

We Are His Temple

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I'm sure you must be dazzled by all these gold items in front of you (indicating the models of the Temple artifacts created for the VBS). Some of you may have wondered if we have gone back to Old Testament times! But the beauty of all these things is that the Bible tells us that they are but a shadow of the real thing.

The book of Hebrews says that all of these things point to a fuller understanding and that fullness of understanding has come to us through Jesus and the work that He did for us at Calvary. So all these things are taken and placed within us because, as you heard from the children, "We are the Temple where God dwells." The Tabernacle of God is within us, we are His dwelling place. So we need to look at all of this in a new light, not in terms of looking at it with a full stop at the end, but looking at it with a comma and seeing where the sentence goes. It started but it's not completed. How do we process these things?

The tabernacle was something that went wherever the children of Israel went. It was a 150' x 75' tent inside which was a huge construction that had three places – the holy place and the holy of holies. This was moved and carried wherever the children of Israel went. It was God's way of telling them that His dwelling was with them, that He was with them. But we also know, as we read in Revelation, that one day, God will dwell amongst us in fullness.

Revelation 21:3-6 says: *And I heard a loud voice from the throne, saying, "Behold the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell among them, and they will be His people, and God Himself will be among them, and He will wipe away every tear from their eyes; and there will no longer be any death; there will no longer be any mourning, or crying, or pain; the first things have passed away."*

And He who sits on the throne said, "Behold, I am making all things new." And He said, "Write, for these words are faithful and true."

So we wait for the culmination of all that is happening to end with the tabernacle of God dwelling among us. The Garden of Eden, when God talked and walked with His children, would happen once again in His beautiful presence. But till then, if you know Jesus as Savior, then His Spirit dwells within us and God dwells like that with us and in us.

As we look at all these elements that made up the tabernacle, we must ask ourselves: what did they signify? What did they mean at that time – the Ark of the Covenant, the Manna, Aaron's rod and the Ten Commandments? We see that it had to do with the history that was part of what God had done with the children of Israel – how he had walked with them, provided for them, authenticated leadership with Aaron and given them the Ten Commandments to help them walk a life of holiness and purity.

Then we look at the brazen altar where sacrifices were made continually. People who sinned would come to the priest and then bring a sacrifice. The priest would sacrifice it, he would place their hands on the head of the animal, and their sins were forgiven.

The high priest would enter the holiest place only once a year, on Yom Kippur, making atonement for himself first and then for all the people. He entered with a lot of trepidation and fear. It was a very holy moment; the people were scared whether he would even come

out. Some writings say that they would tie a rope around the priest's leg as he went in, so that in case he died, they could pull him out as nobody else could enter the place where the presence of God was. Hence the awe, fear and trepidation! The high priest made the sacrifices and the access was limited. There was a veil that prevented anyone from going from the holy place into the holy of holies.

Then we saw the menorah and the showbread – the menorah suggested that light must shine and it was never put out. It was supposed to continually shine and that was what was expected from the children of Israel. Remember that God looked at them and said, *"You are a royal priesthood, a chosen people, a holy nation"*. God had set them apart to be His spokesperson, to showcase Him to a world that didn't know Him; to be a city on a hill. And yet, all those expectations were not met. So there was need for somebody to come in, and Jesus entered into this vacuum that was created and He fulfilled all the requirements of the law. The 6th, 7th and 8th chapters of the book of Hebrews, where it talks about moving from this shadow into the actual real one, had such significance. I want us to look at the significance of it this morning.

Deuteronomy 31:6 says, *"I will never leave you, I will never forsake you."*

That was what God had said to them – *"My presence will move with you"* and they would go. Moses said, *"We will not go anywhere unless we know that You are coming with us."*

For us too, as we look at ourselves and the things that we go through, God's Word again is repeated in the New Testament, in Hebrews 13:5 where it says, *"I will never leave you and I will never forsake you."*

I was talking to somebody this past week who was going through a very difficult time. Finally I just prayed with this person and ended with this line – God saying, *"I will not leave you or forsake you."* This person just broke down and said, *"You don't know what it means to hear the words 'not forsake'. To me, forsaken means complete abandonment, and that's what this person was feeling – completely abandoned. Yet God was saying to him, 'I will never abandon you, I will never forsake you.'"*

So, from the Old Testament to the New Testament, that promise stays – that wherever or whatever you're going through in life, His promise is this: *"I will never leave you and I will never forsake you."* It meant that sins would be forgiven so there was room for forgiveness, there was room for second chances of coming back and saying, *"I made a mistake."* Yet, it happens over and over again. The writer says that there was blood that was being spilt over and over as animals were brought for the people who were sinning, and Jesus took on that role and He gave Himself as the unblemished, spotless lamb of God – our once and for all sacrifice, so that it didn't need to be done over and over again.

So we have this period of grace when God says, *"The sins that you have committed, I have forgiven."* And yet, so often in our minds we let our behaviors take over and think – if God is giving grace, God has forgiven sins, then let me just continue to do what I want to do, follow my own will because God gives grace. Paul almost recoils at that statement, *"...so do we continue to sin that grace may abound?"* He says, *"God forbid! May it never be!"* And he points to another symbol – the symbol of baptism. These are just wonderful symbols that we have today that tell us about the things used to go on for the forgiveness of sin. We can never take that lightly.

