

Old Testament Survey - Part 16

by Dick Woodward

This sermon explores the significance of the Old Testament tabernacle and its applications in the New Testament, emphasizing our direct access to God through Christ.

Duration: 27:26

Scripture: Exodus 25:8, Psalm 100:4, 1 Corinthians 6:19-20, Hebrews 4:16, Hebrews 10:19-22, 1 John 1:9

Topics: "Tabernacle Worship", "Gods Presence"

Description

This sermon delves into the significance of the tabernacle in the wilderness as a precursor to understanding the Book of Leviticus. It emphasizes the communication and communion between God and His people through the tabernacle. The sermon explores New Testament applications to the Old Testament tent of worship, highlighting the presence of God dwelling in believers, the heavenly reality mirrored in the earthly tabernacle, and the devotional aspects of approaching God with reverence and gratitude.

Transcript

Before we begin our study of the Book of Leviticus, we said in our last session, it's very important for us to understand something about the tabernacle in the wilderness. It's very difficult to understand the Book of Leviticus. I remember an Episcopal woman named Gert Gehenna, who had become a believer out of a lifestyle that had been extremely worldly.

I heard her speaking once to believers, telling them how they should approach people who are people today like she was before she became a believer. I remember she said, when you talk to worldly, secular people like that, don't quote Scripture to them. Don't quote Leviticus 27.4. She said, I've been a Christian now for six years, and I still haven't found out who Leviticus is.

Well, Leviticus, of course, is not a man. The word Leviticus actually means pertaining to the Levites. The rabbis actually called the Book of Leviticus by Hebrew words that mean, and he called.

Because the significant thing about the Book of Leviticus was, God called to the people of God out of the tent of worship. They not only communed with him there, he communed with them there. This is the significant thing about this tabernacle in the wilderness, and this is the significant thing about the Book of Leviticus.

You see, the Book of Leviticus was actually a minister's manual. I remember when I began in the ministry, I hadn't been told for some reason how to do practical things like literally, you know, how to conduct a wedding or how to conduct a funeral or how to baptize people or how to deal with some of these things that you deal with as a pastor. Nobody had explained to me literally how to do these things.

When I conducted my first funeral, I had only been to one funeral in my whole life. A friend of mine, another pastor, gave me a minister's manual, and I shall never forget how I treasured and valued that minister's manual. In just a few years, it was dog-eared and looked very worn, because it was worn a great deal.

I used it a great deal. Now, that's what the Book of Leviticus was. It was a priest's manual showing them how to officiate in the tent of worship.

The third part of the Book of Exodus gives the specifications for the construction of the tent of worship, and the Book of Leviticus tells them how to carry out their functions in that tent of worship. So before we approach the Book of Leviticus, we simply have to understand the tent of worship. In our last session, we looked at the articles of furniture, we looked at the location of the tent of worship, and we looked at the literal physical presence of the tent of worship, and we saw that it's all just filled with gospel truth.

Every article of furniture tells us how to approach the Holy God, and salvation in some form or other is in all those articles of furniture. The tabernacle in the wilderness we saw in our last session is all about Jesus Christ. It prefigures Christ, perhaps as nothing else in the Old Testament does.

Moses wrote of me, Jesus said, and that's nowhere more true than it is in the tent of worship. But in this session, before we go on into Leviticus, I would like to make some New Testament applications to this Old Testament tent of worship. Now, the tent of worship, or the tabernacle in the wilderness, is an Old Testament phenomenon, but as we go through the Bible, we find it referred to again and again, and as we come to it here in the Old Testament, it's not only true that the New Testament will explain to us these Old Testament things, but it's also true that the Bible is the best commentary on the Bible.

Remember that as a principle for Bible study. There are many excellent commentaries on the Scripture that can help us understand the Scripture, but the greatest commentary on the Bible is the Bible itself. And if we want to understand this tent of worship and its significance, I think it's good even at this point to go on into the New Testament a little bit and see what the New Testament tells us by way of commentary about this Old Testament tent of worship.

I believe there are at least three very dynamic applications that the New Testament will make to this tent of worship. The first, and perhaps in some ways the most dynamic application the New Testament makes to the tent of worship is this. In the Old Testament tent of worship, the Ark of the Covenant and the Holy of Holies was the very place, the literal place, where the presence of God dwelt.

