

The Contents of the Tabernacle.

by Robert Murray M'Cheyne

Robert Murray M'Cheyne's sermon explores the significance of the Tabernacle as a type of Christ and its implications for the New Covenant.

Scripture: Hebrews 9:1

Topics: "The Tabernacle", "Christ as Our High Priest"

Description

Robert Murray M'Cheyne explores the significance of the Jewish Tabernacle, emphasizing its role as a meeting place with God and a profound type of Christ. He explains that the Tabernacle, made of worldly materials, foreshadows the heavenly sanctuary established by Christ, who is the new Tabernacle. M'Cheyne highlights the contents of the holy place, such as the golden lamp, the altar of incense, and the table of showbread, illustrating how they represent Christ and the Church. He contrasts the limited access to God before Christ's sacrifice with the open invitation to all believers now, urging them to embrace the salvation offered through Jesus. The sermon concludes with a warning about the consequences of neglecting this great salvation.

Transcript

Hebrews ix.. 1-5--"Then verily the first covenant had also ordinances of divine service, and a worldly sanctuary. For there was a tabernacle made; the first, wherein was the candlestick, and the table, and the shew-bread; which is called the sanctuary. And after the second veil, the tabernacle which is called the Holiest of all; Which had the golden censer, and the ark of the covenant overlaid round about with gold, wherein was the golden pot that had manna, and Aaron's rod that budded, and the tables of the covenant; And over it the cherubims of glory shadowing the mercy-seat; of which we cannot now speak particularly."

In my last lecture on this chapter, I enter on the subject of the Jewish Tabernacle. I showed you that the Tabernacle was the peculiar glory of the Jewish people. I showed you it was so for two reasons,--1st. Because it was the meeting-place with God ; 2d. Because it was the greatest type of Christ becoming incarnate. And therefore, when the Arabian or the stranger saw it--saw the pillar of cloud by day, and the pillar of fire by night--they knew that this was a peculiar people. And when that wicked man Balaam saw them, he said, "For from the top of the rocks I see him, and from he hills I behold him." [Nu. 23:9] "The Lord his God is with him, and the shout of a king is among them." [Nu. 23:21b] "How goodly are thy tents, O Jacob, and thy tabernacles, O Israel!" [Nu. 24:5] The Tabernacle, then, is to be regarded as the

peculiar glory of the Mosaic covenant.

I showed you first of all, that the Tabernacle is called "a worldly sanctuary." It was called so for two reasons,--1st. Because it was in the world : It had local habitation : It had its little spot where it could be seen. 2d. It was a worldly sanctuary for another reason--because it was made of worldly material. The badgers' skins, and the boards of shittim-wood, and the fine twined linen, were all fading. It was a worldly sanctuary, soon to pass away. Now, the second covenant has got a heavenly sanctuary--"A building of God--an house not made with hands." I showed you that Christ is the new Tabernacle.

The second thing that I showed you was the holy place. We saw, that in the 2d verse, it is described in three ways : It is described first by its situation, then by its contents, and lastly by its name. I shall not now go over all that I then said : but I would like to show you what is the meaning of the holy place. I would open to you now what appears to be the meaning of the holy place and all that is in it. I think that it is meant to show Christ mystical,--that is, Christ and all his members.

In order to explain this more fully, just observe there was a golden lamp lighted up every day. Now, there can be no doubt that this lamp was intended to represent Christ and his members. Now, you will observe, brethren, one remarkable feature about this candlestick--the light was enclosed within boards and curtains. Now, it appears to me, that this expresses the state of the Church in the Wilderness--before Christ came it was shrouded under boards and curtains. It is true that there were some straggling lights shed over the world, so that the Queen of Sheba came to inquire about it, and the Eunuch came all the way from Ethiopia to Jerusalem to worship : But, however that may be, it was not intended to shine over the world : It was a Church having the Gospel, but not spreading the light of the Gospel over the world, until Christ came, and then the boards and curtains were taken down, and the lamp shed its light over the world. It appears to me, that the candlestick in the Tabernacle describes the state of the Church till Christ came ; but now, when he is come, the light is no more hid under boards and curtains, but is spread over the world.

Again, in the holy place there was the golden altar of incense. The golden altar of incense was on the outside of the vail, and its use was to burn incense every morning and evening. Now, there can be no doubt that this also describes Christ, the great intercessor, and his people, the intercessors of the world. But there is one thing that must strike you very much : The altar was not within the vail, but on the outside of it. Now, I cannot but think that this describes the state of the Church before Christ died--that they had not that near, close, and intimate communion that we now enjoy. The Spirit signified by the incense on the outside of the vail, that the way into the holiest of all was not yet manifest. We know that the Old Testament Church was one of prayer. David sought God's face seven times a day. Solomon prayed. Daniel was a man of prayer. The Psalms prove distinctly that it was an interceding Church ; but the intercession was without the vail. There was not that spirit of adoption whereby we cry "Abba, Father!"

There was a third thing ; and that was, the pure golden table bearing the twelve loaves of bread. There can be no doubt that this shows Christ, the provision of his people. But you will notice that there was a loaf for the twelve tribes, but nothing for the Gentiles ; and this is what Christ means when he says, "Go not into the way of the Gentiles, and into any city of the Samaritans enter ye not: But go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel." [Mt. 10:5,6] The twelve loaves of the shew-bread were the children's bread ; and it seems to signify that till the vail was rent the twelve loaves of bread were for the twelve tribes only--until Jesus died and said, "Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature." [Mk. 16:15] You remember, what he said unto the Jews--"I am the bread of life." [Jn. 6:35]

From all this, dear friends, I want you to gather how great and peculiar the privilege under which you live. When the Tabernacle was standing, the way into the holiest of all was not made manifest ; but now, since Christ has died--the boards and the curtains are taken down, and the way into the holiest of all is made manifest, and the bread which was only twelve loaves is now multiplied--there is enough for the prodigals of the Gentiles. Brethren, how shall ye escape if you neglect so great salvation ? I do not know, brethren, if you have followed me in what I have been saying ; but you cannot but see that there is now an openness to be found that was not then ; so that your condemnation will be greater, if you go away, as the most of you are doing, going away unpardoned, unjustified, unsaved.

