

The Portable Temple of God

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[0 : 00] Amen. Please be seated. I'll pray for us. Heavenly Father, thank you so much for your word. Thank you that it's a beautiful and precious gift to us.

Help us to dwell on it, and by doing so, dwell on your glory and greatness and be transformed. I pray in Jesus' name. Amen. I'd like to begin today with a book review, a final book review.

This is a new study Bible just released called the ESV Study Bible. It's very fat and very thin paper. There's lots of great information here.

This is, I think, becoming the study Bible to get. If you read the Bible and you find bits that are hard to understand, this is one of those Bibles that's sort of got comments and diagrams in the bottom half of each page.

You've got Bible, then diagrams. It's not a great Bible to take to a small group, because there you don't want to kind of be sort of a smart aleck and sort of quote from your notes. But it's a good Bible.

[1 : 03] If you want to spend time studying the Scriptures and you get stuck on something, this may help you get unstuck. And our very own vicar has contributed to the notes on Deuteronomy.

And there's just some amazing resources in this Bible. And also, what I like are some really, really good diagrams, which I'm going to use in this sermon. So these have got some really wonderfully drawn but biblically researched diagrams about things that are in the Old and New Testaments.

So that's very, very helpful. Well, friends, we're here. We're finishing the book of Exodus. I think it's a wonderful and great book. And I want to just show you something of where we've been.

The book of Exodus can be split into two halves. I've got a slide for this. Exodus is 40 chapters. And the first half of the book is redemption. The first half of the book is God rescuing his people, getting them out of slavery in Egypt to the mountain of God, to Sinai.

But that's not all of Exodus, even though that's what we think of when we think of Exodus. The whole second half of the book is worship. And it's about meeting God, making a covenant with God, about regulations for worship, protocols for worship from God.

[2 : 18] And so the second half of the book is just as important as the first half. And if we can just zoom into the second half on the next slide, the second half can be broken down in this way.

Chapters 20 to 24 are the Ten Commandments and other laws. 25 to 31 are laws about the tabernacle, which is the theme of today's sermon, the tabernacle.

And then you've got this sort of bit in the middle, this narrative in the middle of 32 to 34, the golden calf incident that we looked at last week, that great idolatry and Moses' great intercession to save the people.

And then what we didn't look at last week was, following on from that, even though there's an uneasy truce, the covenant is renewed and God and the people recommit themselves to each other.

And things are good again, in a sense. And then you go back to 35 to 40, more chapters on the tabernacle. And so interestingly, you've got there over 10 chapters, over a quarter of the book are laws about the tabernacle, either laws about what it's going to look like, or in the second half of laws are the actual doing of it.

[3 : 34] You've got, you know, that Moses did as God commanded, Moses did as God commanded, and it sort of repeats itself. So the tabernacle must be extremely important for it to take up so much of the book and to be repeated so much in the book.

Even though things took a turn for the worse last week with the golden calf, you can see the net effect of the book is that God is not stopped, that God's plans are not stopped by human sin, but they are overcome.

And he continues in the work of building a dwelling place for God, of building the tabernacle. It's a great sign of grace that the book is structured this way. It shows a lot of God's grace that the book doesn't sort of end with the golden calf or the uneasy truce.

It continues with the plan of God to build a dwelling place, a structure to make his home with his people. And so I want to say, friends, today, the net effect of Exodus is positive.

The net effect of Exodus is to show that God is powerful and gracious. And he's patient despite slavery, despite idolatry and grumbling.

[4 : 50] His purposes overcome again and again and again. God is committed to his people. God is committed to achieving his rescue.

God is committed to being with his people. And it's a wonderful sign of grace, really, that Aaron, who made the golden calf, he's rebuked, he's confronted, he's disciplined, but then he's restored and he finds a place still among the priests of God's people.

You see, the shape of Exodus is trying to tell us something important about God. God cannot be stopped by Pharaoh. He cannot be stopped by sin. Nothing will stop God achieving the glory for his name in the rescue of his people.

He will always find a way to overcome. He desperately desires for his own glory. He desperately desires for his people to be a priestly kingdom to honor him in the earth.

And although in Exodus the glory of God scares the people, it pushes them away in a way, the glory of God also pulls the people. So we've missed a part of Exodus where Moses himself asks God a favor.

