

God Dwells Among Us

Exodus 25:1-22

Fall Old Testament Sermon Series on Exodus

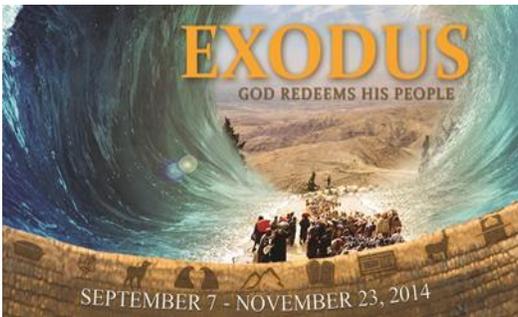
Kenwood Baptist Church

Pastor David Palmer

November 9, 2014

TEXT: Exodus 25:1-22

We continue our series on the Book of Exodus, the Gospel of the Old Testament, where we discover who God is and who we are called to be as His people. Last Sunday, it was good to be a lawyer as we had a very important message on how we understand the specifics of moving out as a people called to reflect the glory of God in the specifics of our daily living. This morning, it's



good to be an artist. We praise God that He loves lawyers and artists and craftsmen, and that He is a God of beauty and glory. We learn in Exodus three very large truths as the shape of this Book unfolds. We learn that God is a God of redemption in chapters 1 through 15; we learn that God is a covenant-making God in Exodus 16 through 24; and then in Exodus 25 through 40, we

learn that God intends to dwell in the midst of His people. There is nothing special about us, except if God dwells among us, then He is special in our midst.

This morning we look at God's instructions to construct a sanctuary, a Holy Place. God dwells in our midst is the call, with significant implications for us. As we will see, the tabernacle instructions begin in Exodus 25 and are narrated in detail through Exodus 31. There is an interval of the golden calf, and then the last portion of Exodus narrates the fulfillment of the construction of the sanctuary, the command-fulfillment pattern which is like Genesis chapter 1. As we prepare to look at the sanctuary, I want us to remember the context: Mount Sinai, enveloped with the glory of God. The Lord told Moses to come up to the mountain and to remain there. God says in Exodus 14:12:

"I will give you the tablets of stone, with the law and commands I have written for their instruction."

God further said He would write on those tablets with His very own hand. So Moses goes up to the summit of the mountain in the cloud of glory, and the elders wait in the middle section of the mountain, and the people are at the base of the mountain. At the base of the mountain is a large altar of sacrifice, where sacrifice for sins and fellowship offerings are offered. It is crucial

that we remember this scene of the mountain covered with the glory of God and these grades of holiness going up the mountain. When the Israelites saw the glory of God, it looked to them like a consuming fire on top of the mountain, and Moses entered this cloud for 40 days and 40 nights. Then we are allowed access into this divine exchange between God and Moses, beginning in Exodus 25. Let's follow in the text as we look at what Moses himself hears.



Moses is told in Exodus 25:2:

"Tell the Israelites to bring Me an offering. You are to receive the offering for Me from everyone whose heart prompts them to give."

The NIV says *whose heart prompts them to give*; the Hebrew idiom is actually more beautiful than the NIV might lead you to believe. The Hebrew idiom here is *from everyone whose heart makes him willing*. Isn't that wonderful? This is the Bible's view of free will. In the Bible, free will is when the Spirit of God comes upon you, and you run in God's ways. That's the kind of will that I want, and I want that for you. That is a will that can think of nothing but running in the paths of God, and the only way that you can do that is if the Spirit of God comes upon you. In Psalm 51:12, David prays with that same language:

"Restore to me the joy of Your salvation and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me."

That Spirit moves us to have God as our greatest treasure. "Receive the offering only from those whose hearts are stirring them, moving them, making them willing." The people give, and they give generously, and we have that rarest of moments for a spiritual leader that plays out in the wake of this, all the way to Exodus 36. The people's spirits are moved so profoundly that they give to such a degree that there is an excess of materials, more than could be used for all the work that would be done. Moses then has that rarest of privileges in chapter 36:6 when he says:

"Let no man or woman do anything more for the contribution for the sanctuary."

