

Mobile Sanctuary

Exodus 27:1-21

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That brings us to Exodus 27. So if you have your Bibles look with me there.

“Our Lord and our God teach us from Your word this night of Christ and of Your worship. We ask it in Jesus' name. Amen.”

I want to point you to three things. Exodus 27 divides into three parts. Verses 1-8 describe the altar of sacrifice. That altar of sacrifice was called different things. For instance, in the very first verse of the next chapter, it's called the altar of bronze, it's called the altar of burnt offering, it's also, in other places, called the outer altar. It's distinguished from, you remember, the altar of incense that's inside the tent of meeting. This is the altar that you would have seen first when you came into the courtyard of the tent of meeting. So, the first 8 verses deal with that outer altar.

Then verses 9 -19 deal with the courtyard itself. Around the tabernacle, that was only the size of one quarter of our own sanctuary, was a much larger tent structure that ringed off the courtyard to provide a sacred space in which the animals would be brought for sacrifice, and which the worshipers would enter. They would not be allowed into the tent of meeting but they would be allowed into the courtyard, and it's described in verses 9-19. And then there's that matter of the lighting of that lamp in front of the curtain which led into the holy of holies, and that's described in verses 20 and 21. So those are the three parts of the chapter.

I. The altar taught the Old Testament believer that communion required atonement/sacrifice.

Let's look at some lessons that we learned from each of them. First of all, in verses 1-8, the outer altar. The outer altar taught the Old Testament believer that communion required atonement. The outer altar taught the Old Testament believer that the only way into communion with God was through sacrifice. This outer altar was the very first thing that a worshipper would see when entering into the tabernacle courtyard. You noticed, by the way, that whereas in Exodus 25

and 26 when making of the Ark of the Covenant is described, and the making of the various framework for the tent of meeting is described, - and what metals are used? Gold. - by the time you get to outer courtyard, - what metals are used? Bronze and silver. The closer you are to the symbolic presence of God, the finer the materials, and in fact, even when we saw the coverings, you remember the fine linen is on the lower level. Finally, you get up to porpoise skin leather at the top. And so the principle over and over is, the closer you are to the symbolic presence of God, the more precious the material, the more precious the metal. Just a little word in passing.

Now the altar, we're told, had horns. These horns may have represented the sacrificial beasts that were offered on the altar, but we know from Psalm 1:18 verse 27, they also served to bind the sacrificial beast to the altar. You remember when the Psalmist speaks of binding the sacrifice with cords around the horns of the altar.

They were also things which a supplicant could take hold of with his hands. When you fled to the tabernacle for mercy from your enemies and took hold of the horns of the altar, you were, as it were, dedicated to God, and therefore could not be touched by those who were pursuing you. We see these kinds of places of refuge even in medieval Europe for instance. If you were being pursued by an enemy and you could flee into sacred ground and just get across into the courtyard of Holyrood Abby, you were considered safe. The same thing operated with regard to the sanctuary in the temple courtyard.

Now you noticed in verses 6 and 7 that this altar, just like everything else, every other piece of furniture in the tabernacle was moveable, it was portable, it had rings and poles to be carried, because, the whole of the sanctuary was moveable. It was a mobile church. God, in the wilderness, shows His marvelous condescension in that He is willing to wander with His people. And so the altar is portable and the poles remain in the altar even when it's stationary to remind the people of God's identification with them. The altar was made just as the Lord commanded Moses at Sinai. If you look at verse 8 it's stressed again to do it just like God showed on the mountain.

So what's the message of the altar for us today? Simply this; the altar visibly drove home the point to every worshiper in Israel for 1500 years that you could not come into God's presence without sacrifice.

What does the author of Hebrews say? In Hebrews 9:22, "According to the law one might almost say that all things are cleansed with blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness." It is that point that the altar makes. When you come into the temple courtyard and you see the altar you're reminded, "I can't fellowship with God without the shedding of blood, without the offering of sacrifice, because I'm a sinner and He is holy." And that principle, that there is no communion apart from atonement, is universal since the fall.

But the beautiful thing that the altar points to is Jesus Himself, because the next thing that the author of Hebrews says in Hebrews 13 verse 10 is that Jesus is our altar. We often think of Jesus being our priest, and that's true, but Hebrews 13:10 says this, "We have an altar from which those who serve the tabernacle have no right to eat." The altar is Jesus Christ Himself.

