

The Tabernacle: An Introduction

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[0 : 00] Well, if I could, this evening, with the Lord's help, if we could turn back to that portion of Scripture that we read in the book of Exodus.

Exodus chapter 25. Exodus chapter 25, and if we read again at verses 8 and 9. Exodus 25, verse 8, where the Lord says, And let them make me a sanctuary, that I may dwell in their midst, exactly as I show you concerning the pattern of the tabernacle and all of its furniture.

So you shall make it. So as I mentioned, this evening we're beginning a study on the tabernacle. And God willing, over the next couple of months, we're going to consider the purpose of the tabernacle and its importance for us as the Lord's people.

But I just want to say from the very outset of our study that everything that we're going to look at in relation to the tabernacle and everything we're going to consider together, As you would expect, it all points forward.

It all directs our attention towards Jesus Christ. Because Jesus Christ, he is the fulfillment. As you know, he's the fulfillment of all the types and all the shadows of the Old Testament.

[1 : 26] Therefore, all the furniture in the tabernacle, whether it's the brazen altar or the bronze laver or the table of showbread or the golden lampstand, all of it directs our attention towards Jesus Christ.

In fact, I think I mentioned this to you before. It was the American theologian B.B. Warfield. Warfield, he once said that the Old Testament can be compared to a dimly lit room with lots of furniture in it.

And Warfield said that the room he describes, it doesn't have enough light to make out all the pieces of furniture. But when you look at the furniture, all you can see is these shapes and shadows in this darkened room.

And Warfield says nothing is clear. Nothing is clear in the room until the light of the New Testament is switched on and everything is finally revealed. And in this illustration, Warfield, he says, the introduction of light, it doesn't add any furniture to the room.

Rather, it brings into clearer view what was already in the room, but not fully seen before. And, you know, what Warfield says is actually so helpful because as we consider all the furniture in the tabernacle, it's like the furniture in the tabernacle is in this darkened room.

[2 : 47] It's in the darkened room of the Old Testament. But when we come into the light of the New Testament and we see the light of the New Testament, it's presented to us in the person and work of Jesus Christ.

And that's even why the Apostle John, when he begins his gospel, he begins his gospel account by saying the true light which enlightens everyone.

is coming into the world. And with that, John went on to say that the Word became flesh and dwelt among us. And we beheld his glory. The glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.

And even what's remarkable about that verse, John 1, verse 14, what's remarkable, and I want us to remember this as we study the tabernacle, what's remarkable about John 1, verse 14, is when John said the Word became flesh and dwelt among us.

Because the Word dwelt, when John quotes it, it's literally tabernacled. The Word became flesh and tabernacled among us.

[3 : 55] Jesus tabernacled among us. And so as we begin this study of the tabernacle, I want us to always remember who it's pointing us to. Because it's pointing us to Jesus, our tabernacle.

The tabernacle in the wilderness is pointing us to Jesus, our tabernacle. Now as we study the tabernacle together, and consider all the furniture and all its meaning, I don't want us to follow the order that it's presented to us in the Bible.

The way it's presented to us in the Bible is actually very interesting. Because theologians describe it as a theocentric order. It begins where God is dwelling, and then goes out into the outer courtyard.

But I want us to begin in the outer courtyard, and come in to where God is dwelling. Not for any particular reason, except I want us to look at the tabernacle as if we were walking through it ourselves, right into the presence of God.

So we'll begin, God willing, next week at the outer gate, and we'll walk into the courtyard of the tabernacle, and we'll come to the altar of sacrifice, and then another week we'll come to the brazen laver, and then we'll eventually walk through into the holy place, and we'll see the table of showbread, and we'll see the golden lampstand, and then we'll come to the altar of incense, and then we'll walk through the second curtain, into the holy of holies, and we'll see there the ark of the covenant, and the mercy seat, and we'll consider the glory of God that dwelt there.

[5 : 35] And so in our study we're going to walk through the tabernacle, as if we were starting at the outer gate, and walk right into the presence of God, because, well, in the New Testament, as the New Testament church, we can walk right into the presence of God.

We're encouraged to come to the throne of grace, that we might obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need. And in fact, I'll show you a short video clip after the service to explain what I mean, because the video clip, it actually just walks us from the outer gate, right into the presence of God, and we'll see the journey that we're going to take through the tabernacle.

But this evening, as we begin our study of the tabernacle, I just want us to introduce ourselves to this topic by considering two things, just two things, creation and contribution.

