

The God Who Dwells

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[0 : 00] Chapter 25, verse 8 and 9 says this, Then let them make a sanctuary for me, and I will dwell among them. Make this tabernacle and all its furnishings exactly like the pattern I will show you.

So God had saved his people from slavery in Egypt, and he had entered into a covenant with them, and now this third chunk of the Exodus story, in it God instructs Moses to make a sanctuary, to make the tabernacle as a place for him to dwell.

And so the tabernacle in a sense would be a bit like a piece of heaven on earth, where God's presence would be among his people. So God wants to be with us, and yet there's a problem, because God's presence cannot tolerate sin.

And the Bible tells us this in the very beginning, when God's presence was with his people, way back in the Garden of Eden. In fact, the Garden of Eden was the very first sanctuary where God dwelt with his people.

And so they didn't need a special place, a special building, because remember how in the Garden God was seeking Adam and Eve in the cool of the day, walking in the Garden in Genesis chapter 3.

[1 : 22] So God created human beings to dwell with them. But our first parents, Adam and Eve, rebelled against God, and were banished from the Garden of Eden.

And humanity has been separated from God ever since. And so it's against this devastating backdrop that the rest of the Bible story, or God's story, unfolds.

And we find our place in it. Because the Bible story centres on God essentially restoring his relationship with humanity that has been destroyed by sin.

And the tabernacle is a stage in God's story as the first of the earthly sanctuaries where God made it possible for him to dwell with his people.

And so the tabernacle essentially foreshadows the dwelling of God with humanity in Jesus Christ. But before we get to Jesus, we need to know that God wants to draw near his people.

[2 : 26] And yet, sin creates this barrier between God's people and God because we can't get near him because of our sin.

And that's why we read at the beginning of these chapters, Exodus chapter 25, verse 1, that the Lord said to Moses, and then there's all these instructions that come from God, and all the way through we read them, the Lord said to Moses, the Lord said to Moses, and so on and so on. So God is telling Moses that the only way that it is possible for people to get near God is if God makes a way.

There is no other way for human beings to get to God other than God makes it happen. And so what we can see here in the tabernacle is really humanity's biggest problem because our loving creator, God, wants a relationship with us, but our sin is a barrier that stops us getting to him.

Now, of course, the concept of sin is not very popular in today's secular society, is it? Because not many people would consider sin to be really an issue, let alone a problem for us.

[3 : 40] I guess most people these days regard themselves as being nice, virtuous, respectable, even woke. And that's basically the definition of a good person.

And so to say that our sin is our moral failure against a holy God and it deserves his judgment is offensive to our ears.

This was highlighted to me recently in an article in the Glasgow Times. It was remembering the Billy Graham crusades in Glasgow way back in 1955 when, unbelievably, Billy Graham attracted 16,000 people each night in the Kelvin Hall over, I think, a six-week period.

And he had a rally in Hampden Park with 90,000 people attending. And so the article was remembering all of this and it said in the title, Christian Fervour Sees Sinful City.

Where the word sinful was in quotation marks as if to say, we don't use that language of sin anymore. We don't do sin. We don't regard very much as sinful.

[4 : 51] Unless, of course, it's downright evil. Then we'll call it sinful. Like we see, let me killing babies. That's sinful. But apart from that, you're generally quite good.

And yet what we see here in the Bible is that we are not okay with God. Our sin prevents us dwelling in his holy presence. And that's why God has to do something about it.

And the instructions for the tabernacle, as lengthy as they are, tell us this loudly and clearly. Its whole design makes it possible for sinful people to come into the presence of the Holy God.

And so listen to what God says, chapter 29, verse 42 through to 46. He says, For the generations to come, this burnt offering is to be made regularly at the entrance to the tent of meeting before the Lord.

There I will meet you and speak to you. There also I will meet with the Israelites and the place will be consecrated by my glory. Then verse 45.

[5 : 57] Then I will dwell among the Israelites and be their God. They will know that I am the Lord their God who brought them out of Egypt so that I might dwell among them.

I am the Lord their God. And it really sums up the point of the tabernacle. And it sums up the point of the book of Exodus. God saved his people to dwell with his people.

And so the tabernacle would be his earthly residence, if you like, his home where he would be present with them. And so what we're being told here in all of the detail of the tabernacle is, this is what God is like.

God wants to be with the people he has made. And so today we worship the same God who wants to dwell with people like us.

