence of God. With which thief do you and I agree? There is no question that we too are sinners and thieves. The only question is what kind of sinner and thief are we. Do we believe that Jesus is the way, the truth, and the life? Have we asked Him to remember us and save us from our sins? If not, today you can do so and be ushered forgiven into reconciliation with God. You must do so, for God's holy place is still a dangerous place for you.

II. The veil corresponds to the local church as a way to enjoy the presence of God (Heb. 10:22-26).

Illustration: I had the wonderful privilege of holding my first grandson last August. I praise the Lord for Isaiah's healthy birth and experienced cheerful joy and thanksgiving as I held him for the very first time.

Isaiah and Kara had a healthy delivery, and no incubator was needed. Other parents in that hospital that day were not as blessed with good health. They could not hold their newborn the way we could. They had to wait for the incubator to be removed before they could experience the joy of holding their newborn.

Application: From God's perspective, sin did to His offspring what poor health does to the offspring of parents who require an incubator. Like those parents, the Lord went through a lot of trouble to see the day when the veil could be removed and the reconciliation between Himself and His creatures could be complete. He gave His own Son, as we have said, to be our High Priest and sacrifice, that we might be with Him again. And now where once there was the distance of the Day of Atonement, there is the intimacy of the Lord's presence in the local church assembly.

Our author issues three commands in this passage, all in the second-person plural: "Let us draw near" (v. 22), "let us hold fast the confession of our faith" (v. 23), and "let us consider one another to provoke unto love and good works" (v. 25). These verses are not about my drawing near, my holding fast, and my considering myself. They are about me as a part of us. We are commanded to do these things together, and verse 25 tells us how: "Not forsaking the assembling of yourselves together, as the manner of some is, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the day approaching."

It is as though the author is telling us that given what Jesus has done for us to enter the presence of God, gathering as His church should be like being held as a newborn who has just emerged from the incubator.

Alone we keep our distance, rather than draw near. Alone we let go rather than hold fast. Alone we consider ourselves with selfish works rather than one another in good works. At the end of the chapter, the author describes these persecuted members of the Jerusalem church: "But we are not of them who draw back unto perdition; but of them that believe to the saving of the soul" (v. 39). They would faithfully draw near, hold fast, and consider one another because they would faithfully assemble. It was just who they were. Who are we?

Conclusion: As we conclude our thoughts about the veil as the incubator of our restoration to God, I want us to remember again that it formed a perfect cube for the holy of holies where the presence of God dwelt above the mercy seat of the ark of testimony.

That perfect cube repeats itself in the pages of Scripture in the temple of Solomon, in Ezekiel's eschatological temple, and finally in the very last chapters of the Bible, the New Jerusalem: "And the city lieth foursquare, and the length is as large as the breadth: and he measured the city with the reed, twelve thousand furlongs. The length and the breadth and the height of it are equal" (Rev. 21:16).

In the Old Testament, the cube contained the visible presence of the Lord. It was to be accessed by the High Priest. In our day, we meet in the Lord's presence by faith with no cube or shekinah glory that we can see.

But someday, the veil of faith will be lifted, the eternal morning will come, and in God's holy city, which forms a perfect cube, we shall see with our eyes what we only can believe to be true for now. John saw what we will see: "I saw no temple therein; for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are the temple of it" (v. 22).

Until then, it is our message to invite as many as will come with us to that city. Our message to the world this morning is that of the Spirit and the bride. They say, "Come!" (Rev. 22:17). Will you come with us to the eternal city, into the glorious presence of God, through the veil torn from top to bottom by the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ?

"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