The writer of Hebrews says in 10:26-31, *"For if we go on sinning willfully after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a terrifying"*

expectation of judgment and the fury of a fire which will consume the adversaries. How much severer punishment do you think he will deserve who has trampled underfoot the Son of God, and has regarded as unclean the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified, and has insulted the spirit of grace?"

That's what happens when we continually sin, willfully sin. We know it and yet we go on and on saying that God's grace will take care of it. He ends by saying: *"For we know Him who said, 'Vengeance is Mine, I will repay'. The Lord will judge His people. It is a terrifying thing to fall into the hands of the living God."*

So while we are in this period of grace where the blood of Jesus has cleansed us from all our sins, offers forgiveness for all our sins, we dare not take that lightly and continue to willfully sin. He says, *"If you receive the knowledge of truth and continue to sin willfully, then there no longer remains the sacrifice."* That's the sober, somber part of bringing the Old Testament imagery into our lives. Again, it goes on and says, *"Just as the Menorah was meant to let the children of Israel shine, we too ought to shine because we are now in the same status like the children of Israel. We too, are a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God."*

But Peter goes one step further and says, *"Why is it that you are so? It is so that you proclaim the excellences of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light."* So there's a reason why we have been saved – that we must showcase the wonders of the God who has called us from darkness into light. We cannot be silent about it.

Jesus took this a little further when He said, *"Let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works and glorify My Father who is in heaven."* So the same shining that was expected of the children of Israel is expected of you and me today – that we would be light in a world that desperately needs light, a world so dark with so much evil that is all around us, that our light will shine and bring glory to God.

Finally, we are the tabernacle of God who dwells in us. What does that mean, as we look at all these symbols? The altar of incense – we lift up praise; we bring the sacrifice of praise into the house of the Lord. We are now the temple of God, so everything that we do must bring praise and adoration to the Almighty. Our lives must be a fragrant incense that is offered to God.

The holiness of God is maintained through our own desire to be holy, as God is holy. If God is in us, it is incumbent upon us to make sure that His dwelling place is a holy place. So we strive towards holiness in all our actions, our thoughts, our movements; we try to be holy so that God may dwell within us, as the book of Ephesians says.

Then of course, the access: we know that when Jesus died (Matthew 27:52) *"...the veil of the temple was torn in two"*, and God said you no longer have no access. You now have access because you don't come in your own righteousness but in the righteousness of My Son. That is why some liturgy that is read during communion says: *"We do not presume to come to this thy Table, O merciful Lord, trusting in our own righteousness, but in thy manifold and great mercies."* Not in our own righteousness, but He says, *"My Son; His righteousness now stands and so you have the access."* That is why the book of Hebrews says, *"Come boldly before the throne of grace."* Come boldly, not with fear, not with trepidation, but don't forget that we still come with awe of the holy God,

And so beloved, even as we look at all this, we must be reminded that this now, which used to be the place where God was and showcased so many things, now He dwells within us. We

are the Temple of God and our lives must be filled with holiness and purity and we must be able to trust Him, know that He will lead us, guide us and He has not departed from us, that He is with us wherever we go and never leave us. So all these promises come alive because God is with us – ‘Emmanuel, God with us.’

Here’s the last thing that I want to say. It encouraged me so much that the tabernacle was with the children of Israel from the time that they began as wanderers in the wilderness to the time when Solomon built the temple. This told me that when things get difficult for us, as it did for the children of Israel, God will be with us. God said: “Build the tabernacle so that My presence will go with you. Even though it is in the place that you yourselves have lost, still I will go with you.”

Maybe today, you’re going through difficult times; you’re between a rock and a hard place. Maybe today things are not going well with you. We can take a lesson from the Old Testament, from the time when God said, “*My presence will go with you. I will not leave you, I will not forsake you.*” So beloved, for any of you who are in that place, you need to know that even though you feel abandoned by people around you; remember that God can still use you. He said to the children of Israel, “On eagles’ wings I brought you to this place.” Jesus would echo that and say, “Come unto me all ye that labor and are heavy burdened, and I will give you rest.”

I wonder today, if we are there, we just need to walk into His midst. I wonder if you’re weary, fatigued; it’s been a long haul and things don’t seem to be changing and you even wonder whether God is present. Yet His Word says that He is. And even beyond that, if you’re able to say, “I need You, Lord. I just want to come into an embrace and trust that You will take care.” Underneath, beloved, are the everlasting arms. You and I can never, ever fall any lower.

Let us pray:

Heavenly Father, to You we come this morning, even as we see all of these things that remind us of how You led the children of Israel. Lord, we thank You that they stand to remind us of the things that we need to follow after – purity and holiness, to trust You in the wilderness. When things are not going well, when opposition comes and there are lies all around. You are the solid rock we need to stand on and anchor to. Lord, for those here who need those words etched upon their hearts that You will not forsake or abandon them, Master, would You just bring within them the sense of well-being that they will know, and even experience what they know intellectually. Touch their hearts, Master. Draw them close to You so that they may rise and walk out of here with greater confidence than when they came in. in Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.