[6 : 06] He says, God, I want to see your glory. And God, in a sense, shows him the back of his glory or walks past him as Moses is hidden in the cleft of a rock.

And the glory of God is attractive. And Moses is drawn to it. And Israel is drawn to it. And there's a sense in which the tabernacle, by being a dwelling place for the glory of God, will attract the world to God, will draw the world to God.

And so the tabernacle is a great gift. Now we'll wind back a bit now. And I'm going to just sort of give an overview of the tabernacle and its significance. And this is how it starts in chapter 25.

This is how the tabernacle begins. The Lord says to Moses, Tell the Israelites to take for me an offering. From all whose hearts prompt them to give, you shall receive the offering for me.

What does God want? This is the offering that you shall receive from them. Gold, silver, bronze, blue, purple and crimson yarns and fine linen. Goat's hair, tanned ram skins, fine leather, acacia wood, oil for the lamps, spices for the anointing oil and for the fragrant incense, onyx stones and gems to be set in the ephod and for the breastpiece.

[7 : 27] That's for the priest. And have them make me a sanctuary so that I may dwell among them. In accordance with all that I show you concerning the pattern of the tabernacle and of all its furniture, so you shall make it.

God declares they are going to make for him, build for him, a sanctuary, a dwelling place. And it's going to be a response to the rescue of God.

It's going to be a response to the grace of God that they are going to give freely from all their best material possessions. And the media of worship, the material of the tabernacle is wonderful.

It's the best stones and the best jewels and lots and lots and lots of gold and silver and bronze. This is going to be for God, for God to dwell.

It's going to have to be glorious. And Moses is going to make it according to the pattern of God, according to the pattern he gives. And we'll talk more about what that pattern is in a minute.

[8 : 34] God is so excited, as it were, about this tabernacle. This is how intense his presence will dwell. In chapter 25, verse 21, he talks about a room within a room within the tent.

He says, chapter 25, verse 21, So God himself is going to be present in the most holy place of the tabernacle.

And he's going to speak from there. And he's going to sit there. He's going to be enthroned there. This is going to be some building. It's going to be some tent. Now, I've actually got a diagram here from the ESV Bible of what it looked like.

So this is a cross-section of the tabernacle. And so there's really two rooms in it. There's sort of a holy place where priests go.

And then there's a most holy place where the great high priest was sort of, you know, you'd rarely go in there. So you have a sense, don't you, of the preciousness of what's inside this tent that most people can't even go near it in terms of where it's situated.

[9 : 59] There's a court around it. And then in the tent, there's a special room. And then within that room, there's even another veil. So there's veil on veil on veil. It's going to be a special place for God to dwell.

It's going to be a special place for God to dwell. Thanks. So that's the tabernacle. Now, I want to make, I would love in a way, although it would be really quite hard, to go verse by verse through all the instructions for the tabernacle, 11 chapters of instructions.

But that would take too long. So I'm going to give four broad themes about things I've picked up as I've read through those chapters and reflected on them. Here's what I've picked up about the tabernacle.

Firstly, it is so beautiful. It is majestic. It is a wonderful place. There's gold and purple.

It's absolutely stunning. It truly is a place for God to dwell. And there's a sense in which the closer you get to that inner sanctum room, the most holy place, the products get better and better and better.

[11 : 04] Until in the very middle, there's so much gold. Everything is gold. So you start with things of bronze and then silver, then lots and lots of gold. It's a beautiful place.

Anything, I think, for God has to be beautiful. Because God is beautiful. God is glorious. And I love this description from chapter 35. Where would you get gold?

Where would you get all this gold? Well, chapter 35, verse 20. All the congregation of the Israelites withdrew from the presence of Moses. That is, they go away from Moses. And then they came back, everyone whose heart was stirred, everyone whose spirit was willing, and brought the Lord's offering to be used for the tent of meeting, for all its service, and for the sacred vestments.

So that is, Moses doesn't say to everyone, you all must give. It's not like a tax. He sends them away, and people come back who want to give. And it goes on, verse 22.

So they came, both men and women, all who were of a willing heart. And they brought brooches, and earrings, and signet rings, and pendants, and all sorts of gold objects, everyone bringing an offering of gold to the Lord.

