

SESSION #8

We continue with our study of the Tabernacle. Let's begin by taking a quick look at some of the major elements involved.

There was an outer curtain around the courtyard surrounding the little building of the Tabernacle. It acted as a barrier, nobody could look over it. A white linen barrier. You couldn't come to the presence of God because that kept you out. You could tell God was in there because the cloud, signifying His presence, hovered over the Holy of holies all the time. At night it was a pillar of fire. During the day it was a pillar of cloud.

You could see that cloud but you couldn't get to it because this curtain blocked the way, except in one spot: on the east there was one gate. Only one, but God had made a way – one way – into His presence.

If you were an Israelite wanting to get right with God, you would come through that gate with a lamb or some other sacrificial animal. You would stop at the brazen altar. A priest would meet you and you would put your hand on the head of that animal, identifying yourself with that animal, and then the priest would kill that animal and offer it on this altar, the sacrificial altar. You would stand there realizing that this animal whom you've identified with is taking your place on that altar, dying for your sin. *You* should be there, but the animal is there instead of you. The place of sacrifice.

God gives us the opportunity to have fellowship with Him, to have a relationship with Him. But it's not just an ad hoc kind of thing. God's justice is completely satisfied by something paying the ultimate price to make that possible, providing forgiveness and atonement.

Christ Jesus, of course, came to give His life as the ultimate sacrifice at the brazen altar, the cross.

Then if you move on to the next piece of furniture in the courtyard, it's a wash basin, made again of brass. And the priests would always wash their hands and feet coming and going between the sacrifice altar and the little tent of the Tabernacle, as they ministered to the Lord and for the people. It's a wonderful picture of the Word of God.

In fact, that brazen laver was made out of the mirrors of the ladies of the nation of Israel. In those days, they made their mirrors from polished bronze. And all the ladies gave up their mirrors – can you imagine the sacrifice! – this was really a sacrifice! They all gave up their mirrors in order that they could be blended together to make that wash basin. So that basin just shone as a mirror that the priests could look in and see themselves as they washed.

The Bible is like that. James says it's like a mirror. You look into it. If you're a wise person you'll see what's wrong and do something about it. The Bible is a mirror that shows us what's wrong. But it's not only a mirror; it's the water that provides the washing, the cleansing. And this brass laver shows us something of the importance of the Word in the life of a believer. Sanctification, and cleansing.

Then if you moved into the Tabernacle tent, inside the holy place, on the right hand side you would see a small table with some bread on it. On the left hand side you'd see a candlestick. Towards the back a small golden altar of incense. And then a curtain hiding the Holy of holies at the very back.

That table of showbread, or the table of the presence of the Lord. Twelve loaves of bread, each one representing a tribe of Israel, were laid out on that little gold-covered table every week. And the priests would come in once a week, stand around that table, break that bread, eat it, and then replenish the loaves. It's a beautiful picture of some wonderful truths. Jesus said in the NT, "*I am the bread of life*". He is the only sufficient nourishment for our spiritual lives. He is *the* Bread of life.

This bread pictured God's people in front of the presence of God, but it also pictured God Himself providing for them what they needed for daily life. As the priests gathered around that table once a week and ate that bread, what a wonderful picture of God's people whose only basis for fellowship is Jesus Christ. He's the Bread. He's the only reason you and I can call one another brothers and sisters. And we fellowship around Him alone.

Then across from that little table was the candlestick made of solid gold, picturing the Light of the world. There was no window in that tent. This 7-branch candlestick

provided the only light. Jesus said, *“I am the light of the world. You are the light of the world.”* As we identify with Him and His life becomes our light, we then become His lights in the world too.

Then at the back, just before the curtain separating the Holy of holies, was the golden altar of incense. The priest would take hot embers from the outside altar of sacrifice, bring them in with a brass censer, lay them on this altar and then sprinkle a special incense and that incense would rise up like a sweet-smelling cloud in front of that curtain behind which God dwells. A beautiful picture of prayer and of worship. The closest thing to the presence of God.

If you could part that curtain and go into the Holy of holies, then you would see the Ark of the Covenant. It was a small gold-covered wooden box, in which were kept the copies of the Covenant made between God and Israel, one copy for God, one copy for the people, kept here in this safety deposit box, in a sense, the Ark of the covenant. Both copies were there. Aaron’s rod that budded was later kept there and also a sample of manna from the wilderness journeys reminding them of God’s provision for them.

But that little Ark became synonymous with the people of Israel, with the presence of God because He said He would live with them, would meet with them, right there.

On the top of that Ark was a solid gold lid on which were placed the cherubim angels. That solid gold lid was called the Mercy Seat. And the High Priest came in on what is sometimes called the Good Friday of the OT, once a year, and sprinkled the blood of the sin offering for the whole nation on that Mercy Seat as an atonement for the whole nation. In Romans 3:25, Jesus Christ is called that Mercy Seat, the lid of that Ark – He is our meeting place. God was positioned as it were, between the cherubim, and over that gold lid.

If God could look down into that box, what would He see? He would see the ten commandments, the broken tablets of those commandments, the Law which the people could not keep, even the very first of the list.

But when God looks down He sees not the broken Law, but He sees the Mercy Seat, and on that Seat He sees the sprinkled blood of sacrifice. Satisfying His divine justice, that

even though the Law has been broken there has been a sacrifice made that paid the penalty for that broken Law. No wonder it is a Mercy Seat!

This little Ark of the Covenant becomes then a portable throne, an identifying presence of the living God among His people and leading the way for them as they move.

The entire Tabernacle, in all of its aspects, emphasizes the truth that Jesus Christ is the theme of the OT throughout every chapter. And the climax of this book of Exodus, and the climax of the entire Pentateuch up to this point comes here in Exodus chapter 40 as God, Yahweh, is enthroned in the Tabernacle.

The final chapter speaks of His glory coming down and taking up residence in this tiny building. It is a high point indeed, that a people who deserved only death should instead enjoy the presence of the living God among them.

So, let's review quickly the book of Exodus.

Three words encapsulate the content of this book: Life, Law, Love. God redeems His people, He buys their lives, by the death of the firstborn sons and redeems them out of slavery. Then as He brings them to Mt. Sinai He begins a reconstruction of the nation by giving them the laws. But not just the laws, He shows them something of His magnificent love for them by a reconciliation process described by what happens at the Tabernacle and the way that the people of God can ever live with a Holy God. It will be by the rituals at the Tabernacle.
