God with Us - Part One

# (Exodus 25:8-30)

Thank you for joining us today. Over the past 10 weeks we’ve been looking at the incredible story of a man named Moses as he led the Israelites out of Egypt, out of slavery and following God into the unknown. This morning, we’re continuing the story, but we’re beginning a new series because the Israelites are beginning a new chapter in their lives; no longer are they just following God, but God is with them, he is dwelling among them. No longer was God out there, he wasn’t just in the cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night, now he had come near, now he was on the ground, now he was dwelling with them, he was doing something new, he had come into covenant with them.

Last week we saw Moses go up on the mountain with his brother Aaron, Aaron’s two sons, and 70 of the elders of Israel. God had invited them to come to this special meeting, this conference where he was the keynote speaker, because when people aren’t in agreement, where there is disunity, things tend to fall apart. And so God met with the 74 leaders so that they would be in agreement as they were transitioning from following God to dwelling with God, he is now with them, he is dwelling in the camp with several million of his children gathered around him. And it had been a year since the Passover, a year since God sent Moses down into Egypt to tell Pharaoh one last time, “Let my people go so that they may worship me.”

Now God tells Moses to tell the Israelites in verse eight, *“Have them make a sanctuary for me and I will dwell among them” (Exodus 25:8)*. And so, he gave Moses this building project, it was very specific, and he laid out his instructions with great detail, right down to the cubic inch of what he wanted, how it’s to be built and what it’s to do. This tabernacle was to be a pattern of God’s sanctuary in heaven, it would be the fulfillment of what God meant by worship, and so he was coming close, the cloud was going to cover the tabernacle, and the glory of the Lord was going to fill the inner sanctuary.

God lays this all out before Moses, line upon line, there is a site map, there are specific dimensions of the tents, the outer areas with their curtains, but first he begins prescribing six essential pieces of furniture that will be needed. The first one you would come to as you walk through the opening in the white sheets into the tabernacle was the bronze altar where sacrifices were made. Next there was the bronze basin made for washing, and then there was the tent, the holy place, but this was a restricted area. This was only for the priests, they had to be washed, specially clothed, and anointed, as they entered into the holy place. Stepping into the shadows on the right there was the table containing the bread of the presence, on the left the golden lampstand, and ahead of that was the golden altar of incense towering taller than the other pieces. It stood before a beautiful woven veil that separated the holy place from the holy of holies, the inner sanctuary, and it was behind this veil where the golden chest called the ark of the testimony with the atonement cover was.

Those are the six pieces of furniture that are associated with worship in the tabernacle and the ark of the covenant is mentioned first because God must be put first in everything. It was this ark that represented the power and authority of God, it was there in the most holy place, it was named first, and God told Moses, *"Have them make a chest of acacia wood — two and a half cubits long, a cubit and a half wide, and a cubit and a half high” (Exodus 25:10)*. And so, Moses instructed the craftsman to get busy sanding, filing, and shaping the acacia wood. It’s a strong tough wood that grows in the desert places and so it had the natural propensity to withstand the heat, but because it was wood it could be cut, shaped, and formed.

And then in verse 11, God said, *“Overlay it with pure gold, both inside and out, and make a gold molding around it” (Exodus 25:11)*. This is awesome because now we’re getting a glimpse of the symbolic covenant relationship that is established between the wood, a perishable substance, which Moses was instructed to overlay with gold, an imperishable substance. And so, there’s this unmistakable relationship between the wood which represents humanity, and the gold which represents divinity, and it’s powerful symbolism pointing to Christ, because the perishable would have burned up if it hadn’t been covered by the imperishable. In other words, if it went through the fire it would’ve burned up, that’s what the Bible tells us, *“Fire will test the quality of each man’s work, if what he has built survives, he will receive his reward. If it is burned up, he will suffer loss, he himself will be saved, but only as one escaping through the flames” (1 Corinthians 3:13-15)*. And so, this wooden chest was overlaid with gold, the perishable with the imperishable, and it was in the holy of holies, the inner sanctuary, where Moses would meet with God.

Verse 12 says, *“Cast four gold rings for it and fasten them to its four feet, with two rings on one side and two rings on the other. Then make poles of acacia wood and overlay them with gold. Insert the poles into the rings on the sides of the chest to carry it. The poles are to remain in the rings of this ark; they are not to be removed” (Exodus 25:12-15)*. And so, this chest of wood and gold, representing both humanity and divinity is made so that it could easily be moved, it’s intended to travel with us, just as the Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. And it’s these poles, overlaid with gold, that were made for the priests to safely carry it when it’s time to move.