Not in a tabernacle, but in Jesus Christ, as we have seen. And so what's the application of this? Well, perhaps in your life right now, you feel or sense that God is distant.

[7 : 04] And maybe you need to be reminded of God's desire to dwell with you. Of his presence to be a real experience in your life.

Because God wants you and me to know and to experience and to enjoy his presence with us. And of course, his presence won't tolerate our sin.

And yet God has made a way, he's made it possible for us to be near him in Jesus. So don't feel that God is distant.

Or even that you can't draw near to God because of your sin or because of what you've done in the past. God wants his people to come to him. He longs to dwell with the people he's made.

Even people like us. And so we'll see how this is possible. Because first of all, God dwells with his presence. But second, God directs by his pattern.

[8 : 05] God told Moses to make the tabernacle and everything in it according to his specific exact instructions. And so chapter 25, verse 9 says, Make this tabernacle and all its furnishings exactly like a pattern I will show you.

Okay, so God gave Moses the pattern for the work, the blueprint, the construction plan. He gives them all the details of the furnishings. He gives them the instructions on who would minister there. And it all had to be made exactly as God directed. And God kept reminding Moses of this. So chapter 25, verse 40.

It says, See that you make them according to the pattern shown you on the mountain. Chapter 26, verse 30. Set up the tabernacle according to the plan shown you on the mountain.

27, verse 8. It is to be made just as you were shown on the mountain. Chapter 31, verse 11. It says, They are to make them just as I commanded you.

[9 : 16] So we get the point. God has a plan. And Moses and those working on the tabernacle have to stick to the plan. So this wasn't like making up IKEA furniture, which is the worst job in the world.

Where you start off and it's all going well for about five minutes. And then you hit a problem. And you made a mistake. And something's on upside down. And the wrong way around. And the holes are back to front.

But you think, Ah, it's okay. Looks okay. Probably be fine. We'll just leave it. And you have to warn the kids. Don't go near that. Or it'll collapse. Seriously. Leave it.

No. Not like that. This is precise instruction. And it's to emphasize that if God is going to dwell with Israel, it has got to happen God's way.

Not their way. And so the whole layout and the dimensions, the design, the details, the materials, indicate that dwelling with God is possible only on his terms.

[10:15] And so let's just look at what God directed. Not by going into all the details, but just to give an overview. And we've got some pictures for this. So we're going to start from the outside of the tabernacle and go to the very heart, which is the place where God would dwell with his people.

So first there's the courtyard. The tabernacle consisted of a courtyard. And in it were the bronze basin and the bronze altar. So next, the bronze basin.

The bronze basin was for the priests to wash themselves before they entered the tent or before they made an offering. They had to wash their hands and their feet. And God says if they didn't, then they would die.

Clear, direct instruction. Then there's the bronze altar. This is where the priests would offer sacrifices. Then there's the tabernacle tent. Next.

This tent was 45 feet long. Okay. It was 15 feet wide. And it was 15 feet high. And it had this wooden frame, which was overlaid with gold.

[11:20] And so it had to be fit for God's presence. That's because of the gold. And yet it was a tent. So it was also portable. And as well as the inner curtains, there were curtains of goats here.

Coverings of various animal skins. And so the tabernacle was separated into two sections. By a curtain. You see the curtain there. The first room, the larger one, was called the Holy Place.

And then the second was called the Most Holy Place. And the Most Holy Place was a perfect cube. And inside the Holy Place was, next slide shows us the table for the bread.

So it was a wooden table overlaid with pure gold. And 12 loaves of bread, which symbolized the 12 tribes of Israel. And it was a reminder that God would provide for his people, as he had in the wilderness.

And then there's the golden lampstand. This was made of pure gold, hammered out of one solid piece. And the six branches, along with the stem in the middle, held seven lamps for light.

[12:25] And then there was the altar of incense. Incense was burned for the Lord on this altar. And it was made with wood. It was covered with pure gold. And it sat in the Holy Place.

Just in front of the curtain, into the Most Holy Place. And so the curtain that separated the Holy Place from the Most Holy Place was blue, purple, and scarlet.

We're reminded of that again and again. And it was embroidered with cherubim. Those heavenly creatures with wings. And so this Most Holy Place, this 15 feet cube, had just one piece of furniture inside it.

