

The Tabernacle

1. Intro & Context

- So we're in the OT book of Exodus
 - God has rescued his people out of Egypt > slavery under Pharaoh
 - Led them through the Red Sea to Mt Sinai
 - At Mt Sinai God has entered into a covenant with Israel
 - A solemn agreement
 - He will be their God and keep his promises to bless them
 - They will be his people and live according to the Law and the 10 Commandments
 - Sealed the deal with an elaborate covenant signing ceremony
- After God and the Israelites have ratified this covenant with each other
 - Moses went up the mountain, surrounded by cloud and the glory of God
 - 24:18 > he stayed on the mountain 40 days and 40 nights
 - He's left the people at the bottom of the mountain with his brother Aaron in charge
- While he's up the mountain God gives Moses two things
 - give him the stone tablets with the 10 Commandments
 - but also to give him instructions for building the tabernacle
 - And its these very detailed instructions for the tabernacle that take up all of chapters 25-30
- Reason for this is because the relationship between God and his people was to be one of interaction and fellowship
 - At the moment, God us up on the mountain far away from the people and only Moses is able to get anywhere near him ...
 - And where are the people? Way down the mountain!
- How was God going to overcome this problem?
- How was God going to be able to meet with and dwell amongst them?
 - Answer ... through the tabernacle and the work of the high priest
- Today going to look at ...
 - Form of the Tabernacle
 - Function of the Tabernacle
 - Fulfillment of the Tabernacle
- As we do ... we'll see

- how God's people can be in his presence and not die
- And how you and I can live in God's presence for eternity

2. Form of the Tabernacle

- The instructions for the tabernacle are very detailed and precise
- God starts from the inside out > from the most important, to the least important
- **Ark of the covenant (25)**
- He starts off giving instructions for the Ark of the Covenant
 - If you've seen the movie Raiders of the Lost Ark ... this is what they were searching for
- Basically it's an ornately decorated chest covered with pure gold, both inside and out
 - And it would hold among other things, the stone tablets with the 10 Commandments
- v17 - on top of the ark was to be placed a special lid called the atonement cover
 - Also translated 'mercy seat' > signifying his great mercy to his people
 - On top of the mercy seat were two cherubim facing each other with outstretched wings
- Next God gives instructions for a table > again made of gold
 - Moses was to put the Bread of Presence of the table
- Also a lamp stand made of gold
- The purpose of these items was to demonstrate that God lived in the tent and were symbolic reminders that God was with them at all times > day and night
- **Tabernacle (26)**
- In Ch 26, God gives instructions for building the tabernacle
 - This is the tent in which the ark of the covenant would be placed¹
- Tabernacle was divided into two rooms
 - A larger room called the Holy Place
 - A smaller room called the Most Holy Place which contained the ark of the covenant
 - They were separated by an ornate curtain of blue, purple and scarlet thread

¹ 4.5m wide, 14m long, 4.5m high

- **Courtyard (27)**
- Outside the tabernacle would be a series of curtains running right around the tent creating a courtyard
 - 23m wide, 46m long, 2.3m high
- **Bronze Altar**
- Inside the courtyard > between the entrance and the tabernacle was to be an altar made out of bronze for the offering of sacrifices
- **Priestly Garments (28 & 29)**
- Finally, there were instructions for the garments that Aaron, the high priest was to wear
 - Very ornate, also made out of blue, purple and scarlet thread
 - This was to symbolically show how honourable and significant the role and function of the HP was within the tabernacle (28:2)
- One of the garments he was to wear was a breast piece into which were sewn four rows of three precious stones
 - One for each of the 12 tribes of Israel with each name engraved on a stone
 - The point was ... that whenever the high priest entered the Most Holy Place he would bear the names of the sons of Israel over his heart when he enters into the presence of the Lord to show he represents all Israel when he ministers before the Lord in the Tabernacle
- Summary
 - Outer courtyard > altar for sacrifices
 - Inside > tabernacle split into two rooms
 - Inner most room = Most Holy Place / Holy of Holies
 - Contained the Ark of the Covenant and the 10 commandments
 - Together called the sanctuary