This chest, the ark of the covenant, the focal point of the tabernacle, is made out of two elements, the wood and the gold. It was the wood that made him in our likeness, that would make him family, in fact the Bible says that Christ, *“Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness” (Philippians 2:6-7)*. And so, because he became flesh, he came in that which was perishable, and therefore he was able to sympathize with our weaknesses, and he was able to be our kinsman redeemer. By taking that which was perishable and overlaying it with gold he was able to redeem us.

On top of this box was the atonement cover, an elaborate lid which was often referred to as the mercy seat or God’s throne. And in verse 17, God said, *"Make an atonement cover of pure gold — two and a half cubits long and a cubit and a half wide. And make two cherubim out of hammered gold at the ends of the cover” (Exodus 25:17-18). “Place the cover on top of the ark and put in the ark the Testimony, which I will give you. There, above the cover between the two cherubim that are over the ark of the Testimony, I will meet with you and give you all my commands for the Israelites” (Exodus 25:21-22)*. This majestic cover had these two angelic creatures called cherubim on each end with their wings overshadowing the ark. It was here that God would speak to Moses and reveal his will for the people of Israel.

The Bible tells us in Leviticus chapter 16 that once a year, on the day of atonement, the high priest was permitted to enter the holy of holies, and he would sprinkle the blood of the sacrifice on the mercy seat, making atonement for Israel’s sin. But today we have the privilege to boldly come into God’s presence through the blood of Jesus because our atonement is found in him and so the throne of God for us as a throne of grace. And it’s as we consider the furniture of the tabernacle that we’re able to fully appreciate who Jesus is and what he did for us as he shed his blood on the cross. You know, we always talk about being redeemed, but it’s only as we go into the tabernacle and see the killing of animals, their blood being shed on the altar, and imagine it sprinkled on the mercy seat that we begin to understand the price that was paid for our redemption.

You see, when Jesus died on the cross it was a business transaction, our redemption is basically all about substitution, because it was your sin and mine that nailed him to the cross. And so, when he died, he didn’t die as Jesus Christ, but he died as me, he died as you, and because he died in our place we can live in his. In fact, the Bible tells us that *“in him we live and move and have our being” (Acts 17:28)*. That’s what so beautiful about the atonement cover and the sprinkled blood, you and I live in his place, he has covered us, our sins have been atoned for, and we have peace with God. Not just for a year, but for all time, because *“he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed” (Isaiah 53:5)*. He is our high priest, it’s his sprinkled blood that brings us peace with God, because he became sin for us, and so we’ve traded places, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God. But there are some of you who have felt the guilt and shame long enough, you’ve been burdened by your past. It’s time to go into the tabernacle, you’ve got to move beyond the outer court, you’ve got to go in to the ark of the testimony and the atonement cover. God came near to save you, to wash you, to remove your transgression, removing your iniquity, but you’ve got to go deeper, you need to move on to maturity, going on to perfection.

Now, last week, I gave you some homework, and I asked to read chapters 25 through 31 in Exodus, because if you want to go deeper, you need to understand this furniture in the tabernacle, you need to know your Bible, because we’re going from grace to glory. We’re going to go up another level, another level of maturity, another level spirituality, and we’re getting ready to go deeper. You see, when you part the curtain and enter into the outer courtyard the first thing you notice is that chapter 27 and chapter 30 describe how the altar and the basin were to be overlaid with bronze. But as we move from the courtyard into the tent, moving from the sunlight into the shadows, we are leaving the bronze and moving into the gold, because we are moving on to better things. You see, everything in the tent, everything in the holy place is made of gold, because gold is symbolic of the nature of God. Gold always holds its value, it maintains its composition through the fire, it can take the heat and it will liquefy but it will never be anything but gold. And so we’re going to be purposeful, we want to be intentional, we want to move from bronze to gold, because whatever is in us, whatever is on us, we want to come out of the fire as gold.

