

It's Curtain

Exodus 26:1-37

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If you have your Bibles I would invite you to turn with me to Exodus chapter 26.

“O Lord, teach us wonderful things from Your word. Surprise us with the truth of Your word. We ask in Jesus' name. Amen”.

Curtains. A chapter on curtains. What does God intend us to learn? Well, in the midst of the recording of these instructions, Moses teaches us at least three things. He first teaches us about God. He second teaches us about His redemptive purposes as they are progressively unfolded. And third, he teaches us about the accomplishment of Christ's redeeming work. You're saying to me, “I didn't catch that one while you were reading.” So let's look at this great passage together.

I. A small, dark, cool and beautiful tent for meeting with God.

First at verses 1 through 14, these verses record for us the coverings for the tabernacle proper. I have given you a little diagram on the bottom of your evening bulletin.

The lines on the outside are the curtains or the veils which delineate the outer area and courts of the tent of meeting. The tabernacle that is being described in the passage tonight is that set of inner lines which is, if you are looking at it, the left hand box. You see the holy of holies in the holy place. This is the area which is being delineated for its covering and frame and measurements in the passage that we are reading tonight. It is a small, dark, beautiful tent made for meeting with God.

And we see several things as we look at the descriptions. The main pattern of this tent or tabernacle is clear. You've looked at the illustration in the bulletin, but many Bible dictionaries give the same basic illustration. The structure resembles a nomad's home. The curtains here described in verses 1 — 14 are the coverings that would have formed the roof on a nomad's home, though its dimensions were much larger than that of an ordinary tent. The tent of meeting

was small, certainly by the standards of this sanctuary that we are in. It was around 45 feet long and about 15 feet wide. That's it folks, that's the tent of meeting. We could get four of them in our sanctuary easily. That's the tent of meeting. That's the place that God Almighty was going to meet with the children of Israel, some two million of them, 45 feet by 15 feet, the tent of meeting. That gives you an idea of what we're talking about. So it was small by the standards of a modern church.

There were to be four separate layers for the roof covering of this tabernacle, as described in verses 1 — 14. Those layers were linen, and then goat's hair, and then ram skins, and then porpoise leather. The lowest layer, only visible from the inside, was to be made of ten sheets of fine linen in different colors, decorated with the cherubim motif. They were sown together in paired sets of five, giving two long sheets. A skilled craftsman was commissioned to design the cherubim. The upper layers on top of that fine linen layer helped keep the interior cool and dry. The very coverings remind us of the nomad's home and, therefore, the temporary nature of this tent.

Think of it. Think of God's condescension. His people are without a land. They are without a permanent home. And so He wanders with them in the tent of a nomad, along with them as a desert wanderer. Think of the condescension of God.

What do we learn from these details here in verses 1 through 14? I'd like to suggest six things that we learn from it. We learn something about the humility of God. We learn something about the refuge of His shadow. We learn something of the beauty of the Lord. We learn something of His inscrutableness, of His incomprehensibility, and we learned something about the temporariness of this era of redemptive history.

You're asking me, "Where did you get that?" This is where. First, consider the condescension of God, to dwell in the midst of His people, in a tent a fourth the size of this room. This is the meeting place of God with His people, not nearly as tall, about 15 feet high. Consider the condescension of God. The small size points us to something of the humility of God. I used that phrase knowingly, *the humility of God*. Matthew 11 verse 30 is the only place in the New Testament where the heart of Jesus is named. You know what it says about Him, "Come to me all you who are weary and heavy laden and I will give you rest, because I am gentle and humble of heart." Friends, you need to understand that's not some sort of a temporary expedient for the work of redemption. That is a window into the heart of God. God, can I say it without being sacrilegious, God is humble. He humbles Himself to dwell with His people, and the very size of this sanctuary points to it. And that humility has been reiterated in the life of Jesus who comes to tabernacle, to dwell in a tent, an earthly tent, the tent of His flesh with His people. And the Christmas songs that we sing celebrate that humility. We think of Handel's hymn, "Who is He in yonder Stall at Whose feet the shepherds fall, tis

the Lord O wondrous story, tis the Lord the King of Glory at His feet we humbly fall, crown Him crown Him Lord of All.”

