

A New Creation under Canvas

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[0:00] You have a seat. Please would you open up your Bible with me to Exodus chapter 31. That can be found on page 71 of the Blue Church Bible, which should be in front of you.

We're reading the whole chapter 31 this morning. Last Sunday, we covered chapters 25 to 30. And so this is following on from our understanding of the tabernacle, God's tent, by which he came to dwell among his people.

So reading from Exodus 31 and verse 1. Let's hear God's word.

The Lord said to Moses, See, I have called by name Bezalel, the son of Uri, son of Hur of the tribe of Judah. And I have filled him with the Spirit of God, with ability and intelligence, with knowledge and all craftsmanship, to devise artistic designs, to work in gold, silver, and bronze, in cutting stones for setting and in carving wood, to work in every craft.

And behold, I have appointed with him Aholiab, the son of Ahissamach of the tribe of Dan. And I have given to all able men ability, that they may make all that I have commanded you, the tent of meeting, and the ark of the testimony, and the mercy seat that is on it, and all the furnishings of the tent, the table and its utensils, and the pure lampstand with all its utensils, and the altar of incense, and the altar of burnt offering with all its utensils, and the basin and its stand, and the finely worked garments, the holy garments, for Aaron the priest, and the garments of his sons, for their service as priests, and the anointing oil, and the fragrant incense for the holy place.

[2:05] According to all that I have commanded you, they shall do. And the Lord said to Moses, You are to speak to the people of Israel and say, Above all, you shall keep my Sabbaths.

For this is a sign between me and you throughout your generations, that you may know that I, the Lord, sanctify you. You shall keep the Sabbath, because it is holy for you.

Everyone who profanes it shall be put to death. Whoever does any work on it, that soul shall be cut off from among his people. For six days shall work be done, but the seventh day is a Sabbath of solemn rest, holy to the Lord.

Whoever does any work on the Sabbath day shall be put to death. Therefore the people of Israel shall keep the Sabbath, observing the Sabbath throughout their generations as a covenant forever. It is a sign forever between me and the people of Israel that in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, and on the seventh day he rested and was refreshed.

[3:11] And he gave to Moses when he had finished speaking with him on Mount Sinai, the two tablets of the testimony, tablets of stone, written with the finger of God.

Amen. God's holy living word. Please keep those words open before you, and let us pray, as we have just done, that God the Holy Spirit would speak to us by his word.

Father, we do thank you for your precious word. We thank you that wherever we find it in the Bible, wherever we open our Bibles, there we hear your voice.

And so we pray, Lord, as we have read, and as we are about to hear, that you, by your Son and through your Holy Spirit, would speak now, for your servants are listening.

Lead us to our Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, the word of God, become flesh, that we might worship him. This we ask in his name. Amen.

[4:10] Amen. Well, I don't know how many of you would say you're into camping. Maybe some of you spent nights in a tent over the summer.

For people who are into camping, one of the things they love about it is all the things that can go wrong. I've heard loads of stories about camping, and I've got one or two, but none of them are about how everything went perfectly, about how the tent wasn't flooded in the night so that the shoes floated away, or how a mouse didn't eat a hole in the side of the tent and chew open your bag to get to the peanut M&Ms.;

Part of camping is enjoying the unpleasant surprises that it could throw up, and maybe that is why you never intend to go. Indeed, even seasoned campers can wish at times for a pleasant surprise. Who, for example, didn't watch the fourth Harry Potter movie with the magical tent that could expand on the inside while remaining the same size on the outside and think, I wish mine did that? It would be a pleasant surprise to find a tent that transported you to seemingly another dimension when you opened up the flaps. No ordinary tent, but one that took you to a whole other world.

[5:41] This morning, we're coming back to the book of Exodus and God's tent, the tabernacle. Last time we heard about the design or the pattern for the tent, a little heaven on earth.

And we thought about how God pitched his tent because he wanted his people inside it, through their priests, in his presence. And we saw his glorious purpose in this tent, that he would live among them because ultimately that is what he'd saved them for, that they would be at home with him, their God, once again.

But today our passage tells us that God's purpose for his tent is bigger still. Here is a tent not only full of pleasant surprises, but life-changing surprises.

Because our passage tells us that the tabernacle wasn't just a gateway to heaven, but a doorway back to Eden. In fact, it is a whole new creation under canvas.