The material was sufficient to do all the work and more. Wouldn't it be a joy to be able to say we have more than we need? When God's Spirit moves upon us, we can do everything we thought of, praise God! Isn't that how we want to give?

The people are moved to give, and they give specific things of tremendous value. Beginning in

Exodus 25:3-7, we read:

“These are the offerings you are to receive from them: gold, silver and bronze; blue, purple and scarlet yarn and fine linen; goat hair; ram skins dyed red and hides of sea cows; acacia wood; olive oil for the light; spices for the anointing oil and for the fragrant incense; and onyx stones and other gems to be mounted on the ephod and breastpiece.”

They give material that is of value. You may be wondering how 600,000 slave families have gold, silver, bronze, and purple cloth. Remember that as they left Egypt, God moved the hearts of the Egyptians to compensate them for 400 years of slavery. So, they are giving to God out of what they have received, which is another great theology of giving. You give to God with gratitude what He has given to you. They give precious stones, fragrant incense, and God tells Moses in Exodus 15:8:

“Then have them make a sanctuary for Me, and I will dwell among them.”

Build a *miqdash*, a Holy Place, a sanctuary, so that the presence of the living God can be in their midst. God will *tent* among them; He will be there in person, in glory. God tells Moses in Exodus 25:9:

“Make this tabernacle and all its furnishings exactly like the pattern I will show you.”

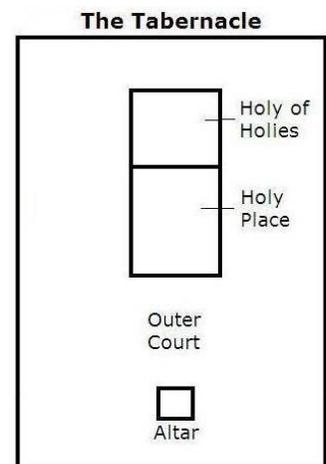
Sometimes we are inclined to think that Moses has a vision of a heavenly architectural tour. In Exodus 25:40, though, we receive more clearly a picture of what God is telling him. God says:

“See that you make them according to the pattern shown you on the mountain.”

The mountain of God's glorious dwelling in the midst of His people is the pattern of the sanctuary. When Moses dwells on the mountain, he is in the holy presence of God at the summit of the mountain. The elders remain at the middle section of the

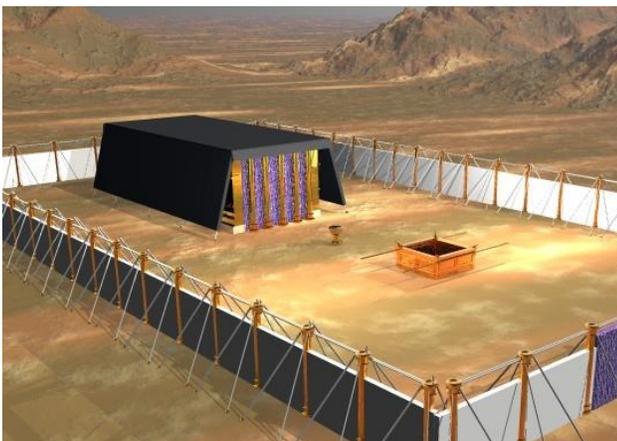


mountain. At the base of the mountain, there is an altar and the 600,000 families.