By the way, that's one reason that Protestant churches don't have physical altars in the sanctuary. We have a communion table from which we take the Lord's Supper, but not an altar. Why? Not because we don't have an altar, but because we do have an altar, and that altar is Jesus Christ.

There's a very interesting story that occurred in London, England, a number of years ago. There was an Irish Republican Army bombing in the Fleet Street area of London. And the wonderful church of Dick Lucas, Saint Helens Bishopgate, was badly damaged in that bombing. When they rebuilt the sanctuary after the bombing, they left out the old altar that had been built into that Church of England sanctuary. And one of the local council members was incensed. He said, "How could you have a church without an altar?" And they wrote back to him the words of Hebrews 13:10, "We have an altar from which those who serve the tabernacle have no right to eat." Jesus Christ is our altar. And so the principle is, Jesus is our altar. He is the one who provides the atonement that brings us in to the presence of God.

II. The courtyard demarcated sacred space to the worshipers but also separated classes of people.

A second thing, look at verses 9 through 19. All temples and sanctuaries in the ancient world would have had a space demarcating the sacred from the profane, setting off the sacred space from profane space. And this itself reveals one of the key ideas of holiness in the Old Testament. The idea of separation, to be holy, was to be separate, to separate from the world. And the later temples in Israel's history also had courtyards. Solomon's temple had courtyards. Herod's temple had courtyards. In fact, we know that Herod's temple had four courtyards. There was a courtyard for the priests. There was a courtyard for Jewish males. There was a courtyard for Jewish females. And then there was a courtyard called the courtyard of the Gentiles. And these courts were separated by dividing walls. And Josephus tells that there was even a signed warning that if Gentiles entered into any of the other courts they would face death.

That metaphor is picked up by the Apostle Paul in Ephesians chapter 2, verse 14. Do you remember it? In Ephesians 2:14 Paul says, "He Himself," Jesus Christ Himself, "is our peace who made both groups in to one speaking of Jews and Gentiles, and broke down the barrier of the dividing wall." Now you see the imagery. In Israel, in the courtyard, there was a dividing wall that kept the

Gentiles in one area and the Jews in another. Paul is saying that in Jesus Christ that barrier has been broken down. Paul is saying that there is no longer any barrier between the Jew and Gentile who is in Christ. The dividing wall metaphor points to Jesus bringing an end to the ceremonial law and system. It was removed in Christ. And so the barrier which it existed as a part of the Old Testament holiness code was abolished in Christ so that all those who believe in Him, both Jew and Gentile, are one. It's a beautiful picture of the way that Jesus has brought reconciliation. And so the courtyard demarcated sacred space to the worshipers. But it also separated classes of people, and Jesus Christ, in His redemptive work, brought together those who had been separated as they believed in Him.

III. The *ner tamid* (the perpetually burning lamp) reminds of the divine presence.

One last thing; look at verses 20 and 21, the perpetually burning lamp, called the *ner tamid*. This perpetually burning lamp reminds us of the divine presence. Think of it, friends, the people never, ever, would have seen within the veil into the holy of holies. Once the tabernacle is constructed, once the tent is set up, nobody but one priest, once a year, sees inside the holy of holies. But outside that holy of holies, in front of the closed veil, in front of the closed curtains, sits a lamp.

That lamp visibly reminds the people of the presence of God. The symbolism of this continually refueled lamp seems to point to the presence of the unseen God. And John picks up on this theme in Revelation chapter 22, verse 5. Do you remember what he says? He's commenting on the superiority of the new heavens, and the new earth, and the New Jerusalem, which has been brought down by God, and this is what he says, "There will no longer be any night and they will not have need of the light of a lamp, nor the light of the sun, because the Lord God will illumine them and they will reign forever and forever." In other words, John is saying they will experience the very presence of the glorious God. They will not need a lamp to represent Him. They will not need a lamp to remind them of the divine presence. They will not need a lamp to lighten their eyes. They will experience the presence, the very presence of the glorious God. And so even the lamp, this light before the ark and the tabernacle, points to the glory to come. These are three things which we ourselves can benefit from as we study the tabernacle together. Let's look to the Lord in prayer.

"Heavenly Father we thank You for Your Word. We ask that You would teach us by it, encourage us through it, build us up in it. In Jesus' name. Amen."

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