It had the Ark of the Covenant. And the Ark of the Covenant was a wooden chest. And it was covered completely with pure gold.

And inside the Ark of the Covenant were the two stone tablets with the Ten Commandments on them. And the lid of the Ark was called the Mercy Seat, or the Atonement Cover.

[13:29] And it was made of solid gold. And on it were two cherubim. One cherub on each side. And so the Ark spoke of God's presence.

It was to be the place where God would come and meet with his people. And that was the whole point of the tabernacle. That's why the tabernacle instructions begin with the Ark.

So God tells Moses, chapter 25, verse 22. There, above the cover between the two cherubim that are over the Ark of the Covenant law, I will meet with you and give you all my commands for the Israelites.

There was other instructions for the tabernacle. But the main and longest list has to do with the priests. And so what they were to wear, how they were to be prepared, and what they were to do. So there's the priest's garments, chapter 28. And then there's the consecration of the priests in chapter 29. So the priests would minister in God's presence.

[14:44] And they came from the tribe of Levi. And the high priest had to come from the line of Aaron, who was Moses' brother. But before they could minister, they had to be consecrated.

And so there's all these details about what they had to do before they could even get near the most holy place. So, get this, God directed the building.

He directed the furnishing. He directed the outfitting of the priests. And it all had to be done according to God's pattern if God were to dwell with his people.

And the point is, we have got no right to be in the presence of God. Our sin prohibits us. And that's why there are these cherubim everywhere.

I wonder if you noticed that. They were sculpted, or they were woven into the material of the tabernacle. And they were symbolic of the separation between God and the people.

[15:51] The people and God's presence. Interestingly, do you know where cherubim first are mentioned in the Bible? They come up in the Garden of Eden. So, after Adam and Eve had sinned, God banished them from the garden.

And then in Genesis chapter 3, we read that the Lord God placed on the east side of the Garden of Eden, cherubim and a flaming sword flashing back and forth to guard the way to the tree of life. So, the cherubim were there to separate Adam and Eve from God, his presence. And so, all the cherubim and the tabernacle were a reminder that the sins of the people prevented them from having full access to the presence of God.

And so, they needed the tabernacle. They needed the priests. They needed the sacrifices in order to dwell with God. But then, even the high priest, only the high priest, was permitted to enter the most holy place.

And only once a year. And so, why this specific pattern for the tabernacle? One last time. Why this pattern? Why this design?

[17:06] Why all of these different functions? Well, it is all pointing beyond the tabernacle. It is a pattern that points towards Jesus Christ.

So, all of these instructions point to the greater reality of God dwelling with his people through Jesus. Where one day, the ultimate high priest would come and he would offer himself as the ultimate sacrifice for sin through his death on the cross.

And Jesus would then open up the way into God's very presence. And wasn't this powerfully symbolized when Jesus died on the cross? Remember what happened the moment he died? The curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom. So, Jesus' sacrifice dealt with sin once and for all, removing the barrier between God and people.

Opening up the way back to God. And that's why we don't need a tabernacle or priests or sacrifices anymore. However, the book of Hebrews tells us because we have confidence to enter the most holy place by the blood of Jesus.

[18:21] By a new and living way open for us through the curtain that is his body. I say that Jesus is the true and better tabernacle where we can meet with God.

And so, as Jesus died, God was saying the way into his presence is open for all who trust in Jesus Christ. And so, the question is, have you done that?

Do you trust in Jesus Christ? Because there is no other way possible to have access to God and to enjoy your relationship with God other than through Jesus.

So, first, God dwells with his presence. Second, God directs by his pattern. And third, God delivers on his promise. The promise of the tabernacle was not simply the way God would dwell with Israel. Because it foreshadows the dwelling of God with humanity in Jesus. And not merely for this life alone, but forever.

[19:34] And so, while the tabernacle served this important function in Israel's worship, it was only ever meant to be temporary. Because as we follow the story of the Bible, the place of God's dwelling moves from the tabernacle to the temple in Jerusalem.

But again, the temple was only ever meant to be temporary. Pointing to the fullness of God's presence that came when Jesus entered into this world, when he came to earth.

That's why John begins his gospel by announcing the word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.

And the original, the word dwelling, means to pitch a tent or to tabernacle. Because Jesus is the fulfilment of the tabernacle.

God became man to make his dwelling among us. I wonder if you heard the rumours. The rumours are that Apple are going to launch a new iPhone, the iPhone 15, apparently on Tuesday the 12th of September.