If you can, take this glorious dwelling of God on the mountain in your mind's eye and just grab hold of it: God in glory dwelling, speaking, revealing His will, providing at the base of the mountain forgiveness of sins and dwelling with us in visible glory, to meet with us and speak with us, that we would hear His own voice. Take that mountain of glory, and then just lean it over on its side. Lean the mountain over and rest it down, for that is the architectural shape of the sanctuary. Mount Sinai is set down flat, and the pattern of the tabernacle then reflects this design: Moses at the top corresponds to the Holy of Holies; Aaron, Nadab, and Abihu, the elders, correspond to the Holy Place; the people, then, are gathered at the base of the mountain, and there is the altar providing provision for sacrifice and forgiveness of sins. The theophany of Mount Sinai, the glorious presence of God, is the place where God dwells and meets with us. It is the goal of redemption. The goal of salvation is not just to be released from Egypt; it's not just to be taken into a covenant relationship with God; but that covenant relationship with God is for the great ultimate end of God's dwelling with His people and us with Him. It would be like taking the vows of a wedding, and after the ceremony, the bride and groom just going their separate ways. Wouldn't that be unthinkable? The goal of the wedding is to live together. The goal of redemption is that God would dwell in the midst of His people. The goal of missions is not just salvation, but it is worship and dwelling with Almighty God. The pattern of the sanctuary is designed so that Sinai can be an ongoing experience. Through the instrumentality of the tabernacle, the experience of God's presence on the mountain is extended as a living reality. There is Sinai, and there is the miniature Sinai in the sanctuary. It's like when Christians build cathedrals, and they build them in the shape of a cross so that you see the cross from above; so that you're always reminded that this is the moment that defines our identity. Likewise, Israel's sanctuary is defined on the experience of the Exodus and the experience of God's glory on Mount Sinai.

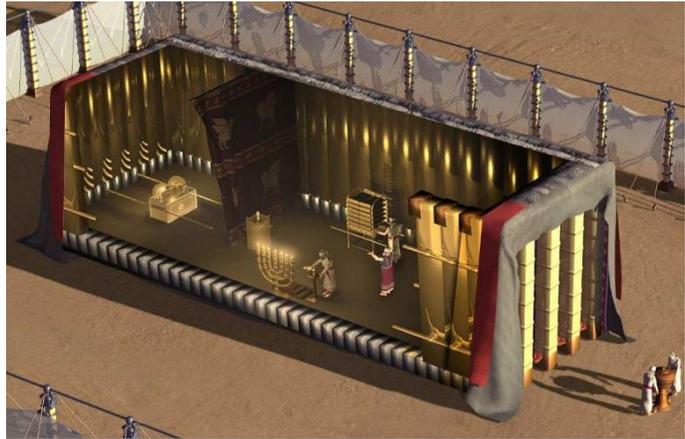
Let's take a closer look at this sanctuary that God describes. When we review the sanctuary as a



whole, we look at it constructed the at the base of the mountain. The sanctuary is built with a perimeter of linen curtains. The worshiper enters the tent from the east, facing west. Poles of bronze and cords of silver, joining them together, define this outer court. A bronze altar is in this outer courtyard. A lamb is to be placed on this altar every morning and every evening of every day, so the first thing you see when you come to worship God is the lamb slain for my sins. That is

what you see; it's always burning there. It's called *tamyid* in Hebrew, meaning the perpetual

offering. There is always provision for sins when we first walk into God's presence. The tabernacle itself is the inner tent inside the larger enclosure. When we come in a little closer to this sanctuary, the tent itself, we see what God has described. The inner tent is divided into two sections of increasing holiness: the Holy Place and the Holy of Holies. Inside in the Holy Place, there are three objects that are narrated in detail. The first is on the north side. There is a table overlaid with pure gold, and every day twelve loaves of fresh bread are placed on this. The priests eat this bread, and it is a symbol of God's abiding, sustaining presence. It is part of the background for Jesus' teaching us to pray for our daily bread. It was an image of daily provision. God seeks to walk with us daily.



On the south side, there is a lampstand, a Hebrew menorah, of pure gold. The lampstand looks like a burning bush; it has leaves and branches, and it has lights that are burning. They are lit every night, and they burn all night long. Think of the difference between when you come to a home in the evening and it's completely dark and when you come to a home in the evening and the lights are on and there's a soft glow. You feel invited and welcomed. God is there. The menorah is constructed of gold, beautiful in its artistry. Remember that inside the sanctuary, the wooden panels are overlaid with gold, so you can imagine the tremendous beauty of the reflection of this illumination.