Job said it this way in chapter 23, he said, *“God knows the way that I take. When he has tested me, I will come forth as gold” (Job 23:10)*. In other words, the only thing the fire is going to burn up is the impurities, because that’s the only thing you can burn, you can’t burn gold, and so Job says, “I will come forth as gold.” That is such good news, because whatever you’re going through right now, if you were gold going in, you’re going to be gold coming out of it. And that is why when God handed Moses the plans for the tabernacle, he had to be careful to follow the pattern, he had to be careful how he built, because the Bible says, *“No one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ. If any man builds on this foundation using gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay or straw, his work will be shown for what it is, because the Day will bring it to light. It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test the quality of each man's work” (1 Corinthians 3:10-13)*. And so, Moses is building with this acacia wood, this perishable substance, and he’s overlaying it with gold, covering it with this imperishable substance, because the wood would’ve burned up if it hadn’t been covered by the gold. And there’s this collaborative effort between God and man, divinity and humanity, where God is the architect and Moses is the builder.

There is one more piece of furniture I want to mention in our remaining time together. God told Moses that he would meet with him there above the cover between the two cherubim that are over the ark of the Testimony and he would give him commands for the Israelites (Exodus 25:22). And in verse 23, he continues telling Moses, *"Make a table of acacia wood — two cubits long, a cubit wide and a cubit and a half high. Overlay it with pure gold and make a gold molding around it. Also make around it a rim a handbreadth wide and put a gold molding on the rim. Make four gold rings for the table and fasten them to the four corners, where the four legs are. The rings are to be close to the rim to hold the poles used in carrying the table. Make the poles of acacia wood, overlay them with gold and carry the table with them. And make its plates and dishes of pure gold, as well as its pitchers and bowls for the pouring out of offerings. Put the bread of the Presence on this table to be before me at all times” (Exodus 25:23-30)*.

The bread was to be placed on the table, it’s called the bread of the presence, and God gave the recipe, but he didn’t make the bread. He prescribed the ingredients, but his people are the builders and bakers, and it’s the works of their hands that are offerings to him. And so, there were 12 loaves to be laid on the table, representing the 12 tribes of Israel, which really was symbolic of them presenting themselves to him. The apostle Paul tells us, *“in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God…” (Romans 12:1)*. And so, everything involved in the preparation of this bread, from the planting of the seed, the growing, the harvesting, and the crushing of the kernels is symbolic of those things breaking off of your life so that you are suitable to be food for the Lord’s table.

I hope you to understand that it’s you and I that are symbolically on the table and there is never to be a time that the table is without bread. This bread is always to be there, but even beyond that Jesus said, *“I am the bread of life … I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever" (John 6:48, 51)*. And so, Jesus is our provision, he’s our true bread, he’s the bread that feeds you and strengthen you. On one hand you’re the loaf of bread presented before God and on the other hand its God offering bread to us. It’s a collaborative effort and he said this bread is to be before me at all times, because I will never leave you, I will be with you in the wilderness, all I ever wanted was to be with you. And that’s what the Bible tells us, *“The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel"—which means, "God with us" (Matthew 1:23)*. In other words, God said he just wants to be with you, he just wants your attention and so he says if you’ll just hang out with me, I’ll always put bread on your table.

And so, the question is why would you want anything else? Why would you want the food of Egypt when you can have the true bread of heaven? In fact, even now manna is falling from heaven and God is feeding his people. He is with us; he’s making a way where there is no way and he will never leave you nor forsake you. In fact, he said, *“Surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age” (Matthew 28:20)*. And even right now, God is revealing himself, there is bread coming into your heart and into your spirit.

The thing that is really amazing about this chapter is that there isn’t anything supernatural, there aren’t any miracles from heaven. God simply says, *“Tell the Israelites to bring me an offering and then have them make a sanctuary for me and I will dwell among them” (Exodus 25:2, 8)*. And so, there’s no burning bush, no fire from heaven, no parting of the Red Sea, no miraculous deliverance, just a man who was obedient to what God called him to do. In fact, all through this story we find Moses seeking God and serving him faithfully. No matter how much murmuring or complaining there was, he pushed back the critics and kept his eye on the goal. No matter what challenges or difficulties he faced, God was glorified because he was the one who empowered him, he was the one who parted the Red Sea, gave them bread from heaven, and water from a rock. He was there in the beginning, through all the challenges and difficulties, and he was there in the victory because he was the one who made it all possible.

Today, no matter where you are in the process right now, I want to encourage you to start building a lifestyle that is characterized by meeting with God. He is with you and he will never leave you nor forsake you. He is empowering you, he is your provision, he is your bread, and today he is encouraging you and reinforcing your calling. But you will never finish what you don’t start, there’s only one foundation, and so you can build with gold, silver, costly stones, or even wood, hay or straw, but whatever you do make sure you build on that foundation which is Jesus Christ. Seek to build that which will last and do it all for the glory of God.

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