God actually dwelt there. When Solomon's temple was constructed, when they finished building Solomon's temple to these same specifications, the glory of God in the form of a cloud filled that place to the point that the priest had to run out of there. There was so much of the power of God in that place.

Now, that was where God dwelt. And to every devout Jew, that was where God had his headquarters. That was where God lived.

Prophets like Ezekiel and Daniel had a tremendous challenge because they were the captivity prophets. Ezekiel preached to the people of God when they were in concentration camps, when they were in slave labor camps in Babylon and in what became Persia. Ezekiel faced a big problem, as did Daniel.

How could you be a prophet? How could you be a spiritual leader to a group of people whose God was over there in Jerusalem? Now, this is why Daniel always prayed facing Jerusalem because that was where God dwelt. That's a dynamic Old Testament truth about the tent of worship. But the New Testament application, which is even more dynamic, is this.

The apostle Peter refers to his body as a tabernacle. In Peter's letters, which are like his swan songs, he says to us that he knows that the time of his death is near. The way he describes it is, he says, I'm about to take down my tabernacle.

The word tabernacle means tent. Peter is saying that his body is the tabernacle in the New Testament dimension on this side of the beautiful experience of Pentecost. You see, this is probably the most dynamic truth in the New Testament.

Don't you realize that you yourselves are the temple of God and that God's Spirit lives in you? God will destroy anyone who defiles his temple, for his temple is holy and that is exactly what you are. That is a very dynamic truth, perhaps the most dynamic truth in all of the Bible, especially to a Jew who believed that the presence of God dwelt in that tent of worship and later in Solomon's temple. Just think of this, the apostle Paul says.

Your body now is the tabernacle in which God dwells. God actually lives in you. And for that reason, sins against the body are very serious sins because your body is the temple of God.

Paul says to the Corinthians who were kind of hung up in sexual sins, your body wasn't made for sex, your body was made for God. Your body is the habitation of God, that's where God lives today. I used to be into jogging quite a bit and when I would be out jogging I instructed my children, my wife and I have five children, and I instructed them that if somebody called and asked for the pastor and I was out jogging they should say that the pastor or that daddy was out doing temple maintenance.

That sounded like something very official around the church. What I meant by that, of course, was this is the temple and I'm out there maintaining it. I think that's a good explanation of what you're doing when you're taking a nap or when you're just taking care of yourself physically, you're getting your temple maintenance.

Now I had a friend who heard me say that and so he had jogging suits made with temple maintenance written on the back and we went to the Holy Land on one occasion and I shall never forget coming up on an elevator in the King David Hotel with some Jewish people who were trying to figure out what temple maintenance meant, which was written on the back of our jogging suits. They knew that it couldn't mean that we worked in the temple. The Dome of the Rock is built now, one of the three largest Muslim shrines is built right there where that Temple of Solomon used to be.

So they just couldn't understand what we meant by that. But of course what we were trying to say by those words, temple maintenance, was simply this. It's a very dynamic truth.

This body is the temple of God and therefore it only follows that if this body is the temple of God then we should maintain this temple and we should be very sensitive to sins that are against the body. Here's

another way of saying the same thing. The Apostle Paul says, There are those to whom God has planned to give a vision of the full wonder and splendor of his secret plan for the nations and the secret is simply this, Christ in you, yes Christ in you, bringing with him the hope of all the glorious things to come.

That is the most dynamic truth I believe in the Bible, Christ in you, Christ in me. Our body is the temple of God. That's a New Testament application to what we see in the Old Testament tent of worship or tabernacle in the wilderness.

Now a second very dynamic application that we find in the New Testament about this Old Testament tent of worship is found in the book of Hebrews. If you read this, especially in a translation you can understand, it's in Hebrews chapters 9 and 10. You'll never really understand the book of Hebrews unless you understand something about this tent of worship because the book of Hebrews is the book that links the Old and the New Testament together.

The transition from Old Testament to New Testament can be a great challenge. The book of Hebrews is the book of the Bible that really explains that transition for us. In connection with giving us that transition from Old Testament to New Testament, the book of Hebrews has something to say about this tent of worship and it's this.