In front of the veil, there is a golden altar of incense. As we come in further and stand before the Holy of Holies, there is a veil woven with the most expensive fabrics of linen and dyed with purple. The veil is embroidered with heavenly creatures and signs of royalty, and God's presence, His indwelling presence, is behind this veil. The focal point of the sanctuary, as we read in the narrative of these chapters of Exodus, is behind the veil.

When we come in behind the veil, we see in Exodus 28:10 that the Lord tells the people:

“Have them make an ark of acacia wood--two and a half cubits long, a cubit and a half wide, and a cubit and a half high.”

A cubit is from the tip of your finger to your elbow, about 18 inches long. If you want to do mental calculations of cubit measurements in the Bible, just multiply by 1.5. They are to make this ark and overlay it inside and out with gold, pure gold, the most valuable of all materials. The Ark of the Covenant is a place that houses the testimony. God says in Exodus 25:16:

“Then put in the ark the Testimony, which I will give you.”

The Ark of the Covenant is a beautiful work of art. It is made of pure gold; it has poles on it so that it can be transported safely. These poles are never removed. There's a lid upon it that's carefully wrought. God tells Moses to place the Testimony inside the Ark. The *Testimony* is another word for *Covenant*, In Exodus 24:12, the Lord had said to Moses:



“Come up to Me on the mountain and stay here, and I will give you the tablets of stone, with the law and commands I have written for their instruction.”

The conclusion of the tabernacle narrative in Exodus 31:18 says:

“When the LORD finished speaking to Moses on Mount Sinai, he gave him the two tablets of the Testimony, the tablets of stone inscribed by the finger of God.”

The focal point of the sanctuary is this ark. It's an ark that has the Covenant inside of it. It's a place that has a lid on top of it, a cover. We learn later in the Bible that on top of the ark there are beautifully wrought cherubim. This is the place where atonement is made; where mercy is extended. The Septuagint translates this piece of furniture as the *mercy seat*. The cherubim are there, facing each other and looking down toward the cover. They look down just as the cherubim do in Ezekiel 1 or Isaiah 6, shielding themselves from the glorious presence of the living God.

Then God says the most remarkable thing. In Exodus 25:22, He says:

“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.”

God tells Moses, “I will speak with you; I will meet with you; I will speak with you.” The ESV

says:

“There I will meet with you, and from above the mercy seat, from between the two cherubim that are on the ark of the Testimony, I will speak with you about all that I will give you in commandment for the people of Israel.”

The King James renders these two groups:

“I will meet with thee, and I will commune with thee from above the mercy seat.”

I like the New Living Translation here. It says:

“I will meet with you there and talk with you from above the atonement cover.”

God will dwell in the midst of His people. “I will meet with you,” God says, “and I will talk with you. I will dwell in your midst.” Nahum Sarna says in:

“The importance of these facts cannot be overestimated. They bear witness to a radical break with all contemporary, indeed with all, pagan concepts. Everywhere, and at all times, the most important feature of a temple was the cella, or innermost shrine that housed the image of the god. In Israel, with its uncompromising aniconic, imageless religion, in place of the representation of the deity came the tangible symbol of His Word – the stone tablets of the Covenant.

“The Ark and its contents become the focus of the collective consciousness of the community. It remained the symbol of the eternal covenant between God and the people, the record of His demands upon the individual and every sphere of life.”

This again God speaks in the second person plural: “I will meet with you (pl), I will speak with you (pl) from this place. The sign of God's presence is the ark of the covenant. In synagogues today, the focal point of the synagogue is the front cabinet that holds the Scriptures, and you know that's called? It's called the ark. You open the ark and pull out the Word of God. There's no idol; there's no image: God is a living God. As the living God, He cannot be represented by anything nonliving, and as the living God, He will do what no one else can do for you. Nothing else that you will be tempted to trust in can provide what God is offering to you this morning: that He will actually be there, and He will actually speak. His voice will be heard from His dwelling place: “I will meet with you, and I will speak with you.”

