

God Enthroned in the Ecclesia and in Our Lives

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This morning our thoughts will be on the structure of the Mosaic Tabernacle as a whole and its significance as the pictorial manifestation of God revealed among men. All the Tabernacle appointments were for glory and for beauty—for Divine glory and for spiritual beauty. Glory and beauty characterize everything pertaining to God, and we must get in harmony with the glory and beauty of God, for literally we are ugly—sin is ugly; the flesh is ugly; human nature is ugly.

Moses' face shone with the glory of God, for when he came down from the revelation of these things he had to cover his face, for Israel could not look upon him. Paul tells us that this symbolizes their groveling, earthly blindness. That true believers see the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ; that they grow daily more like Him from glory to glory. Glory means excellence, and excellence means betterness. We are changed into the same image from glory to glory, from betterness to betterness, closer and closer to the divine ideal, to the perfect beauty of character, spirituality, divinity, godliness. The whole purpose of our lives is to increase in glory and in beauty, in excellence, in holiness, in godliness, in beauty of character, in fullness of love, in depth of understanding. If this does not occur, we live in vain.

Solomon declares, "*God has made everything beautiful in His time*" (Eccl. 3:11). Only beauty, true beauty, is eternal. All else must pass away. The very existence of beauty, the basic beauty of all God's works from the smallest to the greatest is one of the greatest arguments for divinity and is against the theory of evolution. Evolution is blind, earthly, grubby, carnal. It has no place or explanation for beauty and for glory.

The Tabernacle was God's plan, God's initiative, God's instruction. "*See thou make it according to the pattern shown thee*" (Exod. 25:40). It was a great act of love and condescension upon God's part to dwell with Israel and to speak with them. God went all the way in approaching to man and taking them to Himself, but there were very strict regulations—no familiarity, no carelessness, no thoughtlessness in God's presence. Among the very first things that happened in connection with this Tabernacle was the death of the High Priest's eldest sons, Nadab and Abihu. God must be honored in those who dare approach unto Him. Those who dwell in His presence must be sober, mature, circumspect, reverent. God will not tolerate careless, thoughtless, slipshod, half-hearted service.

The next great lesson was that God is only to be found where and how He appoints, "*This is life eternal that they might know thee*" (John 17:3), and He can only be known by that which He reveals about Himself; therefore, it is our wisdom to learn all we can that He has lovingly revealed.

How much do we really study the divine message? Half an hour a day is two percent of our life, and how many do even that? What tremendous dividends we expect from such paltry investments! There are fifty chapters of the Bible devoted to the Tabernacle and its service. We are told that all Scripture is given for doctrine, instruction, correction and reproof in righteousness that the man of God may be perfect—we have a long way to go, and these are things that point the way.

As we notice from our readings, particularly in the book of Hebrews, much of the language of the New Testament has its foundation in the Tabernacle service and cannot be understood without a comprehension of these things: the veil, the mercy seat, propitiatory, laver, altar, priest,

high priest, the Lamb of God, sacrifice, offering, candlestick, the shedding of blood, the Tabernacle, the Temple, the Passover, the Firstfruits. All these are parts of the picture of the glory and beauty of God that the New Testament reveals in Old Testament terms. All the deep principles of godliness are graphically and vividly portrayed in the Tabernacle service: holiness, obedience, glory, consecration, beauty, sacrifice, unity, dedication, fellowship, rejoicing, thanksgiving, forgiveness, mercy, reverence and love.

The Tabernacle was the center of the nation's life. This is what gave it purpose, futurity and hope. It stood in the center of the camp, but it stood majestically alone. The tents of Israel would be of black goat's hair. And in a large central area, separated from all these tents by an open space, the white walled Tabernacle stood in isolated splendor—a white center of purity in the midst of black humanity, with the overshadowing cloud of God's love and providence hovering above it.