[12 : 18] And what does that remind you of? That's exactly like what they did for the golden calf, where they all contributed their gold to worship an idol, to worship a false god, to worship a man-made object.

Perverse. And yet now God, in his grace, gives them an opportunity to use their gold to worship him, to worship the true and living God, to build a tabernacle.

If only they had not done the calf and actually just waited, they would have had even more gold. Not that they needed it, because Moses actually has to tell them, stop bringing gold.

Eventually they bring too much offering, and he says, God says no more offering in chapter 36. Very hard to imagine a church ever saying that. No more offerings.

AGM. You know, no more. We could burn the bowls and plates and things. The total amount of gold in chapter 38 is 29 talents, and it's probably about a ton of fine gold.

[13 : 23] A ton of fine gold. So this is a beautiful tabernacle. But friends, here's the catch. It's only beautiful on the inside.

And so I have a photo here that Paul Barker took on the last trip to Israel. This is a kind of two-scale reconstruction of the tabernacle, and obviously they haven't done the insides, but it's probably what it would have looked like from the outside.

All the gold and all the purple robes were for God on the inside. On the outside of the tabernacle, it looks quite plain. It looks like a kind of, you know, barbecue galore tent, canvas tent you can pick up on a Christmas sale to seat eight people or something like that, or that might seat a lot more than that.

It looks quite plain. To the eyes of faith, it is glorious. To the eyes of the world, quite plain. I actually think it's a good symbol of what was to come in terms of the incarnation of Jesus Christ.

We read in the reading that the word became flesh and lived among us. And the word there, lived among us, is literally tabernacled among us, tented among us, and we have seen his glory.

[14 : 43] Jesus Christ came in glory, fully God, fully man, in the incarnation. And yet to the world, it just looks like a bloke, just looks like another man. But with the eyes of faith, you see his glory.

You see something incredible in the Lord Jesus. So the arrival of Jesus Christ is tabernacle 2.0. It's the fulfillment, in one sense, of this temple that is sort of plain on the outside and yet truly glorious.

It's truly the dwelling of God. And, you know, Jesus himself is God. So he is the true tabernacle, glorious. Meekness and majesty in a man and meekness and majesty in a tent is to get us ready for Jesus.

So it's truly beautiful on the inside. Second point about the tabernacle that I've observed is that it seems to be a fulfillment of the Garden of Eden or a renewal of the Garden of Eden.

There are hints of this. We're in Eden where God walked with man, where God dwelled with man, Adam and Eve. God dwells in this place made of the very best elements of creation, are caught up in this tabernacle.

[16 : 01] And so creation itself is the very best things of creation are brought. There's the priestly breastplate of Aaron that has all the jewels, the best jewels that are mentioned in the Garden of Eden in Genesis 2.

There's a lampstand of pure gold that's a reminder. It's got sort of seven branches. It's a reminder of the tree of life from the Garden of Eden.

The tabernacle faces the same direction that Eden faced to the east. Mixed in with the tabernacle laws are laws about Sabbath, which itself ties you back to the very good creation where God rested and where mankind walked with God in refreshment, in the glory of creation.

That's what is going to happen around this tabernacle. They will rest and it will be a sign of that. In the Bible, creation was very good, but then we stuffed it up.

We sinned and it fell. And then we're under judgment. And we saw in the plagues, God can wield creation to destroy. God can wield creation.

[17 : 09] He can turn water to blood and use creation as a weapon. But here in the tabernacle, we see it's not all bad. God is still committed to creation and he's committed to the restoration of paradise.

And so in a fallen world, there is this part of the world in the tabernacle that is a restored creation. I think a pointer to the whole earth being restored to a new heavens and a new earth, an eternal Sabbath rest.

So the tabernacle is beautiful and it's a restoration of Eden, of creation. Thirdly, the tabernacle is a place of sacrifice and a place of death.

And here's the sort of schedule in chapter 29, just the beginnings of the things that will be kind of killed around the tabernacle. He says in chapter 29 verse 38, There's lots of things being offered up, not least this living perfect beast, this animal, this one-year-old lamb each morning and night.