3. Function of the Tabernacle

- The symbolism with each of the parts of the sanctuary is deliberate and meant to make clear to the Israelites what the function and purpose of the tabernacle is for
- And one of the key functions is so that God would dwell among them
 - As God says to Moses in Exodus 25:8-- *have them make a sanctuary for me, and I will dwell among them*

- As it stands at the moment, it's not possible for God to dwell among them
- At the moment God is on the mountain ... surrounded by cloud of glory, fire and thunder and lightning ... and the people are down the mountain > far off and distant from God
- What this does is re-enforce God's transcendence
 - That he's a holy God full of glory, power, majesty and splendor
 - And the Israelites are far from that – morally, spiritually, physically
- But God's intention is the relationship he has with his covenant people is to be way more than that
 - He's not only a God who is transcendent ... he's also a God who is immanent
- That is ...
 - he wants to be close to his people
 - he wants to be in relationship with his people
 - he wants to know them intimately and more importantly they would know him intimately
 - And he can't do that by being distant from them
- But here's the dilemma
- So far ... God has warned Moses and the Israelites ...
 - That because of his transcendence and holiness; and
 - Because of their sinfulness
 - anyone who comes too close to him and the mountain ... would die!²
- So God gives the Israelites the tabernacle so he can be immanent
- But also allowed so he can maintain his transcendence
- ***A Tent of Royalty***
- He's able to do that first of all ... because the tabernacle was a tent for royalty
- The entire structure, rituals and materials of the tabernacle designed to show Israel that this is a royal tent in which God's people meet with their king
 - The expensive fabrics, the gold fittings were all indicative of royalty
 - Entering the tabernacle was like entering into a throne room

² 19:12, 21; 20:19

- Highlighting this even further was the large curtain called the 'shielding curtain' that separated the Holy Place from the Most Holy Place
- This was in effect the heart of the sanctuary
- For in the Most Holy Place ... was the ark of the covenant – also covered in gold and effectively acting as the throne of God
 - For this is the place where God symbolically dwelt and where God would speak with Moses
- This was to be a tent that was fit for a king

- **A Tent of Holiness**
- But it's also a tent of holiness
- And just like an earthly king ... God cannot be approached easily
 - One cannot just waltz into God's presence at will

- **Illustration - Queen**
- If you or I wanted to have a coffee / tea with the Queen
 - We couldn't just roll through the gates of Buckingham Palace and expect to plonk ourselves down on the couch in the tea room / drawing room / ?? and have a chat with Lizzie
 - We wouldn't even get to the front door before we would be shot down by 007 or some other double-O agent from Mi5

- For that same reason ... the tabernacle was also a tent of holiness
 - The entire sanctuary was holy ground
- This was achieved in a number of ways

- The outer curtain that makes up the courtyard surrounding the tabernacle separated God and his people
 - The sinfulness of God's people had to be kept separate from the holiness of God
 - And at 2.3m tall not even I could look over to get a glimpse of what was in there
- So the curtain allowed
 - God to be present in all his holiness and majesty
 - While at the same time allowing the people to be close to God, but not too close where they would perish

- In addition, because the sanctuary was holy, only those who were consecrated and set apart as priests were able to enter into the sanctuary