The book of Hebrews says that tent of worship that they had back there in the book of Leviticus and Numbers, that tent of worship that we looked at in our last session which had a physical presence was only an outward physical expression of a spiritual or an eternal reality that's taking place in heaven. Now this is a very dynamic thing if you can grasp it. The writer of Hebrews says that tent of worship was just a shadow of something real.

It was just a copy of something real. What he says is this, in heaven, and heaven is a place as well as a dimension, in heaven there is a tabernacle or there is a temple. There is a worship expression and it's just like the one that was on earth.

The one on earth was just a visible physical expression of the one that exists in heaven. Now according to the author of Hebrews, when Jesus died on the cross, literally and symbolically, in heaven, when he died on the cross, he was like that great high priest that we looked at in our last session. And he was going in that tabernacle that exists in the heavenly eternal dimension.

He was going through these stages. He was going from the brazen altar to the laver. He was going to the candlestick and the table of showbread to the altar of incense.

And then as the high priest did once a year, he went through the veil when he died on the cross and he offered not the blood of some animal that had been sacrificed for the sins of the whole world, he offered his own blood for the sins of the whole world. That's why it's so dramatic, I think, that when Jesus died on the cross, that veil in the temple of Solomon, which was built to this same scale, supernaturally tore from top to bottom. Because that's exactly what was being described here in the book of Hebrews.

When you say in the book of Hebrews, along with this author, that there are two tabernacles, one in the heavenly dimension and one on earth, the one on earth was just a visible, physical expression of the one in heaven. And what was going on there on earth was just a symbol, just an outward expression of a great reality that took place in the heavenly tabernacle. Then you realize how dramatic it was that that veil tore from top to bottom.

Because according to this author of Hebrews, when Jesus died on the cross, he was the great high priest going through that veil for the sins of the whole world, offering his own blood for the sins of the whole world. I think that's a very dynamic application to this tent of worship. In other words, this little tent of worship looks something like a little circus.

It was just really a copy, just a shadow, just a visible, physical expression of the eternal spiritual reality of a tent or a tabernacle of worship that exists in the heavenly dimension. Now, the application to that, if you ask the question, well, what does that really mean to me? The author of Hebrews answers that question by saying this, Christ entered into heaven itself to appear now before God as our friend. It was not in the earthly place of worship that he did this, for that is merely a copy of the real.

He offered himself, he says, for our sins. And so, dear brothers, here's the application. Now we may walk right into the very holy of holies where God is because of the blood of Jesus.

This is the fresh, new, life-giving way which Christ has opened for us by tearing the curtain to let us into the presence of God. And since this great high priest of ours rules over God's household, let us go right into God himself with true hearts, fully trusting him to receive us because we have been sprinkled with Christ's blood to make us clean and because our bodies have been washed with pure water. I think that's a very exciting New Testament application to the Old Testament, the tabernacle in the wilderness, or tent of worship.

You see, what it's saying again is, in the words of Jesus, Jesus is the way. Jesus said, I am the way, the truth, and the life, and no man cometh unto the Father but by me. Never forget this.

Jesus came into this world with a mission, and his mission was that you and I might be reconciled to God. God and man are separated. That's the big message of the tabernacle.

That's the problem that it solves. There is a divorce between God and man, but the good news of the tabernacle in the wilderness and that tabernacle in the heavenly dimension is this. When Jesus Christ died on the cross, he reconciled that divorce, and he made it so that we need not be separated from God.

Now, the bottom line application is this. If you believe all that's symbolized by the tabernacle in the wilderness, you can go right into the presence of God. There's a new and a living way that's been made open by the death of Jesus Christ, and you don't have to have some priest go in your place.

I think one of the awesome things about the tent of worship was the sinner never went any further than the gate. The priest went in his place. He didn't go into the presence of God.

He didn't even approach the holy of holies or the holy place. The priest did that in his behalf. But the good news now is because Jesus Christ died on the cross, we can go right into the presence of God.

The scripture there in Hebrews puts it like this. We have the invitation to come boldly before the throne of grace to find grace to help us in our time of need. That's a very dynamic truth if you understand it.