The other lamb you shall offer in the evening and shall offer with it a grain offering and its drink offering as in the morning for a pleasing odour and offering by fire to the Lord.

[18 : 46] It shall be a regular burnt offering throughout your generations at the entrance of the tent of meeting before the Lord, where I will meet you and to speak to you there.

So you get this sense that for God to dwell here, there has to be some atonement. Blood has to be shed for God to dwell among his people.

And that's what he wants to do. He says in chapter 29 verse 44, I will consecrate the tent of meeting and the altar, Aaron also and his sons, and I will consecrate to serve me as priests.

I will dwell among the Israelites and I will be their God. So to meet with God, for God to dwell, blood has to be shed for forgiveness. They shall know that I am the Lord their God, who brought them out of the land of Egypt, that I might dwell among them.

I am the Lord their God. We cannot simply expect God to be placated without sacrifice. And so built into the surrounds of the tabernacle was a very big altar for sacrifices to be regularly made.

[19 : 54] And as soon as you step out of the book of Exodus into Leviticus, you've got a whole set of sacrifices that are added and added, reminders of human sin, reminders of God's holiness.

I've got another diagram from the ESV Bible. This shows you the tabernacle, the bronze altar, which is the square altar in front of the tabernacle, and around it is a court.

And the wall of that court is 2.3 metres high. And so there's a real sense here that God is hard to approach. There are things that block you from God.

There's an outer high wall. There's a big altar. You can smell the sacrifice. There's lots of anointing with oil. There's furnishings that are special. There's ornate craftsmanship.

The net effect of this whole construction is to tell you that God is not ordinary. God is not ordinary, is he? God cannot be approached casually.

[21 : 01] God cannot be taken for granted. His presence you cannot take for granted. You can only approach God on his terms, following his protocols.

Knowing God is a great privilege because God is not ordinary. So it's a place of sacrifice. Thanks. And finally, the tabernacle, it seems, and we know this for sure from the New Testament, the tabernacle is a model of heaven.

It's a model of heaven. At Mount Sinai, God came down and Moses went up and heaven and earth met at the top of the mountain.

And the tabernacle is to be a continuation of that experience. And it seems that when God is with Moses at the top of that mountain, where heaven and earth meet, that's where the pattern is given for the tabernacle.

And that's a clue, I think, that it's at least a model from heaven, if not a model of heaven. I mean, we don't know whether God gave Moses the words that describe what to build, or whether he showed Moses a blueprint, or whether even Moses was given, as heaven and earth met, could Moses have not been given something of a vision of heaven, a window into heaven, that could be replicated in the tabernacle.

[22 : 26] Not dissimilar, I guess, to John's vision in Revelation, or Isaiah's vision in Isaiah 6. The tabernacle is a window for us into heaven.

The book of Hebrews says that, very clearly, that Christ, when he rose from the dead, chapter 9 of Hebrews, he did not enter a sanctuary made by human hands. He did not enter a tabernacle made by human hands, a mere copy of the true one.

But he entered into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God on our behalf. So the tabernacle, according to the book of Hebrews, is a copy of the true one, which is in heaven.

Heaven itself is pictured in Revelation as an expansion of the most holy place. The tabernacle is to be a window for us into heaven.

That's why it's so important that Moses do everything, just as he's told. Every little detail has to be followed. And again and again you hear the phrase, Moses did just as God commanded, just as God commanded, just as God commanded.

[23 : 32] Because this is so important. It's a model of heaven, and a promise of heaven as well. So the tabernacle is beautiful, it's a fulfillment and a renewal of Eden, it's a place of sacrifice, and it's a model of heaven.

And finally we finish with chapter 40 of the book. The work has been done. Moses has finished exactly as God has designed it, and God himself arrives, and he dwells.

This is how he describes it. The cloud covered the tent of meeting. The glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle. Moses was not able to enter the tent of meeting, because the cloud settled upon it, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle.

And now God is with his people, and he can lead his people to the promised land. Whenever the cloud was taken up from the tabernacle, the Israelites would set out on each stage of their journey.

The whole thing, you can pack up the whole thing, and follow God, and set it up again, and he comes down again. For the cloud of the Lord was on the tabernacle by day, and fire was in the cloud by night, before the eyes of all the house of Israel, at each stage of their journey.