There's that wonderful Christmas hymn that we love to hear sung here every Christmas. “Once in Royal David's city, stood a lowly cattle shed, where a mother laid her baby, in a manger for His bed. Mary was that mother mild, Jesus Christ her little child. He came down to earth from heaven, who is God and Lord of all, and His shelter was a stable, and His cradle was a stall. With the poor and mean and lowly lived on earth.”

And my friends you need to understand that's not the first time God started that tradition in the wilderness, when He dwelt in a small tent in the midst of His people. We see something here of the heart of our God.

Consider, secondly, however the refuge that God Almighty provides for His people, and that is foreshadowed in the tabernacle. The coolness of the tabernacle reminds us of the refuge of His shadow. The tabernacle was a tent in the midst of a desert, and in the midst of that desert wandering it was one of the only cool places of shade that one could have found, dark and cool and dry protected from the heat of the blinding sun in the desert around it. And isn't it interesting how the shade of God, the shadow of God, is used as a picture throughout the Old Testament of the refuge that he provides for his people. Psalm 17:8, “Keep me as the apple of your eye, hide me in the shadow of your wings.” Makes sense for a wandering people, for a desert people.

Think of Psalm 91:1, “He who dwells in the shelter of the most high will abide in the shadow of the Almighty.” Sometimes shadow for us is a negative intimation, but, for someone who dwells in the desert, a shadow is a welcome thing, shade provided by God. You remember the words of Elizabeth Clephame's hymn, “Beneath the cross of Jesus I fame would take my stand, the shadow of a mighty rock within a weary land, a home within the wilderness, a rest upon the way, from the burning of the noon tide heat and the burden of the day.” And is not the coolness and darkness of that shade and that tabernacle a picture of the rest and the protection and the refuge that God is for His people.

Thirdly, consider the beauty of the Lord. The beauty of this tabernacle reminds us of the beauty of the Lord and His appreciation for beauty. The closer to the presence of the Lord, the more precious the material, and the metals, gold and linen surrounding the holy of holies, and as you move further away from it, the bronze and goat's hair and other various types of materials. But the whole thing is beautiful and the description here is to remind us of its beauty.

Fourthly, consider how the very construction of the tabernacle points us to the incomprehensibility of God. But, it also appoints us to the atonement. How? Have you ever thought of it, the tabernacle would have been a very dark place. The only light in the tabernacle was in the holy place. There was no light in the holy of

holies. The holy of holies was in pitch darkness. Year round, there was light provided by that seven-fold lamp stand in the outer tabernacle but, in the holy of holies, just darkness. The symbol of darkness is a symbol in the Old Testament of the inscrutability and the incomprehensibility and the inapproachability of God. You think of it in 1 Kings 8:12, when the cloud prevents the priest from seeing the Glory of God descending into Solomon's tabernacle.

I want to suggest to you that the darkness of that holy of holies not only points to the incomprehensibility of God, it also points to the atoning work of Jesus Christ. You remember Matthew 27 verse 45, that in the three hours surrounding the death of the Lord Jesus Christ, what happened? Darkness covered the face of the earth, as the transaction in the *real* holy of holies was accomplished for the salvation of the sins of the world. The tabernacle points us not only to the incomprehensibility of God, but also to the atoning work of Jesus Christ. And consider the significance of the cherubim. When you see the cherubim in the Scripture they remind us the newness and the majesty of God. You see the cherubim in Isaiah 6, and these cherubim are stitched into the coverings of the tabernacle, and into the curtains which separated the holy of holies from the holy place. These point us to the nearness and majesty of God, and as the priests see them they are reminded of the nearness of God to His people.

And finally, consider the passing nature of this era of redemption as witnessed to in the tabernacle. The place where God would meet with His people was a nomad's tent and however grand, it points to the temporariness of this period. This isn't going to be God's final way of dwelling with His people; another awaits. All those things we learn from this description of the tabernacle.