God bankrupted heaven to make it possible for you and I to go right into his presence and commune with him and talk with him and worship him and petition him about our needs. That was made possible through the death of Jesus, and that was pictured very beautifully by the tent of worship. Now there's a third dynamic application in the New Testament, I believe, to the tent of worship as we find it described in the Old Testament.

We might call this the devotional application to the tent of worship. All the way through this survey of the Bible, we want to ask the question, what is the devotional message of each book of the Bible? What are the practical applications to these books of the Bible to your life and mine today? We want to talk about where the rubber meets the road, where the hull of the ship meets the water. We want to get down to that application again and again and again.

As we conclude our thoughts about the tent of worship, we want to ask this question. Are there any devotional applications in your life and mine today to this tent of worship? We know that there's a difference between what God required before the cross of Jesus Christ and what he requires now. That's what the book of Hebrews will tell us about again.

Before Jesus died on the cross, God required these animal sacrifices because they symbolized what the sacrifice of Jesus was going to mean. But since Jesus died on the cross, the book of Hebrews will say, we don't offer those animal sacrifices anymore because they were all fulfilled when Jesus Christ sacrificed himself. When John the Baptist, the last of the Messianic prophets pointed to Jesus and said, Behold the Lamb of God, who has come to take away the sins of the world.

When that Lamb of God died on the cross, he fulfilled all of those animal sacrifices, and so where there is remission of sins based upon the death of Jesus, there is no more offering for those sins. That's the message of the book of Hebrews. If that's the case, is there any devotional application at all to your life and mine where this tent of worship is concerned? Oh, yes.

It's filled with devotional applications for you and me today. Our approach to God today is something that we ought to think about. Approaching a holy God, does that involve anything? Is there any kind of an approach to God described in the scripture? Do we just come stumbling into the presence of God irreverently? How do we approach the presence of God? David described it for us in Psalm 100.

He said, It's like going into the presence of a monarch. You go through the gates of thanksgiving and the gates of thanksgiving lead into the courts of praise and the courts of praise lead right into the very presence of God with singing. David is picturing for us there in Psalm 100 an approach to God.

How do we approach God today? Do we even think about it? I think the Apostle Paul will tell us in 2 Corinthians that we're no longer under the letter of the law. The letter of the law kills, but the spirit of the law gives life. In the book of Exodus we saw this with the Ten Commandments.

The letter of the law kills. We don't have this letter of the law mentality today where we just throw the book at people. We try to get at the spirit of the law.

The spirit of the law gives life. The spirit of the law always gives life. In that perspective, seeing the tabernacle and the wilderness in that context, the letter of the law, in the sense of that, the letter of the law, there is no devotional application or very little today.

But in the sense of the spirit of the law, there's much application. For instance, rise up early in the morning and arrange to have an hour of quiet time and think about going into the very presence of God. You get comfortable in a chair, perhaps in your living room, and you open your Bible, and you want to have a quiet time with God, an hour with God, before you go off and live your life that day.

How do you approach the presence of God? Well, I believe the tent of worship, by application, by devotional application, could give us a kind of an approach to God that could be a blessing to us in our

quiet time. For instance, as you think in terms of coming into the presence of God, remember the question of the psalmist. Who shall approach the presence of God? He who has clean hands and a pure heart.

Now, how do you cleanse your hands, spiritually speaking? Well, this has to deal with the sin problem. If you have sin in your life, perhaps one of the first things you should do is confess that sin. Now, as you think about your sin that may be separating you from God, or that may be perhaps causing a short circuit in your relationship with God, think of that brazen altar, and think about the fact that the approach to God begins with the brazen altar.

Now, that doesn't mean you should get an animal and sacrifice it, but what that does mean is this. You should worship God and thank him for the Lamb of God who died on the cross that your sins might be forgiven. That's the only basis upon which you can approach God.

Nothing in my hand I bring, simply to thy cross I cling. That's the way I approach God. So, as you think about approaching God in worship or in your devotions, begin at the brazen altar and think about the applications that the brazen altar has, and then proceed to the labor, and think in terms of that feet washing, that continuous cleansing that you need in order to approach a holy God.