Well could Balaam say as he looked down upon this sight from the heights of Moab, "*How goodly are thy tents, O Jacob, and thy Tabernacles, O Israel*" (Num. 24:5)—a beautiful God ordered array with God in the center. Apart from this, Israel would be just another dark, purposeless human mass, but this glorious object in their midst and their divinely instructed arrangement around it gave the whole assembly meaning and purpose and a divinely established dignity. It lifted them from the common perishing horde and related them to eternity. Human life without God is a dark and meaningless tragedy of sorrow and of death—a purposeless existence of a few brief joys, ever increasing heartache, and eventual black oblivion. "*Vanity of vanities, all is vanity,*" but God in the midst changes everything from darkness to light. For God is a God of hope, and of life and futurity, of beauty and holiness and glory. The Tabernacle taught all these things. God enthroned in the midst of Israel, in the ecclesia, in our hearts and lives. How great is His beauty and how great is His goodness!

The pillar of cloud by day and of fire by night showed God's preservation and care and guidance and overshadowing love for His people. It visibly manifested His presence and favor to all Israel. Only the High Priest entered the Most Holy and he but once a year, and only he saw the Shekinah Glory of God's manifestation between the Cherubim, and even then it had to be obscured by the cloud of the incense, lest he die. But even the humblest and the farthest removed could see the cloud over the Tabernacle. When the cloud moved, they moved; and when it stayed, they rested (Num. 9:23).

What a tremendous privilege to move with God, to go where He goes, to stay when He stays, to always be in step with God, borne along by His manifested presence—no other love or interests but to follow God. The wilderness pilgrimage was a glorious privilege or a bitter burden, according as Israel saw it with natural or with spiritual eyes.

Israel was closer to God then than at any time in their subsequent history. They had a far greater manifestation of His presence and power; but the most outstanding of the Tabernacle lessons, as Paul points out, was that it was a barrier. It signified that the way into the Holiest was not yet made manifest. But still, it bore a tremendous message of condescension for the present and promise for the future. It taught them of God's unapproachable holiness, but it also showed them His love. It held them at a distance, and yet it foreshadowed perfect communion in the end. Christ came "*not to destroy the Law but to fulfill it*" (Matt. 5:17)—to fulfill all its glorious prophecies and promises.

In His love and wisdom, God always tempers outward restriction with inward promise—outward sorrow with inward joy. Even in our present wilderness journey every tribulation has its compensating greater blessing, and every loss has its compensating greater gain

When Moses went up into the mount for 40 days, the very first thing that God said to him was (Exodus 25), “*Speak unto the children of Israel that they bring me an offering.*” What can man offer to God? And yet, God allows us to give. He gives to us first that we may have the pleasure of giving to Him, for all is of Him. “*And let them make me a sanctuary that I may dwell among them*” (Exod. 25:8). This was the first message, “*and there will I meet with the children of Israel*” (v. 21).

Fifteen (3 x 5) different types of gifts are commanded to be brought, but the essential requirement was, as we read in verse 2, “*of every man that giveth it willingly with his heart ye shall take my offering.*” Nothing grudging, no compulsion, every one whose heart stirred him up to come unto the work of the Lord to do it.

Are we among the joyful and blessed number, whose heart stirs them up continually to the work of the Lord? Not as a duty, a task or a burden, but as an eager, irresistible fire in our bones. What an inestimable blessing! Yet this divine joy is freely available to all who seek it. As with the Mosaic Tabernacle, so with the everlasting Tabernacle that God is building from the human race, an eternal dwelling place of God by His Spirit. It must be from the abundance of eager and willing hearts.

In Exodus 36:5 we read that “*the children of Israel brought too much,*” and they had to be stopped from bringing. God would accept no more. There are two deep and solemn lessons here; first, the time comes when it is too late. Those who had been dilatory, who had not brought up to that time, now had no opportunity to take part in the Tabernacle. The door was shut. And secondly, how do we compare with Israel in this matter? Could it ever be said of us that we bring too much—too much liberality, too much labor in the work, too much devotion to divine things, too much manifestation of love? Is there any possible danger that what we have done for God may be considered an over abundance; or could it possibly be the other way around—too little?

