

# The Ark of the Covenant

by George Warnock

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*The sermon explores the significance of the Ark of the Covenant in understanding God's sovereignty, election, and our response to His call.*

**Scripture:** Exodus 25:10

**Topics:** "God's Sovereignty", "Human Responsibility"

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## Description

George Warnock emphasizes the significance of the Ark of the Covenant and the mercy seat as God's dwelling place, illustrating how God initiates a relationship with humanity from His own nature rather than from human effort. He discusses the complexities of divine sovereignty and human responsibility, urging believers to recognize that their calling and election are rooted in God's foreknowledge and predestination. Warnock highlights the importance of not presuming one's election but rather diligently seeking to follow God's voice, as true faithfulness is demonstrated through obedience. He reassures that God's plan is consistent with His justice and love, encouraging believers to embrace the truth of their identity in Christ. Ultimately, he calls for a deeper understanding of God's creative call and the assurance of glorification in Him.

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## Transcript

The ark of the covenant (the covering of which was called the mercy seat) was hidden away behind the veil in the holy of holies. It was there before the ark of the covenant that the high priest would stand "once in the year" with the blood of goats; and while there, clothed upon with holy garments, and with Urim and Thummim in his breastplate, he would have a brief time of communication with God. God said to Moses, "They shall make an ark of shittim wood... And thou shalt put the mercy seat above upon the ark; and in the ark thou shalt put the testimony that I shall give thee.

And there will I meet with thee, and I will commune with thee from above the mercy seat." (See Ex. 25:10-22.) God begins here with the ark of the covenant and the mercy seat. We would be inclined to begin with the outer court, the doorway into it, and the brazen altar, for this is what we would see first as we drew near to God. But God's order is different: He begins from Himself and draws near to man. Jesus said, "No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him" (Jn. 6:44).

Our life in Christ is the result rather than the cause of our salvation. We find it difficult to reconcile the sovereign call of God with our responsibility to that call; and no doubt this is the reason there has been so much argument in this whole matter of election and free will. Usually we would emphasize one aspect of

truth to the neglect of the other, because it is difficult for us to reconcile opposites of truth in our thinking. Perhaps it is for this reason that God has seen fit to raise up different ministries from time to time and anoint them to emphasize what others have neglected.

Calvin was sent of God to establish the truth of God's sovereignty. But as men began to presume that they were "elect" of God because they believed in the doctrine of election, God saw fit to raise up others who would exhort men to make their "calling and election sure." In God's portrayal of truth we have many opposites; and there is no way we can reconcile them by human reasoning, or by diluting the truth with compromise in order to make it appear acceptable and logical. Many speak of man's free will as if that were more important than God's sovereign will.

I must be sufficiently sovereign to choose or reject God. But God must not be so sovereign as to choose or reject me! The Potter must not really have any right over the clay, but the clay in the final analysis must have the deciding vote! The distinction that God made between Jacob and Esau was not because of goodness in the one, or evil in the other. "(For the children being not yet born, neither having done any good or evil, that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works, but of him that calleth;) it was said unto her, The elder shall serve the younger" (Rom. 9:11-12).

The apostle makes it very clear that good or evil in the two boys was not to be considered as a motivating factor in God's choice of the one, and His rejection of the other. It was simply that it was God's choice "that the purpose of God according to election might stand."

Sometimes it is hard to reconcile a truth like this with other aspects of God's dealings with men, as we hear Him crying out to his rebellious people to pay heed to His gracious call, and to walk in His ways. Nor does believing in the doctrine of election make me to be one of the elect. I cannot afford to presume. For my part, I must be diligent to make my "calling and election sure," and follow on to know Him. Jesus said, "My sheep hear my voice, and I know them." And this gives me great courage and confidence, as it was intended to do. But it also goes on to say, "My sheep... follow me." And therefore I must not presume to be one of the elect sheep of God's pasture if I am not hearing His voice, and seeking to follow Him. Those who stand with the Lamb on Mount Zion are not only called and chosen, they are also faithful. Why must I be able to reconcile the seeming opposites in God in order to believe what He says in either case? I, who am but dust and ashes? Must I dilute the clear declarations of God's Word in order to make them acceptable in the minds of the people, or understandable in my own finite mind? Can we not simply recognize that as yet we "see through a glass darkly" and find joy in believing where we cannot understand, simply because the infinite God has declared it?

