

18. The superior tabernacle

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The entire world can be divided into two realms – the material part and the immaterial part. The former is anything that can be touched and handled, but the latter one cannot be seen, let alone touch or handle. Our conscience belongs to the latter category as you can tell.

Although our conscience cannot be touched, it certainly touches us. It can reward or reproach us; congratulate or condemn us; applaud or accuse us. It can be honorable or it can be so seared and twisted due to repeated wrong behaviors. It can let the Lord lead us to the righteous path, or it can lead us to self-destructive damnation.

The vast majority of Americans are conscientious about their external appearance. That's why cosmetic, clothing, and weight loss industries are thriving. But these people are not concerned about their conscience as much as their external appearance. What people don't want to admit is that the external bodies will die once someday and will decay, but their spirits are eternal. They will go to one place or another. In other words, the internal being is far more important than the external being, the body.

The OT tabernacle was beautifully and elaborately adorned according to the specifications that were given to Moses by the Lord. But it is utterly inferior to compare with the real tabernacle in heaven. It was a copy; it was a shadow of the heavenly tabernacle.

Hebrews chapter 9 presents a detailed contrast between the OT tabernacle and the NT heavenly tabernacle where Jesus Christ now ministers. This contrast makes it clear that the NT tabernacle is far superior. When we get to heaven, we will see it.

A. THE EARTHLY TABERNACLE

Hebrews 9:1-5 Then indeed, even the first Covenant had ordinances of divine service and the earthly sanctuary. 2 For a tabernacle was prepared: the first part, in which was the lampstand, the table, and the showbread, which is called the sanctuary; 3 and behind the second veil, the part of the tabernacle which is called the Holiest of All, 4 which had the golden censer and the ark of the Covenant overlaid on all sides with gold, in which were the golden pot that had the manna, Aaron's rod that budded, and the tablets of the covenant; 5 and above it were the cherubim of glory overshadowing the mercy seat. Of these things we cannot now speak in detail.

The OT tabernacle was, in a way, a glorified tent that the Israelites carried with them during their wanderings in the wilderness. Wherever they were told to stop, they pitched the tabernacle and it became a place of worship. Whenever the Lord told them, "Get'em up, move'em out," they folded up the tabernacle and moved.

The tabernacle was not just a place where the ancient priests prepared the sacrifices and presented them to the Lord. The whole setup – all the materials that were used, the way they were set up were symbolizing Jesus Christ.

We are going to go over them briefly to learn why the Lord told Moses to make these things in His way:

1) Tabernacle – The tabernacle was a tent 45 feet long, 15 feet wide, and 15 feet high, divided into two rooms. The larger room – the first part was a 15 feet by 30 feet room called the “Holy Place.” Behind the second veil was a smaller room 15 feet by 15 feet, and this room was called the “Holiest of All.”

2) The Lampstand – There is no window inside of the tabernacle tent, so this lampstand provides the only light source for the priests’ ministry in the Holy Place. The lampstand in the Holy Place speaks of Jesus Christ, the Light of the world. The oil for the lamps reminds us of the Holy Spirit, who has anointed us. Israel was to be a light to the Gentiles, but they failed in their mission. Today, each believer is God’s light, and each local church is to shine in this dark world.

3) The Table of Showbread – This table was to be made of acacia wood, overlaid with gold – 3 feet long, 1.5 feet wide, and 2 feet, 3 inches high.

According to Leviticus 24:5-9, Showbread was made of fine flour, and twelve cakes of Showbread – one for each tribe of Israel – set on the table, sprinkled lightly with frankincense. Once a week, the bread was replaced and only priests could eat the old bread.

The bread was a reminder that God fed His people spiritually and physically. The Showbread speaks of Christ as the Life-Sustainer.

John 6:35 And Jesus said to them, “I am the bread of life. He who comes to Me shall never hunger, and he who believes in Me shall never thirst.”

4) The Golden Incense Altar – The actual location of the Incense Altar was right before the second veil that leads to the Holiest of All. But the author of the Book of Hebrews included in the Holiest of All, because on the annual Day of Atonement, the high priest used coals from the altar to burn incense before the Ark of Covenant within the veil. Moses and the author of the Book of 1 Kings related the Altar to the Ark. King David portrayed his prayer as incense in one of his Psalms:

Psalms 141:2 Let my prayer be set before You as incense, The lifting up of my hands as the evening sacrifice.

5) The Ark of Covenant – This ark became famous not because people read the OT of the Bible, but because of the movie “Raiders of the lost ark” by Steven Spielberg. Did they portray it correctly? Are you kidding? Hollywood does not know how to keep everything in truth, even if their lives are depending on it. They made the ark as if it has some sort of mystical power and they stopped there.

The real Ark of Covenant, according to the Bible, was the most important single item associated with the tabernacle, modeled after the throne of God in heaven. The dimension is 3 feet 9 inches long, 2 feet 3 inches wide and 2 feet 3 inches high.

The Ark is a perfect symbol of the Lord Jesus Christ in His deity and humanity. Acacia wood is harder and darker than oak. It is also very durable because wood-eating insects avoid it. This represents a man without sin. Jesus Christ was the God-man. His deity was represented by the gold and His humanity was represented by the wood. It is not a wooden chest, nor a gold chest. There is no mingling of the two materials. Not like Centaur who is supposedly half man and half horse from a Greek myth, Jesus was 100% God and 100% man.