[20:50] I know you can't sleep because you're waiting with great excitement for the new iPhone. And Apple are planning to make big changes to the iPhone. And we've seen so many big changes to this small rectangle black thing over the years.

And yet we've had multiple generations of iPhone. The iPhone 14, the iPhone 13, and before that the iPhone 12 and iPhone 11. And various different spin-off models of each.

But soon, Apple are promising there will be one that will be better than all the rest. And the next year there will be another model that will be better than all that has gone before.

And so when it comes to Jesus, Jesus is not just the new and improved next generation tabernacle or temple. Jesus is the ultimate tabernacle and temple.

Where everything we read about God dwelling with human beings reaches its climax in Jesus.

Because Jesus fulfills the purpose for which the tabernacle and the temple were built.

[21 : 59] Jesus is the one who enables the full fellowship with God that we were made for. And that fellowship with God begins for us in this life and lasts forever through Jesus.

And so while Jesus has ascended to the Father, God's presence is still with his people by his Spirit.

And so the Apostle Paul speaks of this in his description of the church.

Where he says, don't you know that you yourselves are God's temple? And that God's Spirit lives among you? He's saying that the church is now God's holy dwelling.

Later he says, do you not know that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit? Who is in you? Who you have received from God. And so God dwells in every Christian by his Spirit.

And then Paul again says in Ephesians chapter 2, And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit.

[23 : 08] Isn't that amazing? Through our union with Christ, we are a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit.

So just as God made the priests holy at the tabernacle, so he makes us holy in Jesus. He washes us.

He robes us in Christ's righteousness. He sprinkles us with the saving blood of his Son. So that we are a suitable dwelling for him. By his Spirit.

So God delivered on his promise to the Israelites by rescuing them out of Egypt. So that he might dwell among them. And that is part of his promise to all people, including us.

Because when he is our God, he dwells with us. Both now in this life, but also forever. And that is why the writer to the Hebrews points out that the tabernacle reflects a heavenly reality.

[24 : 15] In Hebrews chapter 8, we read a sanctuary that is a copy and shadow of what is in heaven. Referring to the tabernacle. This is why Moses was warned when he was about to build the tabernacle.

See to it that you make everything according to the pattern shown you on the mountain. But in fact, the ministry Jesus has received is as superior to theirs as the covenant of which he is mediator is superior to the old one.

Since the new covenant is established on better promises. He said that the tabernacle was a copy or a shadow of heaven.

A reflection of what is to come. And so the tabernacle represented heaven on earth. And yet it anticipates the merging of heaven and earth in God's new creation.

And so think of the Bible story. At the creation, God had intimacy with his people in the Garden of Eden. And then that intimacy was severed when humans, Adam and Eve, rebelled against God.

[25 : 24] And yet God restores this intimacy in Jesus. Where now, by living in us by his spirit, we've got a deposit that guarantees an inheritance to come.

And that's why the book of Revelation at the very end of the Bible declares the fulfillment of all that God has promised. It says in Revelation 21, So as we close, we were made to dwell with God.

That's what the tabernacle is telling us. That's what the temple is telling us. That's what the Bible story is telling us. And so at the end of the Bible, in Revelation chapter 21, we hear John say, I did not see a temple in the city.

Because the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple. God dwells with his presence.

God directs by his pattern. God delivers on his promise. And so how does this apply to you and to me? Well, it all depends on whether you know this God.

[26 : 49] The God of the Bible. The God whose desire it is to dwell with the people he has made. Do you know him? Or put it another way.

Are you one of his people? Because you were made to dwell in his presence. And God is directing all of human history towards this end.

Of a future where he will dwell with his people. And so if he is not your God and you are not one of his people.

Well, the good news is you can be. And you need to be. Because Jesus is the meeting place between God and human beings.

And so go to Jesus. Because without Jesus, we will be shut out of God's presence forever in hell.

[27 : 47] But Jesus has come. He has come so we can live with the reality of God dwelling with us now by his spirit. And then when Jesus comes again.

We have the great promise and hope that we will dwell in God's presence forever. That's what life is all about. That's why God made us.

So if you don't know him, then turn to him. He wants you to enjoy presence with him in this life and forevermore. Look at this planet. God for you in the life and that act.

Sam Fink mode said, God bless you. Theremos.