

The Ark of the Covenant

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- [0 : 0 0] Well, if we could, this evening, for a short while, if we could turn back to that portion of scripture that we read in the book of Exodus and chapter 25.
- Exodus chapter 25, and if we just read again at verse 10. Exodus 25 at verse 10. And so on.
- Now, this evening, as you know, we have entered within the veil into the most holy place in the tabernacle. And, you know, as we come into this place, we're to come in the sense that we are now standing upon holy ground.
- We're entering into the presence of God through Jesus, our tabernacle. And over the past number of weeks, the past 10 or more weeks, in our study of the tabernacle, we've made our way towards this very place.
- We've always been seeking, sinners seeking the favour, forgiveness and fellowship of our holy God. And we've walked, as we've seen, we've walked through, round the perimeter.
- [1 : 3 4] We've made our way round the perimeter to the outer gate. We've entered through the outer gate of the tabernacle because it's the only way to God. And that's what the Bible reminds us.
- There's only one way to God through Jesus, our tabernacle. And then on entering into the tabernacle courtyard, we were confronted by the altar of sacrifice, which spoke about our justification.
- Then we went to the bronze altar, which spoke about our sanctification. Then we witnessed the four coverings over the tabernacle, which pointed to the person and work of Jesus, our tabernacle.
- Four coverings, one Christ. Then on entering into the tabernacle, under the four coverings, we were inside the holy place of the holy king. We were in Christ.
- We were covered by Jesus, our tabernacle. We're in Christ. And as those who are in Christ, the three items in the holy place, they spoke very clearly of what sinners receive when they're in Christ.
- [2 : 3 1] When we considered the golden lampstand, it was a golden tree promising life and light to all who are in Christ. When we considered the table of showbread, we learned that as those who are in Christ, we have the assurance of the presence and the provision of being in Jesus Christ.
- And when we approached the altar of incense, we noted that it was an altar of purpose, an altar of prayer and an altar of promise. And then last week, we stood before the veil, the veil that separated sinful mankind from the glorious presence of their holy God.
- But as we learned, the veil that was twined together, it represented the veil that would one day tabernacle among us in the person of Jesus Christ.
- And that veil, as we all know, he was torn on the cross in order to grant us access into the most holy place. And so this evening, through Jesus, our tabernacle, we stand before the Ark of the Covenant.

We're in the presence of a holy God. And I'd like us to see that the Ark of the Covenant, it symbolizes for us two things. Two things, God's presence and God's propitiation.

[3 : 50] Two things, God's presence and God's propitiation. So we look first of all at God's presence. On the other side of it, you shall make poles of acacia wood and overlay them with gold.

Now it's safe to say that the Ark of the Covenant is the most important part of the tabernacle. And that's evident by the fact that before the Lord gave instructions to build the tabernacle, or even fabricate the coverings and the curtains, or even form and fashion all the different items of furniture that were in the tabernacle, before the Lord gave any instructions for any of these things, the Lord gave instructions concerning the Ark of the Covenant, emphasizing that it's the most important part of the tabernacle.

And this was because the Ark of the Covenant represented the supreme symbol of God's presence among his people. Because without the presence of God, the Israelites knew that their worship was in vain.

And they would know that their sacrifices and their offerings to God were just empty and futile. And in a similar way, it's the same with us. If the Lord isn't here, if the Lord isn't in this place tonight, then we meet together in vain.

And our worship, our singing, our reading, the preaching of God's Word, it's all empty and futile. If the Lord isn't here, it's all in vain. But, you know, we have this wonderful promise from Jesus, our tabernacle.

[5 : 53] In Matthew's Gospel, Jesus reminds us that where two or three gather together in his name, he is there in the midst of them. And that's what the Ark of the Covenant symbolized for the Israelites.

It symbolized God's presence. And assured them that God was dwelling in the midst of his people. Of course, after the exodus from Egypt, you remember that God promised that he would dwell among his people by a pillar of cloud by day, and in a pillar of fire by night.