I now come, dear friends, to the most holy place. Verses 3-5--"And after the second veil, the tabernacle which is called the Holiest of all; Which had the golden censer, and the ark of the covenant overlaid round about with gold, wherein was the golden pot that had manna, and Aaron's rod that budded, and the tables of the covenant; And over it the cherubims of glory shadowing the mercy-seat; of which we cannot now speak particularly." You will notice, dear brethren, that the second chamber is described in three ways : It is described from its situation--"after the second veil ;" then from its name--"the holiest of all ;" and then from its contents--"which had the golden censer," &c.

1st. First of all, It is described from its situation and its name. It is said, it was "after the second veil." See Exodus xxvi. 31-33--"And thou shalt make a veil of blue, and purple, and scarlet, and fine twined linen of cunning work: with cherubims shall it be made: And thou shalt hang it upon four pillars of shittim wood overlaid with gold: their hooks shall be of gold, upon the four sockets of silver. And thou shalt hang up the veil under the taches { clasps, fastenings}, that thou mayest bring in thither within the veil the ark of the testimony: and the veil shall divide unto you between the holy place and the most holy." It is the same veil that is mentioned in the 27th of Matthew, 50th verse--"Jesus, when he had cried again with a loud voice, yielded up the ghost. And, behold, the veil of the temple was rent in twain from the top to the bottom." This is the very veil which is here spoken of, called "the second veil." The second veil was that which divided between the first and second or innermost chamber. It was four square ; the boards of it were of shittim-wood, overlaid with gold ; and just as the holy place had no light from the outside, so it had no light from the outside. Now, the name of this innermost place is called "the holiest of all." This is the second or innermost place of the chamber which we are now to speak about. Now, let us enter it, and see its contents.

The first thing mentioned is the golden censer. Now, we know quite well that this is not the golden altar. The golden censer, then, can be none other than that which the high priest carried in on the day of atonement. Leviticus xvi. 12 and 13 verses--"And he shall take a censer full of burning coals of fire from off the altar before the LORD, and his hands full of sweet incense beaten small, and bring it within the veil: And he shall put the incense upon the fire before the LORD, that the cloud of the incense may cover the mercy seat that is upon the testimony, that he die not." You will observe that the first thing the high priest did on the day of atonement, was, to take the golden censer, and fill it with burning coals from off the altar ; and then, with his hands full of sweet incense beaten small, he entered in within the second veil, and as he entered he put the beaten incense on the coals, and thus he was enveloped in sweet-smelling incense. It is probable that he put it down on the ground before the altar ; for we read that he sprinkled the altar seven times with blood. Now, it is very plain that the golden censer represents Christ standing before the golden altar offering up our prayers and his own. You will see this in the 8th chapter of Revelation, 3d verse--"And another angel came and stood at the altar, having a golden censer; and there was given unto him much incense, that he should offer it with the prayers of all saints upon the golden altar which was

before the throne." There can be no doubt that the angel here represents Christ, and that the incense represents his fragrant intercession. And this was to teach Israel two things : It was to teach them their prayers were sinful ; and then it was to teach them that they had a high priest to offer up their prayers. But it was to teach you next, that you have a golden censer, and a high priest to offer it up.

The next thing is the ark of the covenant. You will see it described in the 25th chapter of Exodus. 10th, 11th, and 16th verses--"And they shall make an ark of shittim wood: two cubits and a half shall be the length thereof, and a cubit and a half the breadth thereof, and a cubit and a half the height thereof. And thou shalt overlay it with pure gold, within and without shalt thou overlay it, and shalt make upon it a crown of gold round about." "And thou shalt put into the ark the testimony which I shall give thee." Now, brethren, this ark in the holiest of all was merely a chest overlaid with gold, and only contained the tables of stone. And yet it was the chiefest thing in the Tabernacle. You remember when it was taken by the Philistines, Eli trembled for the ark of God, and [the daughter in law of] Phinehas said, "The glory is departed from Israel, for the ark of God is taken." [1 Sa. 4:21] So then it was the glory of Israel, and it was the main thing in the Tabernacle, because it showed Christ as our law-fulfilling righteousness. I think it was the intention of it to show Christ as our righteousness--"Jehovah our righteousness." [i.e. Jehovah-Tsidkenu--Jer. 23:6 (also Jer. 33:16)] And this shows that it is the main thing in a Christian church--it is the righteousness of Christ that ought to be made known.

The next thing within the veil was the golden pot that had manna. I must not now enter upon this. But let me repeat to you what I said before--if those that despised the Gospel in the days of Moses died without mercy, "of how much sorer punishment shall they be thought worth who have trodden under foot the Son of God, and have counted the blood of the covenant, wherewith they were sanctified, an unholy thing, and have done despite unto the spirit of grace." The Gospel was taught to the Jews in the same way in which we teach children--by pictures ; but the Gospel is taught is in the same way as we teach grown-up men--by books, &c.; and if they died without mercy, of how much sorer punishment shall ye be thought worthy ? There is nothing convinces me more that the unconverted will perish than this. If you go to your grave without having Christ our righteousness--if you go to your grave without making use of the golden censer--you will be condemned. If we could say to an unbelieving Jew, "How shall you escape ?" may we not say the same to you ? Amen.

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