The contents of the Ark were also symbolic. Aaron's rod that budded speaks of the Lord's resurrection. The manna speaks of the fact that Christ is the Bread of Life. The Ten Commandments speak of the life He lived on earth fulfilling the Law in all points and fulfilling the prophecies spoken of Him.

It is interesting that each of these three items is connected with rebellion on the part of God's people: the tablets of the Laws with the making of the golden calf. Aaron's rod with the rebellion led by Korah. And the manna with Israel's ungratefulness in the wilderness.

6) The Mercy Seat – It was the pure gold cover for the Ark of the Covenant. Once a year, on the Day of Atonement, the high priest was permitted to enter the Holiest of all, where he sprinkled the blood of the sacrifices on the Mercy Seat. This made atonement for Israel's sins for another year. The sprinkled blood covered the sins of the people so that God saw the blood and not their rebellion.

The phrase "Mercy Seat" also means "propitiation." The fulfillment of this was done when Jesus Christ died once for all for the sins of the world and took away sin by the sacrifice of Himself.

Romans 3:25 whom God set forth as a propitiation by His blood, through faith, to demonstrate His righteousness, because in His forbearance God had passed over the sins that were previously committed

Let's stop here for a moment to think about what we just learned. All of these are wonderful. But these remain in symbolism, not the spiritual reality.

B. THE INACCESSIBILITY OF THE EARTHLY TABERNACLE

Hebrews 9:6-10 Now when these things had been thus prepared, the priests always went into the first part of the tabernacle, performing the services. 7 But into the second part the high priest went alone once a year, not without blood, which he offered for himself and for the people's sins committed in ignorance; 8 the Holy Spirit indicating this, that the way into the Holiest of All was not yet made manifest while the first tabernacle was still standing. 9 It was symbolic for the present time in which both gifts and sacrifices are offered which cannot make him who performed the service perfect in regard to the conscience-- 10 concerned only with foods and drinks, various washings, and fleshly ordinances imposed until the time of reformation.

The earthly tabernacle was nothing like 21st century churches. The Jewish people couldn't assemble within the four walls of the tabernacle for their worship service. They stood outside of the tabernacle while the priests and the Levites were permitted into the tabernacle to do their priestly duties. Furthermore, only the high priest entered into the Holiest of All once a year. When he did, he had to offer a sacrifice for his own sins and the sins of others. But, in contrast, the heavenly tabernacle is open to all of the people of God at all times.

Some of you might get an idea that I am absolutely against rituals, no matter what. In a way, yes and no. Yes, I am against any empty and meaningless rituals that only appease one's inner religious needs and make a person to think that he or she is close to God. It gives a false sense of security. No, I am not against rituals if we are doing them as ways to worship the Lord like church services and taking communion.

By its definition, ritual represents something greater than the ritual itself. The ritual itself does not have any spiritual meaning but what it represents does. All the sacri-

fices offered and the blood that applied to the Mercy Seat could not change the Israelis' hearts or conscience. All the rituals they went through were connected with ceremonial purity, not spiritual and moral purity. It goes the same for what you do here in this service. You may look holy, smell holy, and talk holy, but only the Lord knows whether you are with Him or not. You may fool all of us with your outward appearance, but not the Lord.

By the way, the building we are going to have in the future, the Lord willing, will have a very little amount of Christian symbols. We are not going to have a massive window of stained glass, a gold paint covered cross, or statues. First, we cannot afford to have those things; second, we don't want to distract you guys from your simple faith in the Lord Jesus.

C. JESUS, THE MEDIATOR OF THE NEW COVENANT

Hebrews 9:11-15 But Christ came as High Priest of the good things to come, with the greater and more perfect tabernacle not made with hands, that is, not of this creation. 12 Not with the blood of goats and calves, but with His own blood He entered the Most Holy Place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption. 13 For if the blood of bulls and goats and the ashes of a heifer, sprinkling the unclean, sanctifies for the purifying of the flesh, 14 how much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without spot to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God? 15 And for this reason He is the Mediator of the new covenant, by means of death, for the redemption of the transgressions under the first covenant, that those who are called may receive the promise of the eternal inheritance.

The animal sacrifice originated from the first sin by Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. When they were confronted by the Lord for their sins, in His abounding mercy, the Lord killed an animal instead of Adam and Eve, because without the shedding of blood there is no remission of sin. Its blood spilled onto ground for them and its skin became tunics to cover their nakedness.

Genesis 3:21 Also for Adam and his wife the Lord God made tunics of skin, and clothed them.

But when Jesus died, resurrected, and ascended, He replaced the temporary symbol with a permanent reality which is the heavenly tabernacle. It was not made with human hands; the blood He brought to the altar was not that of animals, but His own.

I've met and talked with the people who wanted to know if our church has a building or big congregation. When I answered them, "Neither," either the conversation stopped or they started to treat me as if I was a fake pastor. Because many people are addicted to "religious tangibles" things we can see and feel.

Many of the Hebrew Christians in the first century thought that if they could just get back to the secure routine of religious ritual, somehow their conscience could be cleansed. But the author of this Book was telling them that they cannot use an external solution for an internal problem.

D. APPLICATIONS

1) Get rid of any religious ritualistic concept and experience.

Quit going through empty religious motions. Get rid of any symbols that have become objects of worship.

2) Focus on the things God does – your heart for Him.

Look to Christ, fix your eyes on Him and always let Him be your King who rules your life.