Creation and contribution. So we'll look first of all at creation. Now we'll read verses 8 and 9 again, where the Lord says, let them make me a sanctuary, that I may dwell in their midst, exactly as I show you concerning the pattern of the tabernacle and all of its furniture, so you shall make it.

Now we read earlier, in the closing verses of Exodus 24, that the Lord called Moses to come up to the top of Mount Sinai. And Moses was to receive instructions from the Lord.

[7 : 03] And as we read in that chapter, Moses went up to the top of Mount Sinai, and he stood in the presence of the Lord's glory for 40 days and 40 nights. And during that period, the Lord gave Moses, he gave him the Ten Commandments that were written on the two tablets of stone.

And along with the Ten Commandments, which are recorded for us in Exodus, back in Exodus 20, the Lord also gave to Moses all these various laws for the children of Israel to follow.

And they're recorded for us in chapters 21 to 23. But then the last thing that the Lord gave to Moses on the top of Mount Sinai were the instructions to build the tabernacle.

And these instructions are recorded for us here in chapters 25 to 31. But what I want us to understand is that the Lord gave these instructions to Moses because there was a problem.

And of course, the problem was sin. Mankind had fallen from the perfect estate in which God had created them, and they had fallen into an estate of sin and misery.

[8 : 13] Our catechism reminds us the extent of the fall. The extent of the fall was devastating because we're told in the catechism, all mankind, by their fall, lost communion with God.

They're under his wrath and curse. They're so made liable to all the miseries of this life, to death itself, and to the pains of hell forever. Because of sin, mankind had lost fellowship with God.

And all this took place, as you know, in Genesis chapter 3, just after the creation. But you know what's so beautiful? It's that when we consider the perfect creation that God made in the beginning, it was actually a prototype of the tabernacle.

And I say that because the Garden of Eden was the first tabernacle. The Garden of Eden was the first tabernacle. The Garden of Eden was the first place in which God had fellowship with mankind.

The Garden of Eden was the first tabernacle. Because, you know, if we were to enter the Garden of Eden, we would have to enter by a gate on the east side of the garden.

[9 : 25] You remember that when Adam and Eve fell, the Lord drove Adam and Eve out of the garden and he drove them out through the gate that was in the east. And so if you were to enter into the Garden of Eden, you would have to enter through that gate, the gate in the east.

And also if you were to enter into the tabernacle, into the court of the tabernacle, through the outer gate, you would have to enter through the gate that was in the east. The tabernacle was always built facing east.

But more than that, we're told that when the Lord placed at the east of the Garden of Eden, that gate, when that gate was put there, we were told that there were cherubim put there.

when he drove out Adam and Eve, there was cherubim and a flaming sword. And the cherubim were there to guard the way to the tree of life, keeping Adam and Eve out because of their sin.

And similarly, when we come to look at the tabernacle, many of the coverings and many of the curtains in the tabernacle, they had cherubim embroidered onto them.

[10 : 33] In fact, the curtain that closed off the Holy of Holies, and we'll see that on the video at the end. The curtain that closed off the Holy of Holies, it had cherubim, two cherubim embroidered onto it to guard the way into the immediate presence of God.

The cherubim, just like at the gate of the Garden of Eden, the cherubim were there to keep sinners out. And as you know, the curtain, these cherubim were embroidered onto, the curtain into the Holy of Holies, it was a distinct mark of separation between sinful man and their holy God.

And one book in particular, a book called Last Things First, it's by a man called J.V. Fesco. He makes all these connections between the Garden of Eden and the tabernacle.

It's a really interesting book to read. And he says, in relation to the cherubim, he says, the Garden of Eden is portrayed to us in Scripture as the Holy of Holies, in which man once had direct access into God's presence.

However, subsequent to the fall, God moved the cherubim to the outer perimeter of the Holy of Holies to keep man from entering. Just as the cherubim with the flaming sword would slay anyone who tried to gain access, so too anyone who attempted to enter the Holy of Holies in the tabernacle would be struck down.

[12 : 03] But you know, the amazing thing is when Jesus, our tabernacle, when he died upon the cross, you remember in the Gospel accounts, the curtain which guarded the way into the Holy of Holies, it was torn from top to bottom.

And the reason for that was that because of his sacrificial death, Jesus, you could say, he removed the cherubim and he experienced the flaming sword on our behalf, all so that we could enter into the presence of God and have fellowship with him.