The tabernacle is special in our family. My wife has been thinking and writing about the tabernacle our entire married lives. I love this sanctuary, and just last night I asked her at dinner to tell us something that she'd never told us about. She said: “You know, the High Priest is wearing garments that are of the fabric of each perimeter so that he can walk through that. He has white linen garments on so he can walk through the outer barrier; he has on his person the

materials of the veil so he can walk into the Holy Place; he has on his person the materials of the Holy of Holies so he can walk through.” I said: “So he’s wearing kind of a security clearance pass?” She said: “Yes, sort of like that.” I just want you to know that the living God has saved you and brought you into Covenant to dwell with you and to speak with you, and He says: “I will never leave you, and I will never forsake you.”

Let me apply the tabernacle in three ways.

- The first application is that **God is faithful to His promises**. He says: “I will never leave you or forsake you.”

He saves us from slavery to draw us to Covenant, to a covenant that is stable, that is permanent, and that is predicated on God's faithfulness. God is not an absentee father or an absentee husband. God keeps His vows, His presence, and His commitment to us.

- The second application is that **the tabernacle provides with us a concrete picture of a God-centered life**.

I love to watch this happen to people. It happened to me when I was 25 years old, and the whole pattern of my life has been different from that point forward. What happened to me was nothing less than a Copernican revolution in my heart’s affections when I realized that the earth is actually not the center of the solar system. The sun is, and the earth orbits around the sun. Aren’t you glad that the whole universe does not revolve around you? Let me tell you that at the very least, you don't have time for that. But much more seriously, you know the universe moves around the throne of God. We come and go. Our lives, the Scripture says, are like a breath, like a vapor, and they are gone. Our lives become meaningful, significant, to be savored,



when they begin to revolve around God, and the tabernacle gives us this great image. It is a great image of the glorious presence of God on Mount Sinai and then the mini Sinai. At the mini Sinai at the base of the mountain, everyone is encamped around the sanctuary. There is no place to go within the community and not have a reference point to God. It's like the parent who brings his child to Kings Island for the first time and says: “You always keep your eyes on me.” It's like the youth pastor who takes a group of youth on an inner-city mission trip

and says: “You always keep contact with me. I can't watch all of you; you watch me.” God says: “I am setting up My tent in the center of the community, and there is no where you can go and live, think, move, without reference to Me.” This is where the living really begins. God's presence with us carries with it implications of a holy calling, to reflect Him and display Him.

- The third application I want to set before us this morning is to **increase our expectations of worship.**

I want you to start preparing for Sunday morning on Saturday night by reading the passage of Scripture we are going to be looking at. Orient your week around this gathering, not because of what I'm going to say or because of where you are serving or whom you are going to meet, but from Exodus 25, I want you raise your expectations because God says: "I will be there, I will meet with you, and I will speak with you." I want you raise your expectations of what you think is happening every Sunday morning. Right before the tabernacle is constructed, God reminds His people of the weekly rhythm: one day a week set apart for worship. We need a weekly encounter with God on Mount Sinai. We need a weekly meeting with Him in a sacred space where He can meet with us and talk with us. That's my hope and expectation of what happens on Sunday morning at Kenwood, and I want that to be yours, too. Can we pray for that together?

Oh Lord God, I thank You for saving us, for drawing us to Covenant, and then for coming to dwell among us. I thank You, Lord, that You did not invite us to take vows and then go our separate ways. Lord, I thank You that You made provision, and that it has been Your intention from the creation of the world to walk and dwell with the people You have made in Your image. We thank You, Lord, that eternity will be this in full measure, and Lord, while we await that day, I pray that You would meet with us now, that You would speak to every heart. You know the needs that we have, Lord, needs to hear Your voice, to receive Your direction, Your guidance, Your convicting Spirit. We need Your power in our lives, Lord, to overcome temptation, to rise above the trials of this world. We need Your mighty arm to reach down and lift us up. Lord, we need Your Spirit to move our hearts. Give us the freedom of following You. Make us free this morning, Lord. Break the bonds of those things that twist and warp our desires to things that only hurt us. Lord, we love You, and we thank You for promising to meet with us and speak with us, and Lord, we want to dwell in Your house for ever, and we want praise You.

In Jesus Name, Amen.