[24 : 50] It's clear to God's people that he is with them. He's taking them to the promised land. The days of slavery have ended, and they are now following God.

Pharaoh could not stop God. Idolatry could not stop God. Grumbling could not stop God. God, the jealous, sovereign God, for the sake of his name, has claimed his people, and is sticking with them, and he's going to achieve his purpose.

He's going to get them to the promised land, and he'll be with them in this portable temple. They are pilgrims. They are, you know, they're sojourners to a place that God has promised.

In this sense, the tabernacle is a real image for us of our journey to heaven. We are pilgrims.

We're not at home yet. Our home is in heaven. We are going to the heavenly sanctuary. That's where we're headed. And God himself is with us on the journey by the Holy Spirit that dwells among us.

[25 : 58] This building is not a dwelling of God. You are the dwelling of God. And he's put down the deposit, guaranteeing what is to come. The Holy Spirit dwells in us until the day when we finally reach the destination, the heavenly sanctuary, where the words of Exodus 29, where he says, I will dwell among the Israelites.

I will be their God. They'll be fulfilled in the words of Revelation, which say, Behold, the dwelling place of God is with men. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people.

And God himself will be with them as their God. That is what we are living for. That is what we are longing for, to see God, to be in the true most holy place, heaven itself.

Friends, heaven is God. Heaven is seeing God. Heaven is God dwelling with men. Heaven is God tabernacling with men. There's a reason, I think, why the actual tabernacle in Exodus, as a model of heaven, lacks golf clubs.

There's a reason why it lacks plasma TV and family photos. Heaven is not about those things. Heaven is about God.

[27 : 15] Heaven is about a redeemed people seeing God face to face and being happy forever in his gaze. Now, I'm sure that with God will come all good gifts.

I'm sure of that. But the tabernacle is a great reminder of what matters most. What matters most? Surviving God, not being consumed by his anger, and then savouring God, surviving and savouring the glory and holiness of God.

God's great gift is that in the Lord Jesus Christ, in his death and resurrection and ascension into the heaven, into the true sanctuary, the gate has been opened for us to survive the glory of God, to survive the holiness of God, and to see and enjoy and savour the holiness and glory of God forever.

We will see him face to face because of the Lord Jesus Christ. So friends, let's finish with just thinking about where we've come from very quickly.

In the very beginning, God's people hardly knew their God. They had some promises, but they were lost, they were enslaved, they were distant from God and unredeemed.

[28 : 34] And God raised up a saviour, a saviour prophet in Moses. And Moses met God's presence in a bush, in a burning bush, on his mountain.

And God, for his own fame and power, rescued his people and carried them to the mountain where they met with him. They were brought to meet their holy God.

And now they're going with and following God. God's people have come a long way because of what God has done. The people who were once in bondage to Pharaoh are now bonded intimately with their God who dwells among them.

The people who were once forced to build houses for an evil tyrant are now building and have built a dwelling place for God, for their God, made by God's own design and plan.

Friends, it's a wonderful thing to be redeemed. It's a wonderful thing to know that God is with you. The net effect of the book of Exodus is that God wins. God does not lose.

[29 : 42] And God can deliver on what he has promised. God can deliver us to heaven. Whatever obstacle you face in getting to heaven, he can meet the challenge.

Whatever thing stands in your way, in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, you will conquer. And nothing will separate you from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

The book of Exodus, the point is that God does not lose. God achieves his purposes for his own glory and fame and honour. Bondage cannot stop it.

Sin cannot stop it. Grumbling cannot stop it. Idolatry cannot stop it. God will rescue us. And we will see him face to face. Let's thank him now.

Lord God, we thank you. We love you, Lord. And we want to see you face to face. We want to gaze on your glory as Moses did, but more than Moses did.

[30 : 45] Lord God, we want to be in the heavenly tabernacle, the true sanctuary where Christ has gone before us, our brother and our great high priest. He's opened the door and it's opened for us.

Please, Heavenly Father, help us to fight the things that might attack us or attack our faith. Help us to lay aside and shake off the things that will hinder.

And we entrust ourselves to your sovereign care to deliver us that we will make it home to be with you forever and to look upon your face forever in glory.

Amen. Amen.