And what's remarkable is that for centuries, for centuries down throughout the generations, the tabernacle, the curtain on the tabernacle, into the Holy of Holies, it proclaimed, if you enter into God's throne, you will die.

If you come in, you will die. But now through Jesus, our tabernacle, the curtain has been torn wide open and now the proclamation is, if you do not enter before God's throne, you will die.

If you stay outside, you will die. If you stay where you are, you will die. And the message that comes to us loud and clear in the gospel is, you must enter into the presence of God.

[13 : 28] You must come to the throne of grace to obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need. You must come to Jesus, our tabernacle.

And so it's evident that the Garden of Eden was the first tabernacle. The Garden of Eden was the first tabernacle. But what about Adam?

Where, what were his responsibilities in the Garden of Eden? Because you remember that when the Lord, when the Lord put Adam into the Garden of Eden, Adam was commanded to work and to keep it.

And so you would expect that Adam's role in the Garden would be something like a farmer. He would be working the ground and producing crops. But having considered the Garden of Eden as a prototype of the tabernacle, we can actually see that Adam's responsibilities were priestly rather than, you could say, agricultural.

And I say that because the phrase which God used to describe Adam's role in the Garden of Eden were told that he was to work and to keep the garden. And it's interesting because the only other time that that phrase to work and to keep, the only other time it's used elsewhere in the Bible is in relation to the priests who served at the tabernacle.

[14 : 50] So the responsibility of the priests who were working at the tabernacle was that they were to work and to keep the tabernacle. They were to work and to keep it by attending to all the sacrifices and ensuring that God was worshipped correctly.

And so if the Garden of Eden was the first tabernacle, then Adam was its first priest. But you know what the Gospel presents to us is that Jesus is the last Adam.

Jesus is both tabernacle and priest. And he is the one who has worked and kept God's Word by presenting himself as a sacrifice and securing our redemption.

But you know there's more because you remember when Adam and Eve sinned and when they sinned they experienced shame. They didn't know what shame was before.

They knew that they were naked and they experienced shame. And they tried to clothe themselves. They used fig leaves to cover themselves up. But these leaves they were no use. But we're told at the end of Genesis 3 that the Lord God made for Adam and for his wife garments of skins and clothed them.

[16 : 06] And that word clothed similar to the phrase to work and to keep it's only used elsewhere in the Old Testament in relation to the priests who served at the tabernacle.

Because as the priests worked and kept the tabernacle they were to be clothed always clothed in their holy garments. And of course in Genesis 3 it was the Lord who clothed Adam and Eve.

It was the Lord who killed an animal and shed its blood in order to clothe the first priest. Which in many ways was a foreshadowing.

It was a foreshadowing of the Lamb of God who would come and take away the sin of the world by clothing his people in his righteousness. And this is the thing in order for the last Adam to clothe the first Adam in his righteousness the last Adam had to be clothed in the flesh of the first Adam.

In order for the last Adam to clothe the first Adam in his righteousness the last Adam had to be clothed in the flesh of the first Adam. In order to take away the sin of the world and to clothe us in his righteousness, Jesus had to become like us. And that's what John draws our attention to. Back to that key verse in John's gospel where he highlights the wonder and glory of the incarnation. John says to us, John 1 verse 14, the word became flesh. And what did he do? He tabernacled among us.

[17 : 47] He dwelt among us. Why? So that we would behold his glory. The glory is of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth. And so as we begin our study of the tabernacle, we see its relationship to creation. But the second thing we see here is contribution. So creation, contribution.

Contribution. Look at again in verse 1, chapter 25 at verse 1. The Lord said to Moses, Speak to the people of Israel, that they take for me a contribution.

From every man whose heart moves him, you shall receive the contribution for me. And this is the contribution that you shall receive from them. Gold, silver and bronze, blue and purple and scarlet yarns and fine twined linen, goat's hair, tan ram skins, goat skins, acacia wood, oil for the lamps, spices for the anointing oil and for the fragrant incense, onyx stones and stones for setting, for the effort and for the breastpiece.

You know, as the Lord spoke with Moses on the top of Mount Sinai, giving him the instructions on how to build the tabernacle. The interesting thing is the Lord didn't miraculously provide all these materials that were needed to build the tabernacle. They didn't just appear there in the wilderness. Rather, the Lord, we're told, he requests that his people provide what's required for his sanctuary. And, you know, it's amazing that the materials, they were to come from the Lord's people. And they were to come as voluntary gifts rather than compulsory demands. The Israelites, they were requested to give a contribution to the work, witness and worship of the Lord.