But the Ark of the Covenant, it was this physical presence, this physical assurance that God would dwell among his people as their king. He would be there as their king.

And in the ancient world, kings would often dwell in a tabernacle or in a temple, and they would dwell in the midst of their people. They would have the king's tent right in the middle, and they'd have all the people surrounding the king's tent, living in their own tents as they moved from place to place.

And like the tabernacle, the king's tent in the ancient world, it would be distinguished from all the tents of the people. It would be distinguished by the different colors, and also the amount of gold that the king's tent would have.

[7 : 10] And we've seen that again and again in the tabernacle. The tabernacle was distinguished from all the other tents of the Israelites because of all the royal colors, blue, scarlet, and purple, as well as the amount of gold that was used in the tabernacle, in the walls, and in the menorah, and the altar of incense, and the table of showbread.

All this gold. And when it came to the Ark of the Covenant, inside the Holy of Holies, no gold was spared. Because we're told there in verse 10 that the Ark, which was this box shape made from acacia wood, overlaid with gold, it was two and a half cubits long, one and a half cubits wide, and one and a half cubits deep.

And as you know, a cubit is the distance from your elbow to the tip of your finger. It's about 45 centimeters. So the Ark of the Covenant was only just over a meter, a meter and 12 centimeters long, 68 centimeters wide, and 68 centimeters deep.

So the Ark of the Covenant, it was quite small in comparison to all the other items of furniture in the tabernacle. But what made it similar to all the other items of furniture in the tabernacle was the fact that it had poles to carry it.

And these poles, as we're told, they were not to be removed. We're told in verse 12, You shall cast four rings of gold for it. You shall put them on its four feet, two rings on one side of it, two rings on the other side of it.

[8 : 45] You shall make poles of acacia wood and overlay them with gold. And you shall put the poles into the rings on the sides of the Ark to carry the Ark by them. The poles shall remain in the rings of the Ark.

They shall not be taken from it. The golden poles on the Ark of the Covenant were to ensure that no human hands ever came into contact with the Ark.

Because if they did, the person would be struck down dead. And you remember that that's what happened to Uzzah. The Israelites in 2 Samuel 6, the Israelites, they were traveling or transporting the Ark of the Covenant, but they weren't carrying it.

They had put the Ark of the Covenant onto a cart. And carrying it on a cart is how the Philistines transported their gods. But that's not how the Ark of the Covenant was to be transported.

That's not what the Lord commanded. And so when the Ark of the Covenant was sitting on top of this cart, they were going back to, they were taking it to Jerusalem.

[9 : 51] The Ark of the Covenant, well, on the cart, it hit a pothole and the Ark fell off. And Uzzah, as you know, he reached out his hand to stop the Ark from falling.

And we're told in 2 Samuel 6 that the anger of the Lord was kindled against Uzzah. And God struck him down and he died beside the Ark of God. And you know, looking at it, well, we might think that the Lord was a bit harsh with Uzzah.

Because Uzzah, well, he's just trying his best. He's just trying to protect the Ark of the Covenant. But you know, the thing is, Uzzah wasn't doing what the Lord commanded. The first commandment written on the tablets of stone that were sitting inside the Ark of the Covenant was, Thou shalt have no other gods before me.

And sad to say, the Israelites, by that point in their history, they treated the Lord like one of the Philistine gods. And the wages of their sin, as they saw it in the life of Uzzah, the wages of their sin, was death.

And it was death because they had broken the covenant agreement of the Ten Commandments. But as you know, the purpose of the Ark of the Covenant was just to be an ark.

[11 : 08] It was to be a box. A box for the covenant. Hence the name, Ark of the Covenant. Because the Ark of the Covenant was to house two tablets of stone which had the Ten Commandments written on them.