The most precious things of the Tabernacle—those most significant of Christ and his work—must be carried by hand. Both the altars, the table of shewbread, the candlestick, the ark, were all borne upon the shoulders by staves. These things could not be carried in carts, though carts were available. It must be personal human labor—nothing mechanical, nothing impersonal, nothing delegated. For the important things of life only personal care and attention and effort will do. Do we perceive the lesson? Salvation is a very personal thing, calling for very personal effort and labor. There were six carts that carried all the outer framework of the tabernacle. This is all our external ecclesial framework and organization, but the inner things must be borne for the whole long wilderness journey on loving and consecrated shoulders. An ecclesial organization will not save us. Our salvation will depend upon how faithfully and lovingly, and above all, how joyfully and cheerfully we have put our own shoulder to the work of the Lord.

We are impressed with the compactness of the Tabernacle. It was all separate pieces easily taken apart for removal, and yet full provision was made for knitting and bonding it together firmly that it should be a unity, one Tabernacle. Bonding, linking, stabilizing, joining together is a prominent feature throughout all its construction. We can readily see in natural things that the more firmly anything is bound together the stronger it is, the more it can withstand, the more it can accomplish; but do we perceive the importance, the absolute necessity of this in spiritual things?

The Tabernacle consisted of three parts: the court, the Holy Place, and the Most Holy. And these three contained among them seven items: two in the court, the altar and the laver—sacrifice and sanctification; three in the Holy Place, the table of shewbread, the candlestick and the altar

of incense—fellowship, testimony and worship; and in the Most Holy two, the ark and the mercy seat above it—the manifestation of God in Christ. And we see a straight line, the altar, the laver, the altar of incense—redemption, sanctification, intercession, worship and prayer. And then the veil that was rent to give access to the perfect state when God shall be all in all.

In the Holy Place—the present probation of God’s people—on the one hand is the candlestick, the irradiating testimony, both within the ecclesia and to the world, and on the other hand the table of shewbread, fellowship and communion together and with God—for the ‘bread of the faces’ or of God’s presence.

Regarding the boards that make up the framework, we read in Exodus 26:15, “*Thou shalt make boards for the Tabernacle of shittim wood, standing up.*” Why standing up? Why were not the boards lying down horizontally as in any ordinary construction? Could we possibly miss the meaning and the lesson? Are we standing up? Standing up for the Truth? Standing up for the work of the Lord? Standing up to the full stature of the perfect man in Christ Jesus? Paul says, “*Put on the whole armour of God . . . that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. Stand therefore, having your loins girt about with truth*” (Eph. 6:13, 14).

“*The evil day*” that can prevent us from being found standing at the end can come in many deceptive ways—some very pleasant to the flesh, not perceivable to the natural eye as evil at all, only evil in their final consequence. We must keep standing, even when weary and it is much more pleasant to lie down with the world.

The boards were not only standing, but they were standing close together—shoulder to shoulder, no space between them. They were knit together on each side of the Tabernacle by five bars, and each board reached down two *tenons* (the original word is *hands*)—two hands into silver foundation sockets of redemption in Christ. Each board was covered and preserved by the pure gold of present faith and future immortality. The sockets of silver supported the boards, and they separated them from the earth.

The boards had originally been trees, rooted naturally in the earth, but they had been selected and cut down—brought low, stripped of all their branches and natural glory—shaped, trimmed, smoothed, and dressed to fit God’s pattern, and then overlaid with purest gold. Now they had no connection with the desert upon which they stood, but a very close and intimate connection with one another and with the pure silver sockets of redemption, and with the glorious curtains of righteousness and beauty. They were fitly framed together and builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit. They were all perfectly equal in height, for one is their master and they are all brethren.

The silver sockets were the one exception to the freewill character of all the materials of the Tabernacle. The gold of faith was the freewill offering of all, both men and women, but the redemption silver was the compulsory requirement for the men only—one half shekel for each male. The rich could not give more and the poor could not give less. All stood upon equal footing as regards redemption in Christ (Exod. 30:13-15).

Freewill offering here was not enough. This was a ransom for man’s forfeited life. “*Each man shall give a ransom for his soul of one half shekel.*” His helpless bondage to sin and need for redemption must be emphasized in the foundation of this building. Here is something that no amount of voluntary offering, eager and freewill though it might be, could accomplish. There was more silver used in the Tabernacle than gold and brass combined. The atoning sacrifice of Christ must be the major foundation aspect of the way of salvation. He must have the pre-eminence in all things, as we read in the first chapter of Hebrews.