They were requested to give a contribution to the work, witness and worship of the Lord. That's what we're told in verse one. The Lord said to Moses, speak to the people of Israel that they take for me a contribution. From every man whose heart moves him, you shall receive the contribution for me.

[20 : 01] So unlike the other kingdoms and empires that surrounded the people of Israel, these kingdoms and empires, they demanded a tax, just like the Romans did for the Jews. They always demanded a tax to be paid. But the Lord here, we're told, that he requested his people to voluntarily give a gift according to their wealth. Literally, the Lord's people were being asked to give a free will offering to the Lord. And we're told, it's from every man whose heart moves him, you shall receive the contribution for me. It was a free will offering. And it was to be given to the Lord as an act of worship. And, you know, that's the model we still use today. That's the model we're still using. Because your monetary gift, which you place in the collection plate as you come into church, it's a free will offering to the Lord. And you're giving that contribution to the work, witness, and worship of the Lord. And you're giving it not by compulsion or coercion, but voluntarily.

As, as the Lord says, as your heart moves you, you give your free will offering and contribution to the Lord. And you give it as an act of worship to the Lord. And this act of worship, it's actually what Paul taught the Corinthians in the New Testament, when he said, each one must give as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. And so my friend, your contribution, your free will offering, it's an act of worship to the Lord. Therefore, worship begins, not when we sing our first psalm. Worship begins when we give our free will offering to the Lord.

And I have to say that as a congregation, your generosity and kindness, both in monetary and even material things, your gifts towards the work, witness, and worship of the Lord, it's very, very encouraging. But you know, when we consider what the Lord said to the Israelites here in chapter 25, and the Lord's request here to give a contribution to the work, witness, and worship of the Lord, just remember what he said. The Lord says in chapter 25, speak to the people of Israel that they take for me a contribution from every man whose heart moves them, you shall receive the contribution for me. And that's there in chapter 25. But what happened in reality was completely different. Because you remember that as Moses was on the top of Mount Sinai for 40 days and 40 nights, standing in the presence and glory of God, and he's receiving the 10 commandments, he's getting various laws for the children of Israel who are down there at the bottom of the mountain.

And he's also receiving instructions for the tabernacle. While Moses is up at the top, the Israelites were down at the bottom of Mount Sinai with Moses's brother Aaron. And what are they doing?

They're making a golden calf. And you know, what's interesting is that as you read through the chapters of the book of Exodus, you have the instructions given by the Lord in chapters 25 to 31. They're the instructions to build the tabernacle. The instructions are in 25 to 31. But then you have the implementation of those instructions in chapters 35 to 40. And what you see is that there's this gap of three chapters. Chapters 32 to 34. These chapters, they fall between the instruction and the implementation of the tabernacle. Because in chapter 32, you can read it when you go home. In chapter 32, we see the Israelites, they become impatient. Moses has been on the top of that mountain for a long time. And they're becoming impatient waiting at the bottom for him. And so they build a golden calf and they start worshipping it. But you remember that when Moses comes down the mountain, and when Moses sees them worshipping the golden calf, he's so angry that he smashes the two tablets of stone on the ground, which had the Ten Commandments on them, written by the finger of God. He smashes them on the ground.

[24 : 30] And then in chapter 33, Moses is so sorry for breaking the Ten Commandments because they were a symbol of the covenant. He's so sorry for breaking the Ten Commandments. He's so sorry for breaking the news, his covenant with his people. But what we have to take note of is that the break in the chapters between the instruction and the implementation, the break in the chapters of the instruction and the implementation of the tabernacle was all because of the disobedience of the Lord's people. And you know, what I find so challenging, especially in relation to the Lord's request for their hearts to move and to give this free will contribution to the work witness and worship of the Lord.

What I find so challenging is that when Moses was on Mount Sinai receiving instructions on how to have fellowship with the Lord, the Israelites were worshipping a golden calf.

And just to read the opening verses of chapter 32, we're told that when the people saw that Moses delayed to come down from the mountain, the people gathered themselves together to Aaron and said to him, Up, make us gods who shall go before us. And for this, Moses, the man who brought us up out of the land of Egypt, we do not know what has become of him. So Aaron said to them, and this is the interesting thing, take off the rings of gold that are in the ears of your wives, your sons and your daughters, and bring them to me. So all the people took off the rings of gold that were in their ears and brought them to Aaron.