God begins with the ark of the covenant because it is His dwelling place, and He must begin from Himself because He is God. When I come on the scene I hear His creative call, and I obey and begin to serve Him. I have the feeling that I am drawing near to Him, that I am being obedient and faithful, and all this is true. But sooner or later I must confess: "Lord, You caused me to approach unto You! You called me, and I came forth because it was a creative Word, just as when You called light to come forth out of darkness in the beginning." (See 2 Cor. 4:6.) No mere invitation that! It was a sovereign, commanding, creative Word that I heard. I yielded to His love, and I submitted to His dealings in my life, that is true. But then, shall the snowflake boast of yielding and melting when the sun sends forth its torrid rays upon the earth? Or shall the sands of the seashore that are overwhelmed with the oceans rise up and say, "Well, after all, I surrendered to the rising of the tides"? Or the flimsy reed that bends and breaks when the winds blow upon it, is it going to boast, "But don't forget, I submitted to the winds that blew"? Or is the apostle Paul,

smitten down on the Damascus Road by a mighty lightning stroke from Heaven going to boast, "I did my part, when God shone forth from heaven and blinded my eyes, I fell off my horse"?

We do not really need to understand all about it now, nor yet be troubled with what appears to be conflicting areas of truth. One day we will know and understand that everything God ever did was consistent with His justice and righteousness--and at the same time consistent with His heart of pure love!

God begins with the ark of the covenant and the mercy seat, because He begins from Himself, works His way out toward Man, and draws him unto Himself. God wants us to know that "It is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure" (Phil. 2:13). Let us not draw back from the truth because we are not always able to reconcile it with God's justice or with His love. But let us embrace the truth because He declared it... and because we know and are assured that He will do the thing that is absolutely right. Let us embrace the truth He declares, not to fortify ourselves with arguments, but that we might enter into true rest. For indeed this is why He makes the truth known to our hearts and minds.

"For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren. Moreover whom he did predestinate, them he also called: and whom he called, them he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified" (Rom. 8:29-30). Let us start with God. We miss so much if we start with the word "justified." God begins from Himself.

Foreknowledge. God knew His people long before they were born--even from the foundation of the world. This knowledge does not merely concern things He knew about them, or things they would do; for God certainly knows everything and everybody, and all that they will do, whether they be good or bad. But here God speaks of certain ones "whom he did foreknow."

Predestination. This comes next... and it is not a frightening word. It simply means "to mark out beforehand." When I seek God and live for Him and seek to walk in His ways, I am not framing my own destiny. I am rather fulfilling a destiny that was predetermined from the foundation of the world. That is why "there remaineth therefore a rest [a sabbath] to the people of God" (Heb. 4:9). I know and believe that the pathway that He has marked out for me is one that is good, and that it is intended to bring me into full conformity to the image of His Son. My sins and faults and failures, and the fleshly strivings of my carnal mind, all these are inevitable; and I must not blame God for that. But I also know that He does not intend to change His plan because of my weakness. He knows what I am made of. And by the wonder of His grace and power He takes each failure, each mistake, transforms them one by one into steppingstones along the divinely chosen pathway in which I walk, giving "beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, and the garment of praise for the spirit heaviness."

Called. Once we recognize that He foreknew and predestinated us, then we know for sure that His call was a creative Word, and not a mere invitation. There is a cause behind the call that reaches back and beyond the foundations of the world. And the cause is hidden in His own heart of Love--He doesn't tell us why He loved us so.

Justified. This is something we become aware of as we embrace Jesus Christ as our Savior; and therefore we might be inclined to think it all started here. But it all started away back from the foundations of the world, in the heart of God.

Glorified. This is yet to come. But it is used in the Aorist tense in the Greek; and I am told this can indicate a once-for-all action in the past, or an action in the future that is sure to come to pass! God is speaking

from the mercy seat, and He says He has glorified us! For He is looking at the finished product as One speaking from the viewpoint of eternity, as One Who is well able to declare the end from the beginning, because He is able to bring it to pass.

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