The boards were knit together by five bars on each side—four bars through the golden rings on each board, and a fifth bar right through the center of the boards. “*And he made the middle bar to shoot (reach) through (sever) the boards from the one end to the other*” (Exod. 36:33). (See Law of Moses p. 139, 3rd edition.)

Here is a strange combination of the four - five symbol; four visible bars and one hidden one, making five. What is it that holds the ecclesia together, that makes it a unit, that changes it from a number of boards standing precariously alone, to one firm Tabernacle—the House of God? Though many things can unite temporarily and carnally, there is only one thing that can unite spiritually and eternally, and that is the Truth, the law, the Word of God. Here are four manifested bars clasped to each board by a golden ring of faith—the universal Cherubim gospel of Christ, and one hidden bar shot through the wall from end to end and hidden in the heart of every board—the foundation of all, the law of God in the heart, making five in all. Bars are to bind together, to keep out that which does not belong, to give protection and security, rigidity, stability. They are a girding and a strengthening—loins girded with the Truth Only the Truth can accomplish all this.

The cloth coverings are distinguished into three parts; the first of which is the Tabernacle. In the original the Hebrew is *miskan*; this word is from the same root as *shekinah*—the inner dwelling. This does not carry the idea of impermanence or temporariness. It simply means *dwelling*, particularly in a religious or divine sense. That is the first linen layer—the dwelling place or *miskan*. The second layer was the tent of goat material—the *ohel*. This is the true meaning of tent or temporary dwelling. The distinguishing into the three layers is clear and significant. The covering of the two outer layers were ram skins (the third), and badger skins or seal skins. (The word is a little indefinite; it was natural skins of some sort.)

The first alone is the actual Tabernacle—the ten linen curtains, two groups of five—two groups knit together by fifty golden fasteners. Here again is the double five symbol, and the fifty fasteners of gold turn our mind immediately to Pentecost—the connecting link between Jew and Gentile. These ten curtains were of the same material as the veil—blue, scarlet, purple and fine twined linen, worked with cunning work of Cherubim. These ten curtains are the Christ-Body, as the veil is the Christ-Head. They alone are the true tabernacle. The rest is simply temporary scaffolding and covering. This great embroidered linen sheet, fifty feet by seventy feet approximately, covered the entire Tabernacle, top, sides and back.

The second layer was of goats’ hair—eleven curtains and slightly larger each way than the linen covering. These are in two uneven groups, five and six. They are united, not by golden fasteners but by brass fasteners—fleshly fasteners. This second layer of goats’ hair is the earth that helps the woman—the natural goat class. They obscure the true linen curtains. This is all the world can see of the Tabernacle. The five—the Word or law of God—unequally yoked together with the six by fleshly brazen fasteners—the number of man and of the flesh. Here we can see the unequal yoking of some who claim to be God’s people with the world. This covering is useful in its place as a temporary shield, but it is not the true eternal Tabernacle. It is very easy to belong to this half and half class. Many of us will find in the end that that is where we have been—half in and half out, half in the Tabernacle (half in the Truth) and half in the world—the five yoked with the six, an unequal yoking. When the Son of Man comes, his sad but necessary task will be to separate the sheep from the goats.

The third layer was ram skins dyed red. Here is blood, aggression, the power of the sword. Here, clearly are the powers of the world whose sole real purpose in existence, though they know it not, is for the protection of the Tabernacle.

And finally, the fourth outer layer of badger or seal skins, just a final natural outer covering laid over all. This final covering is nature or creation itself. The lesson is that all things are for the sake of God's elect—all creation is for their good. Great nations come and go just to forward slightly God's purpose with His people. Are we worthy to be the center of the purpose of creation? The fine linen will finally be found to be so worthy, and there is no reason why we should not be among them, if we make this the sole and consuming desire of our lives.

Finally, we consider the veil—the veil that separates the Holy Place from the Most Holy. The veil of his flesh, as Paul describes it, that which stood in the way, that which obscured the way and had to be torn asunder that the way may be opened. This is the meaning of the word *veil*—that which *separates, shuts off or obscures*. This veil was held up—manifested on four pillars, the four Cherubim pillars, the four gospels, the four-fold camp of spiritual Israel. The veil was of the same material as the ten inner linen curtains—Christ and his brethren are one. Fine linen of strong closely twisted threads interwoven with blue, scarlet, and purple, and skillfully embroidered with Cherubim figures.