Do you see the contrast there? The Lord had requested that the Israelites contribute a free will offering to the work witness and worship of the Lord. But when the Israelites weren't getting what they wanted, they looked elsewhere. And in order to fulfil their desires, Aaron demands. He demands that the Israelites hand over all their gold to make a golden calf. Aaron's request, it wasn't a free will offering.

It wasn't voluntary. Aaron's request was demanded and it was dictated to the people. We're told there in chapter 32, Aaron said to them, take off the rings of gold that are in the ears of your wives, your sons and your daughters, and bring them to me.

[27 : 26] And you know, my friend, when we consider all the golden calves that are present in our world today, these golden calves that are pushed upon us, they're promoted before us, and they're paraded in our face. With these golden calves, we have to be very, very careful. Because sadly, like the Israelites, these golden calves can often take our focus off the Lord. And as we were reminded earlier, this Lord is the one whom we have been created to worship and serve. But you know, what we're not told often, and what we're often not warned about, is that these materialistic golden calves, they fill our minds, they distract our thoughts, they want our money, they crave our attention, and they demand our time. These golden calves, they are relentless, and they will not stop, because they're always wanting more. But you know, the warning that comes to us, even before we begin to consider the tabernacle, the warning that comes to us from the story of the book of Exodus, the warning is, beware of the golden calf. Our priority is fellowship with God. That's the

Christian's priority. The Christian's priority is fellowship with God. And so the warning that comes to us right at the beginning is, beware of the golden calf. Beware of anything that takes your distraction away from the Lord. Beware of anything that fills your mind, distracts your thoughts, wants your money, craves your attention, and even demands your time, that takes everything away from fellowship with God. Beware of the golden calf. Because the Lord, the Lord desires our contribution towards his work, his witness, and his worship. And so just as an introduction, we've considered creation and contribution. But as we begin our study of the tabernacle and consider the purpose of the tabernacle and its importance for us as the Lord's people, let's remember that it all points forward.

It all directs our attention to Jesus. And you know, it should make us love Jesus more, and even understand Jesus more. Because the tabernacle, it's all about Jesus, our tabernacle.

It's all about Jesus, our tabernacle. He is the word who became flesh and dwelt among us, all so that we could behold his glory. The glory is of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth. So may the Lord bless these thoughts to us. Let us pray.

O Lord, our gracious God, may we give thanks to thee for thy word. And may we give thanks, Lord, even for the tabernacle in the wilderness, that it is a picture and even a pointer towards Jesus, our tabernacle. And Lord, as we begin our study, that thou wouldest lead us by thy spirit and guide us, Lord, we pray, to see more of Jesus, that he would increase and that we would decrease, that we would see his beauty, that we would understand his purpose, that we would know more and more of his glory. And Lord, we thank thee and we praise thee for the wonder that he came to dwell among us, that he became like us in order to relate to us. He became one of us in order to die in our place. And Lord, we thank thee for him, that even tonight he is still working. He is still seated at thy right hand, still interceding on our behalf, praying as our great high priest for his own people, whom he loved and gave himself for. Lord, bless us then, we ask. Bless, Lord, those who need thee in a special way this evening. Those, Lord, who are upon our heart, those whom we are burdened for.

[31 : 45] May thy hand be upon them for good. O Lord, bless us together then, we pray. Keep us and go before us, taking away our iniquity and receiving us graciously for Jesus' sake. Amen.

Well, we're going to bring our time to a conclusion by singing the words of Psalm 15. Psalm 15 in the Sing Psalms version on page 16. Psalm 15.

Psalm 15. Page 16. We'll sing the whole psalm. Lord, who may stay within your tent, your sacred dwelling place, and who upon your holy hill may live before your face, whoever walks a blameless path, who acts in righteousness, and who will always from the heart sincerely truth express.

So the whole psalm of Psalm 15, to God's praise. Amen. Amen. Lord, who may stay within your tent, your sacred dwelling place, and who upon your holy hill may live before your face.

Whoever walks a blameless path, who acts in righteousness, and who will always from the heart sincerely truth express.

[34 : 04] He has no slant on anyone, nor does his neighbor own.

He has no spite within his heart, or slander on his tongue.

He honors those who fear the Lord. The worthless he'll despise.

He keeps the oath which he has sworn, however high the price.

He lands his money out. No charge, no pride can he endure.

[35 : 29] Those who behave in life like this will always stand secure.

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.