And these Ten Commandments, as you know, Moses received them on the top of Mount Sinai. They were the testimony that the Lord refers to in verse 16. We're told there, And you shall put into the Ark the testimony that I shall give you.

Now the testimony was the tablets of stone, which was the covenant agreement between the Lord and his covenant people. And this was also a common practice in the ancient world.

That when they would make a covenant between, when there would be a covenant between two kings or two parties, when the terms and conditions of the covenant were agreed on both sides, both parties, when they were agreed, they would inscribe the covenant agreement on tablets of stone.

and each party would receive their tablet with the copy of the covenant agreement. In many ways, it's just like when you take out a contract, say a phone contract, and you receive one copy of the contract and the phone company has the other copy of the contract.

[12 : 31] So that both parties are agreed to the contract and both parties remain faithful to the contract. But what's interesting is that in the case of the Ark of the Covenant, there was two tablets of stone, which means that the Lord received both copies of the contract.

The Lord received both copies of the Ten Commandments. Now, it's not that there was five commandments written on one tablet of stone and five commandments written on the other tablet of stone. No, all of the Ten Commandments were written on each tablet of stone.

The two tablets of stone were copies of the same contract. Now, the reason both copies of the covenant agreement between God and his covenant people, the reason that both were kept inside the Ark of the Covenant was simply because the truth is we could never keep our side of the contract.

The contract agreement, the covenant agreement, was obedience to the Ten Commandments. That's what's written on the tablet, the Ten Commandments. And you and I and even the Lord himself knew fine that because of the indwelling sin of Adam, none of us could keep our side of the contract.

So what happened was that the Lord graciously bound himself to his people and he agreed to perform both sides of the contract. He agreed to perform both sides of the covenant.

[14 : 07] And of course, the Lord performed both sides of the covenant contract in and through the person of Jesus Christ. And so what we need to understand is that the Ark of the Covenant, it symbolised God's presence because the covenant contract between the Lord and his people was being housed inside the Ark of the Covenant.

God's presence was there because the covenant agreement was there between him and his people. Therefore, the presence of God was made known because of the covenant and the glory of the Lord was seen because of the covenant, because of the covenant contract on these tablets of stone housed inside the Ark, the Ark of the Covenant.

Now what's really interesting is that Jewish scholars, they often refer to God's presence and the glory of the Lord and the Holy of Holies as the Shekinah glory.

I don't know if you've heard of that before, the Shekinah glory. Now the word Shekinah is a Hebrew word which means he caused to dwell. He caused to dwell. Shekinah.

He caused to dwell. And as you know, looking forward, God's presence, God's covenant contract inside the Ark of the Covenant and the Shekinah glory, it was all fulfilled in the person of Jesus Christ.

[15 : 33] Because the first advent, the first arrival of Jesus Christ into the world through the incarnation, it was the ultimate manifestation of God's presence in the midst of his people.

And you know, this is what we've been seeing all throughout our study. This is what the tabernacle was pointing to all along. That the tabernacle was pointing us always to Jesus, our tabernacle.

That's what John said in his gospel, the opening words of his gospel, that Jesus is the word who became flesh and he dwelt among us. He tabernacled among us. He made his presence known among us.

Why? As John says, all so that we might behold his glory. What kind of glory? The Shekinah glory. The glory that reveals his presence among us.

This glory, as John says, that was of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth. And John says that, John describes the covenant contract.

[16 : 38] He says, the law came by Moses. That's that covenant contract. but it was fulfilled by grace and truth in Jesus Christ. The law came by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ.

In other words, Jesus has fulfilled both sides of the covenant contract by upholding the law of God perfectly in his life and in his death.

And because of that, God promises to presence himself among his people. He promises to presence himself among his church by his Holy Spirit.

And the covenant contract that was written on the tablets of stone, this is the amazing thing, the covenant contract that was written on the tablets of stone, housed inside the Ark of the Covenant, that covenant contract that was fulfilled in the person of Jesus, it's now written on our hearts.

because the Lord promised that in the new covenant I will put my law within them and I will write on their hearts and I will be their God and they will be my people.