- This was made possible though the elaborate ceremonies of cleansing and offering sacrifices of atonement for sin that the priests had to go through before they could serve as priests and come into God's presence
- Once Moses or the priests entered into the sanctuary, standing between them and the tabernacle was the bronze altar
 - The point was clear
 - Any time they wanted to enter the tabernacle they had to first offer sacrifices in order to be cleansed and made holy before they could enter into God's presence in the tabernacle
- One of the most important jobs of the high priest which is spelled out in Leviticus 16 ... came once a year ... and it was called the Day of Atonement
 - One that day, the priest would make a special sacrifice of atonement for the sins of the entire nation of Israel
 - As the high priest, only he was allowed to go behind the curtain and enter into the Most Holy Place
 - There in the holy of holies, he would sprinkle blood on the 'mercy seat' / 'atonement cover'
 - The place where God symbolically dwelt and sat on his throne ... and provided atonement and forgiveness for his people
- **A Tent of Meeting**
- Finally the tabernacle allowed God to be immanent because it was also a tent of meeting
- Exodus 25:22 God says to Moses
 - *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.*
- Instead of Moses having to go up the mountain to meet with God ... from now on Moses would meet with God in his throne room, before the ark of the covenant and God would speak with him
- So God provides his people with the sanctuary and the tabernacle
 - That will simultaneously allow him to be transcendent and immanent
 - He can be holy, powerful and majestic and yet at the same time be close to his people without them perishing
- Why?
 - Because the tabernacle was a tent of royalty, a tent of holiness and a tent of meeting

- It reminded the Israelites that God is their king who desires to be among them
- Yet at the same time reminding them that he is holy and it's necessary for them not to come directly into his presence because they would die
- So now through the provision of the tabernacle ... God would be able to come into their midst
 - Not just on earth ... not just nearby ... but actually among them
 - And we see this happening in a very symbolic way after the tabernacle is built where God tells the Israelites to camp in their tribes around the tabernacle > 3 tribes to the north, 3 to the east, 3 to the south, 3 to the west
 - The effect is that God would literally be right in the middle of the Israelite community
- The point would be to remind Israel that God is to be at the centre of Israelite life
 - Not just physically ... but more importantly ... spiritually
 - Life for the Israelites was to be centered on God
 - He was to be at the heart of Israelite life ... both corporately and individually
- **Application**
- What this shows us is that God is a holy God
 - The separation from the people
 - The holiness of the sanctuary
 - The access to God limited to the priests
 - The elaborate cleansing and atonement rituals the priests had to go through in order to approach God ...
- All of this is meant to give Israel a glimpse of how holy God is
 - You cannot just waltz into the presence of God
 - You would die
 - He is transcendent! He is holy!
 - There is **nothing** you Israelites can do to make yourself worthy of entering into his presence
- But on the other hand ... the tabernacle is a an expression of God's amazing grace towards his people
- That he would humble himself and come and live among his people

- That a holy God who is pure and without sin would come and dwell amongst sinners and not smite them into oblivion can only happen because God is merciful
- A transcendent and holy God can ONLY be immanent and dwell among his people ... if he is willing to show untold grace towards them

- Now this is helpful ... because when many people think about Christianity ... they think it's all about being good ... whether it's obeying
 - the 10 commandments
 - Love God and love neighbour
 - or your own moral code

- Basically ... it's the view that you're acceptable to God based on your achievements ... based on how 'good' you are
 - You can call that religiosity, moralism or legalism
 - This person sees God has holy ... which is why they seek to please him by being moral and religious
- The problem with this view is it will lead either to
 - self-hatred ... because you can't live up to the standards, or
 - self-inflation ... because you think you have lived up to the standards
- Whether such a person ends up smug and superior or crushed and guilty just depends on how high their standards are

- On the other hand ... there will be others who are more relativistic in their views about Christianity
 - They will tend to say that we're all accepted by God (if there is a God)
 - They will tend to emphasise God's love and grace
 - They won't see themselves as sinners because they set their own moral standard ... therefore God's love costs him nothing
 - If God accepts us, it is because he is so welcoming, or because we are not so bad

- However the tabernacle undermines both those views
- Because the tabernacle shows the moralist and legalist
 - God is not only holy and transcendent, but he's also loving and gracious
 - That he can come and dwell amongst them ... despite their sinfulness
 - And it doesn't depend on their ability to keep their moral standards .. whatever they are

- On the other hand ... the tabernacle shows the relativist

- That God is not only loving and gracious ... but that he's also holy and transcendent
 - That we most definitely are sinners and
 - There's no way God can accept us based on moral standard ... regardless of how good it may be
- Basically the tabernacle shows us the gospel!