The word translated *needlework* in connection with the embroidery of these Cherubim really means *skillfully*, and its root meaning we find is to combine colors into a pattern, though it is used of any skillful work. We see the great fittingness in the work of God in Christ—skillfully combining the heavenly blue with the earthly scarlet to produce the royal and victorious purple. The creating of the Cherubim is all the skillful work of God. “*It is God that worketh in you both to will and to do of His good pleasure*” (Phil. 2:13). Our part is simply to submit, to expose ourselves to the divine light and let it do its work, to empty ourselves with all that interfered with the work of God in us, to keep a steadfast unwavering gaze upon the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ that we may thereby be changed into the same image from glory to glory. It is all something that is done to us, not that we ourselves do.

This word *needlework* or *embroidery* occurs nine times in the Scriptures, eight times in connection with the Tabernacle, and once in that remarkable prophetic passage in Psalm 139 concerning Christ. “*I will praise thee for I am fearfully and wonderfully made: marvelous are thy works . . . my substance was not hid from thee, when I was made in secret, and curiously wrought*” (that is the word *embroidered*—skillfully and beautifully worked) “*in the lowest parts of the earth*” (Psa. 139:14,15). This is the same word as the *embroidery* of the Cherubim upon the veil and the curtains.

When Christ died, when the sacrifice was complete, this veil was miraculously rent asunder—the way into the Holiest was opened—Mosaic shadows were at an end. He said, “*It is finished*” (John 19:30)—completed, perfected. At that moment all the marvelous imagery of the Mosaic Tabernacle reached its climax and fulfillment. The world's hopeless darkness had been turned into joyful light; sin had been conquered; death had been destroyed; truth and holiness were victorious, and the grave had lost its power.

Paul said, in summing up his wonderful exposition of the Mosaic patterns to the Hebrew brethren, “*Having therefore, brethren, boldness (or confidence) to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus, By a new and living way, which he hath consecrated for us, through the veil, that is to say, his flesh; And having an high priest over the house of God; Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled (with the sacrificial blood) from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water (in the laver). Let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works*” (Heb. 10:19-22, 24).

We note how he combines the sublime with the practical—highest vision of the future with the most pressing command for the present—love and good works; a beautiful all sufficient combination—love and good works. How do we provoke any one to love and to good works? To provoke is to stir up to activity, either for good or otherwise. We provoke to love and to good works by manifesting love and good works. Love begets love and nothing else will. Love can not be commanded; it must be taught, manifested, exemplified.

There is no point in merely preaching these things; we must manifest them, praying that God will provide vessels for picking up the radiations and carrying them on. Paul continues: “*Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together.*” This is vital, and it does not just mean Sunday morning; it must be an eager, constant, basic way of life. “*Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together*” (Heb. 10:25). If we do not assemble when there is opportunity to assemble—Sunday morning, Sunday evening, mid-week, (let us speak frankly) we are the most blind and foolish of all blind fools. What do we think the way of life is? A once-a-week ritual, like Christendom? Indeed many in the assemblies of Christendom could put us to shame. If our heart is not with the ecclesial activities always and our bodies whenever possible, we are living a lie and deceiving ourselves. “*Not forsaking the assembling of yourselves together ... but exhorting one another, and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching.*”

Earlier in the Epistle (Heb. 3:13) he says, “*Exhort one another daily.*” Now he says, “*...as the day approaching,*” and certainly we are at that era. “*So much the more,*” we should bear this in mind, in case we feel that a couple of evenings a week is too much to interfere with our personal pleasure or worldly activities. To the real children of God—those few whom He will acknowledge in the end—the Truth is their whole life—daily, hourly, constantly. They always abound in the work of the Lord. Their heart is always in the Truth and the brotherhood. They grieve when they have to miss any ecclesial activity, knowing that the body needs all its members to be healthy and to function.

Let us prayerfully strive to be among the few chosen from the many that are called.

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