[17 : 54] So you know, my Christian friend, the new covenant promised and procured in the blood of Jesus Christ assures us that because the covenant contract is now written not on tablets of stone, but on our hearts.

It now means that God's presence is in us. That's what the covenant contract meant to the Old Testament people. God's presence was with them because the covenant contract was written on stone there but it's now written on our hearts which means that God's presence is in us.

That's what Paul reminds us. God is dwelling in us by his Spirit and because of that, because God is dwelling in us by his Holy Spirit, there is nothing and there is no one that can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

That's what Paul was persuaded of when he said at the end of Romans 8, I am persuaded that neither death nor life nor angels nor principalities nor powers nor things present nor things to come neither height nor depth nor any other creature shall be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Why? Because his law is written on my heart. He presences himself in me, among me, with me. He'll never leave me and he'll never forsake me.

[19 : 23] But you know, that's not all because the Ark of the Covenant had looked forward and it still looks forward to the time when God's presence will one day be fully realized in glory, the glory of heaven.

The book of Revelation assures us, it says, Behold the dwelling place of God is with man. The tabernacle of God is with man and he will dwell with them and they will be his people and God himself will be with them as their God and he will wipe away every tear from their eyes and death shall be no more neither shall there be mourning nor crying nor pain anymore for the former things have passed away.

That's the promise that we have that comes to us through the Ark of the Covenant. The Ark of the Covenant assures us of the promise of God's presence.

The promise of God's presence that when he appears we shall be like him because we shall see him as he is.

We shall see what? His Shekinah glory. The glory of his presence among us dwelling among us. We shall see his Shekinah glory dwelling among us.

[20 : 44] So the Ark of the Covenant it assures us of God's presence but it also assures us of God's propitiation. God's presence and God's propitiation.

Look at verse 17. The Lord says you shall make a mercy seat of pure gold. Two cubits and a half shall be its length and a cubit and a half its breadth.

And you shall make two cherubim of gold of hammered work you shall make them on the two ends of the mercy seat. Make one cherub on one end and one cherub on the other of one piece with the mercy seat shall you make the cherubim on its two ends.

The cherubim shall spread out their wings above overshadowing the mercy seat with their wings their faces one to another towards the mercy seat shall the faces of the cherubim be.

And these verses were told that placed on top of the Ark of the Covenant which housed these two tablets of stone which was the covenant agreement between the Lord and his people placed on top was this lid and it was a lid made from pure gold and it was called the mercy seat or if you were to translate it literally it would be called the atonement covering or the propitiation seat the propitiation seat and we'll come back to that in a moment but on the top of the mercy seat as you can see there were two cherubim two cherubim made of pure gold and the cherubim were to be at either end of the mercy seat facing one another with their wings overshadowing the mercy seat but as you know this isn't the first time that we've seen cherubim in the structure of the tabernacle because well the cherubim they were woven into the cloth used for the outer gate they were woven into the cloth used for the inner covering that was on the inside of the tabernacle and the cherubim were also woven into the veil that separated the holy place from the holy of holies the cherubim are mentioned again and again in relation to the tabernacle and it seems that the cherubim were there to act as guards protecting the tabernacle from intruders just like the cherubim and the flaming sword that guarded the entrance to the garden of Eden and the way to the tree of life the cherubim and the tabernacle they sought to protect the presence of God from sinful intruders but you know there's something more than that there because you know if we were to have stood in the holy of holies if you could just imagine yourself standing there if we were to have stood in the holy of holies and witnessed the ark of the covenant with the two golden cherubim facing one another overshadowing the mercy seat their wings overshadowing the mercy seat and if we were to have stood right in front of it and then looked up looked up at the inner covering of the tabernacle all we would have seen is cherubim they would have been cherubim looking down at the mercy seat and the bible reminds us that it was from between the cherubim in the presence of the cherubim that God would speak to his people the Lord was enthroned on the cherubim in other words the mercy seat was the throne of God and you know with all these angels surrounding the throne of God they're looking down they're overshadowing with all these angels surrounding the throne of God you know in my mind looking at it