The New Testament will say, if we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and the blood of Jesus Christ, his Son, cleanses us from all sin. In the Greek language, present tense is expressed in continuous time, which means you can insert the word continuously in a verse like 1 John 1, 9, which I just quoted. It could read then something like this, if we continuously confess our sins, he is continuously faithful and just, and the blood of Jesus Christ, his Son, just keeps on cleansing us from all sin.

You see, the continuous cleansing at the labor is made possible by that sacrifice of Christ at the brazen altar. So, as you proceed then to the labor, thank God for the continuous cleansing that he promises us. You've had the bath of regeneration perhaps, but as you move through this world, your feet get dirty.

All of us experience that, and so there should be this devotional application of the labor as we think in terms of our approach to God. Now, again, thinking your way through the tent of worship and its devotional application, enter the tent proper. The first compartment of it has three articles of furniture.

On your left, you picture that golden candlestick. Have you ever really thanked God for the scriptures? Have you thanked God for divine guidance? Have you ever really thanked God for the light that he's given you? You know, there are people in this world that don't have much light. There are still thousands and thousands of tribes of people who have no scripture, not even one word of scripture, in their language.

There are people who have never heard the name Jesus. There are people who really do not know the true and the living God. There are millions of them in this world.

It would seem that they have no light. According to the scripture, they have some light. They have natural revelation, but nothing like the light that you have.

If you understand the gospel of the tabernacle and the wilderness, you have a great deal of light. So as you stand there at the golden candlestick, figuratively speaking, thank God for the scripture. Thank God for the light that he's given you and ask him to give you the power to live up to the light that he's given you.

And then on your right would be the table of showbread. I wonder, do you really acknowledge God as being the source of your sustenance? When you sit down to your table to eat your food, do you bow your head and just acknowledge the fact that God is the source of that food? Do you acknowledge that with a grateful heart? Do you see God as the source of all things, the power behind all things, and the purpose for all things? That's the way the apostle Paul saw him. So as you figuratively think about the table of showbread, think about every piece of bread you've got.

Think about every material thing you have. Think about every spiritual blessing you've got. And thank God for all of those things.

All of those things are coming from God. Food doesn't come from the supermarket shelf. Food comes from God, according to the scripture.

And that's why we should worship God and thank God for the things that sustain us. And then, of course, there's the altar of incense. And this is why every quiet time or every hour with God should involve a lot of time of prayer.

You know, when you open this book, God speaks to you. That's the important thing about this book. But not only does God speak to you from this book, God wants you to speak to him.

There are a lot of things that God wants to hear you say. He wants to hear you confess your sins. He wants to hear you express your faith.

He wants to hear your words of worship and adoration. There are many things God wants to hear from you. And that's why he gave us the great privilege of prayer.

When God gave us the privilege and the power of prayer, God gave us a tremendous spiritual blessing. I don't think we'll realize until we get to heaven the tremendous power God gave us when he invited us to come boldly before the throne of grace and find grace to help us in our time of need. That's what that altar of incense pictures.

Prayer. God has given us a tremendous thing when he gives us prayer. And we should use that great privilege that God has given us.

Now, I think as you continue to think your way through the tent of worship, think about what it took for that veil to be torn so you could go into the presence of God. Do you ever think much about the presence of God, the divine presence of God? It's true that God is in us, that God is with us, that God is upon us. It's true that he's in our midst.

But it's also true that we should approach his presence and actually come into the presence of God, just like David described it, just like the tent of worship described it. And in a quiet hour of worship, it's a wonderful experience to just sit there and think your way right into the presence of God and pray your way right into the presence of God. That's what the Holy of Holies describes, the place where God really is.

That Ark of the Covenant was the article of furniture in which he lives. Well, you can see there are devotional applications to this tent of worship. The first devotional application and the most important one probably is the gospel itself, the way back to God, the reconciliation of the divorce between you and God.

That's the big message of the tabernacle in the wilderness. And then the fact that your body today is the tabernacle. That's one of the dynamic applications of the tabernacle in the wilderness.

That heavenly tabernacle, of which the earthly one is just a physical expression, is certainly an application. And then these devotional applications, I think, are really what's important about the tent of worship. The tent of worship showed a sinful man how to approach a holy God.

And you can think your way through that tent of worship as you, a sinful man or woman, approach a holy God even today.

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