II. A sturdy, portable, beautiful and costly structural support.

Two more things I want you to see though, as we look through this passage. Look at the second section in verses 15 through 30, where we see the frame of the tabernacle described. It's a sturdy portable, beautiful, costly structural support. This section in verses 15 through 30 gives us a feel for something of the splendor of rich detail in the tabernacle; even the frame, even the wood was to be overlaid with gold. However, that would have been very cumbersome to carry about, and another reminder of and even a motivation for the temporariness of the tabernacle. Would you have liked to have been on that set up and tear down crew?

Once again in verse 30, but not for the last time, it is stressed that even the frame like everything else must be done according to God's command, according to the pattern which is shown in the mount. And as splendid is this frame, and as splendid as is this structure, in the end the tabernacle's splendor is outmatched by John's description of the glory which is to come in Revelation 21:18-24. The tabernacle, you remember, is overlaid with gold, but John says that the city of

God's making is pure gold, and the streets of that city are pure gold, not overlaid with gold, but pure gold. And he goes on to say that in that city there is no temple for the Lord God, for the Almighty and the Lamb are its temple. And the city has no need of the sun or the moon to shine in it, for the glory of God has illumined it and the lamp is the Lamb. And the nations will walk by its light and the kings of the earth will bring their glory into it.

So you see how the temporary splendor of the tabernacle points to a greater splendor to come. The frame of the tabernacle points to a greater glory to come. We go back to the wonderful hymn "Once in Royal David's City." Remember the last two stanzas, "And our eyes at last shall see Him through His own redeeming love, for that child so dear and gentle, is our Lord in Heaven above. And He leads His children on to the place where He is gone, not in that poor lowly stable with oxen standing by, we shall see Him, but in heaven, set at God's right hand on high. Where like stars His children crowned all in white shall wait around." And the tabernacle foreshadows that glory to come, but it can't match that splendor.

III. Two curtains that speak of holiness and separation.

One last thing, as you look at verses 31 through 37 you'll see the veils. The inner and outer veils. The veil that separate the holy of holies from the holy place, the inner veil, and the outer veil which separates the entrance into the holy place from the courtyard. Two curtains are commanded to be made in verses 31 — 35. And in verses 36 and 37, and these two curtains speak of both holiness and separation. These curtains are commanded to divide the tabernacle itself into two parts. You see that represented on the diagram at both the front and in the middle of the tabernacle, slightly offset. And they separate, the screen separates, the tabernacle from the outer court while the inner veil separates the holy of holies from the holy place. Only the priests could enter into the holy place, and only the high priest could enter into the holy of holies once a year.

And the positioning of the tabernacle furniture is now given in verses 34 and 35. Have you ever thought of it, my friends, the people themselves never saw what the interior of the tabernacle looked like. The only way the people know what that tabernacle looks like is from the word. Their knowledge is not by sight, but by the word of God. This isn't a mystery religion. Something is not being kept secret from them in there that they can't know about.

They are told all about what's inside that tabernacle. They know ever stitch of it. Nothing is to be done in that tabernacle, except what God has revealed in the Word. But none of them see it with their own eyes. That points, my friends, to the separation, the distance, the need for mediation between God and His sinful people. And it is at the death of Christ that the inner curtain of that temple is torn. We're told that in Matthew and in Mark and in Luke.

Jesus, through His finished work, removes the veil of separation and is now for us a priest, a sacrifice, a tabernacle. That event of the tearing of the veil in the temple is symbolic of the termination of the efficacy of the sanctuary and of termination of the efficacy of the priesthood, and the of termination of the efficacy of the Old Testament sacrifice, and their replacement by the Lord Jesus Christ as our sanctuary, as our sacrifice, and as our priest. All these things are foreshadowed in this chapter about curtains. Praise be to God. Let's pray.

“Our Lord and our God we bless You for what Your word teaches us about this heap of curtains, and in so doing, teaches us about You and Your redemptive purposes and the work of Your Son. Help us to learn from it then, we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.”

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