[24 : 28] I'm reminded of the vision of Isaiah chapter 6 you remember in Isaiah chapter 6 that Isaiah he says in the year that King Uzziah died I saw the Lord sitting up sitting upon his throne high and lifted up and the train of his robe filled the temple and above it stood the seraphim each one had six wings with two he covered his feet with two he covered his face and with two he flew and one angel cried to another two angels crying to one another what are they saying holy holy holy is the Lord of hosts the whole earth is full of his glory and then Isaiah says he stands in the presence of God he sees his great vision and he says woe is me for I am undone because I am a man of unclean lips and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips but mine eyes have seen the King the Lord of hosts and you know my friend if we were to have stood in the Holy of Holies and witnessed the Ark of the Covenant surrounded by all these angels we would very quickly realise that there's a mystery taking place here and it's a mystery that even the angels desire to look into because the mystery is God's propitiation on behalf of his people the mystery is God's propitiation on behalf of his people because the Bible reminds us that it was between the cherubim that God would meet with his people and speak with them we sang about that in Psalm 80 earlier on where the psalmist he longed to hear

God's voice he says hear Israel shepherd like a flock thou that as Joseph guide shine forth oh thou that dust between the cherubims abide and we also sang in Psalm 99 which in which the psalmist he describes the Lord as this eternal king who sits enthroned between the cherubim he says the eternal Lord doth reign as king let all the people quake he sits between the cherubims let the earth be moved and shake and so what the psalmist were wanting us to see is that the ark of the covenant and the mercy seat was God's throne it's God's throne on earth he was the king who dwelt and tabernacled in the midst of his people but the thing was no one ever saw this no one in Israel could approach God's throne because it was a throne of holiness and mankind was defiled by sin this it was all shut off in darkness the only light in the holy of holies was the light of the Lord himself no one could approach the Lord no one could come and experience the mercy from the mercy seat no one could experience mercy without propitiation and it was specifically propitiation that was needed that's what it was called the propitiation seat propitiation was needed because the word propitiation is it has a twofold meaning it means to cover and to remove propitiation means to cover and to remove because in the act of propitiation our sins are covered by blood and the wrath of God is removed our sins are covered by blood and the wrath of God is removed and you know it's because of our sins that we've broken this covenant agreement this covenant agreement that was housed inside the act of the covenant we've broken the ten commandments therefore we need propitiation we need our sins covered by the blood and we need the wrath of

God removed we need our sins covered by blood because God is of purer eye than to behold evil and he can't look upon sin but it's not enough just to have our sins covered it's not enough to have them covered by blood we need the wrath of God against our sins removed so that we can experience peace and reconciliation with a holy God but for the Israelites they had no access to this only once a year on the day of atonement that one time in the year when the high priest would go in and seek to make propitiation for on behalf of the people they only had this blessing once a year one day in the year but you know the writer to the Hebrews he reminds us that the sacrifices offered at the tabernacle on the day of atonement were only shadows of greater things to come and the greater things to come was of course

God's propitiation through Christ because the writer to the Hebrews he went on to say in chapter 9 that through the death of Jesus Christ Christ has entered not into the holy of holies that was made with hands but into heaven itself to appear with his own blood in the presence of God on our behalf therefore he is as Paul the apostle Paul confirms he is the propitiation for our sins and we experience propitiation we experience our sins covered and we experience the wrath of God removed we experience peace and reconciliation with God through faith in the blood of Jesus Christ and you know for the apostle John all the apostles they talk about propitiation such an important word but you know for the apostle John when he considered what God has done for us in Christ all he could say was in a sense he was thinking about the tabernacle and the ark of the covenant and what