4. Fulfillment of the Tabernacle

- Which brings us to our final point
- The tabernacle actually points us forward to Jesus
 - Because with the coming of Jesus ... the problem of God's transcendence and immanence is fully resolved
 - Because while the tabernacle enabled God to dwell among his people and retain his holiness
 - Access to God in the Most Holy Place was limited to the HP ... and at that only once a year
 - The rest of God's people were close ... but still separated
- But when Jesus Christ was went up on that cross ...
 - It was like Jesus as being placed on the altar for sacrifice
 - But he didn't just atone for the sins of Israel for that year
 - Jesus atoned for the sins of the world ...
 - All sin ... past, present and future
- Which is why we read in the gospel's³ that at the moment when Jesus died
 - The curtain in the temple was torn in two
 - The same curtain that separated the people from the Most Holy Place and the ark of the covenant
 - That 'shielding curtain' was no longer required to keep sinful people separated from a holy God
 - Because sin had finally been dealt with
 - Sin was no longer the barrier that prevented God's people coming into the presence of a holy, transcendent God
 - Because God had removed the barrier
- And notice that the curtain was torn in two ... *from top to bottom*
 - It's as though God himself reached down from heaven and grabbed hold of the curtain and torn it himself

³ Mark 15:38; Matt 27:51

- And he's saying to us and to the world
 - Through the cross I've removed the barrier between us myself
 - Now you can come to me
 - Now you can come into my sanctuary
 - Now you don't need to keep your distance
 - Now you can come to me and know and experience my grace and love
- But not only is Jesus the sacrifice of atonement ... he is also the great high priest
 - In the tabernacle, the HP was required to go into the Most Holy Place and sprinkle blood on the atonement cover / mercy seat
 - He was required to mediate for the people, offering sacrifices on their behalf, in order for them to be able to live with God in their midst
- But Hebrews 9:11-12 says
 - ¹¹ *When Christ came as high priest of the good things that are already here, he went through the greater and more perfect tabernacle that is not man-made, that is to say, not a part of this creation. ¹² He did not enter by means of the blood of goats and calves; but he entered the Most Holy Place once for all by his own blood, having obtained eternal redemption.*
- Jesus is our sacrifice ... AND our great high priest
 - And because of him we can enter into God's presence
 - Not in a earthly sanctuary ... in a tent
 - But in the heavenly sanctuary ... in heaven itself
- You see the tabernacle was merely a shadow of the reality that is to come
- And Jesus Christ has made a reality for us already ... via the cross
- And so the tabernacle shows us the gospel
 - It reminds us that God is totally transcendent and holy
 - And the only way we enter into his presence and experience his immanence
 - Is through the sacrifice and intercession of our great high priest
 - Without Christ ... we will forever remain distant from God and die when finally do meet him face to face
- But the work of our high priest means the curtain has been torn down
 - The barrier has been removed
 - And all who trust in the blood of Christ ... sprinkled on the mercy seat of the cross ... can boldly enter into the heavenly sanctuary and dwell in the house of the Lord forever

- And it's only this gospel of grace that can help you to see the truth of Christianity
 - Not the Christianity of the legalism or the Christianity of relativism
- For the gospel says to the legalist God is far more transcendent and holy that you think or imagine
 - You can never satisfy God's holy demands based on your achievements
 - He is so transcendent and holy ... only the **death of his very own** son can save you
- And to the relativist, the gospel says God is far more loving and merciful that you can think or imagine
 - You can never presume upon God's love and mercy to you
 - God is so loving and gracious ... Jesus was **willing** to die for you
- How do you experience the immanence of a holy transcendent God
 - You enter his sanctuary of heaven
 - Made possible by blood of our great high priest Jesus
 - He has removed the curtain
 - And all who trust in him can dwell in the house of the Lord forever

PRAY