God has done for us in Christ all he could say was here in his love not that we loved God but that he loved us and he sent his son to be the propitiation for our sins here in his love that we now have access to this mercy seat through Jesus Christ God sent his son in order to ensure that our sins would be covered and that the wrath of God would be removed from being upon us and you know this is why the gospel now invites us to come to come to God's throne the curtain has been torn the way has been made open we're to come to the ark of the covenant because God's throne which was once a throne of holiness that was shut off to mankind and no man could approach or stand in God's immediate presence and now it's open and we're invited to come we're invited to come because God's propitiation through the blood of

[31 : 41] Jesus Christ it has transformed this throne that was once a throne of holiness to a throne of grace and the invitation of the gospel is that we're to come boldly to the throne of grace in order that we might obtain mercy and find grace to help in our time of need and you know my friend aren't you thankful for the throne of grace tonight and every night in your Christian life because whether you're encountering sin or suffering or sickness or sadness or sorrow this is God's provision for us we're able to come with all our burdens all our worries all our anxieties and we're able to come to this throne it's not a throne of holiness that's shut off to us it's a throne of grace and when we come to it we can experience God's presence through God's propitiation and we can obtain mercy and find grace to help in our time of need the invitation is open for us to come and to keep coming every day to this throne and so as we stand before the ark of the covenant it symbolises two simple things God's presence and God's propitiation and it's all ours through Jesus our tabernacle well may the Lord bless these few thoughts to us let us pray oh Lord our gracious God we give thanks to thee that thy throne that was once a throne of holiness in which no man could approach we thank thee Lord that tonight through thy son Jesus Jesus our tabernacle that we are able to come boldly to this throne realizing that it is a throne of grace a throne that gives to us mercy and a throne that gives to us that grace to help in time of need and Lord that we would never neglect it that we would see this throne as somewhere where we should come daily seeking Lord thy help and thy guidance seeking Lord direction and Lord the help of the Lord day by day and Lord as we come to thy throne we are always reminded that thy grace it is sufficient for us and that even thy strength Lord it is made perfect in our own weakness Lord we thank thee for this throne and help us to come help us to come with our prayers our petitions and our burdens knowing Lord and being assured of the promise that thou art the God who hears and who answers prayer oh Lord help us then we pray to keep going on in the walk of faith to keep ever looking to Jesus to know him and to love him as the author and the finisher of our faith that even our study Lord of the tabernacle that it would make us love Jesus more and walk with him more closely and realize that he is a precious savior one that we must lean upon and trust in and love more deeply because he is the propitiation for our sins Lord do us good and we pray bless us in our being together bless us

Lord in our parting one from another that thou wouldst keep our going out and our coming in from this time forth and even forevermore take away our iniquity receive us graciously for Jesus sake Amen shall bring our time to a conclusion by singing the words of Psalm 24 Psalm 24 in the Scottish Psalter page 230 Psalm 24 we're singing the last four verses verse 7 down to the verse mark 10 Psalm 24 a psalm that reminds us of the glorious arrival of King Jesus Jesus ye gates lift up your heads on high ye doors that last foray be lifted up that so the king of glory enter me but who of glory is the king the mighty lord is this in that same lord that great in might and strong in battle is so from verse 7 down to the end of the psalm of

Psalm 24 to God's thanks psalm he gates with the pure heads on high he doors that last foray be lifted up that so the king of glory enter me but who of glory is the king the mighty lord is this in that same lord that great in might and strong in battle is in that same lord that great in might and strong in battle is ye gates lift up your hands ye doors doors that to last foray be lifted up that soul the king of glory enter me but who is he that is the king king of glory who is this the lord of hosts and not but he the king of glory is the lord of hosts and not but here the king of glory is ■ holy be forget ■ torrent

[39 : 14] Alleluia. Alleluia. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God the Father, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all, now and forevermore. Amen.