He's laid a mountain flat on its side. He's made the way for him to live on earth with sinners. Now the holy God of heaven presses the reset button on the whole wide world.

[7:01] So that to step into his tent is in a sense to go back to before everything went wrong. Before our relationship with God was shattered by sin.

When he walked with us in the garden and we could eat from the tree of life. And again, friends, this morning, we want to hear him say to us through our passage, come in.

Come in. You've torn it apart. Let me put it back together. You wanted to fight with me, but I'm making peace. You turned and walked away, but I am coming after you.

I am the Lord. Let's see that together in our passage then. We've got one big point and then we're going to press in and think about three smaller things that that means for us today.

One big point for us this morning then. Paradise partially regained. How will this mini paradise be built? Let's have a look there at 31 verse 1.

[8:07] The Lord said to Moses, See, I've called by name Bezalel, son of Uri, son of Herod, the tribe of Judah. And I filled him with the spirit of God, with ability and intelligence, with knowledge and craftsmanship to devise artistic designs.

Now, sometimes you'll hear about these words that because the first person that we read about being filled with the spirit of God in the Old Testament was an artist.

And because the purpose was to create a holy place for God, a place of worship, that therefore they say the arts are a form of worship to God and particularly when they are used to beautify places or services of worship.

Now, clearly there is something true in there. We never ever hear about Bezalel or a holy ab.

Before this point, we hardly hear about them afterwards. Their significance does seem to simply be that they were the best people to do the job.

Some of you are excellent at drawing and painting and crafts. I say some of you, but some of us, don't count myself in that category.

[9:23] But presumably, these guys were gifted in that department. And indeed, that is what it says. God gave them and the team working with them ability, intelligence, knowledge, craftsmanship to do this work.

He wanted it to be done well. If you are a creative person, your creativity is a gift from God. All our various abilities, whatever they are, if we're handy around the house, if we're green-fingered, if we're skilled in numbers or words or drawing or music or however, God has gifted us with that ability.

And therefore, it is true to say with all our different skills, abilities, and vocations, we ought to glorify him. We can design and create things for the glory of God.

However, there is a but. this would seem like a very strange place in the story for the Lord to teach us that. I've saved you.

I'm coming to live among you. Oh, and by the way, I really like art and design. Is the point of this passage really that we could do with a few more pictures up in this room?

[10 : 40] Brothers and sisters, the extreme rareness of somebody being filled with God's spirit in the Old Testament should make us stop and think there is something much bigger going on in these verses.

See, when before now have we definitely heard that the spirit of God did work? Page one of the Bible.

And what was the work that the spirit of God did? He made things. In fact, he made everything. The very first words of the Bible say famously, in the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was without form and void. Darkness was over the face of the deep and the spirit of God was hovering over the waters. And then God makes things.

The same word in verse 6 of our passage is used eight times in the creation account to describe God making the sky and sea, the sun and moon, animals, people, indeed, everything that he had made.

[11 : 48] And how did he make it in Genesis 1? By his word. The Lord said, let there be light, and there was light.

Now here's a fun fact. In Exodus chapters 25 to 31, all the tabernacle chapters, can you guess how many times we will have read the Lord said, it's actually on your sheet, if you want to cheat, seven times the same number of days in the creation week.

God is creating the tabernacle by his word and spirit as he created the heavens and the earth. And there's more. Chapters 25 to 31 actually mirror the pattern of the creation week.

In days one, two, and three of creation, God gives form and structure to the earth. He separates day and night, sky and sea, land and sea.

Just as in the first three chapters of tabernacle instructions, he separates the various parts, giving form and structure to the tent itself. And then in the next three chapters, it's to do with the Lord filling the tabernacle, getting the priests ready to go into the tent in their work with their sacrifices, their ordination.

[13 : 15] Just as in days four, five, and six of creation, God filled the earth and sky and sea, sun, moon, and stars, birds, fish, animals, people.

And at the end of the creation week comes the day of rest. And so at the end of chapter 31 of Exodus, this, we get instructions about what? The Sabbath day.

Why bring up the Sabbath at this point? It seems really odd, doesn't it? Unless you have picked up on the parallels with creation, which are actually made explicit at the end of those instructions, verse 17, Luke.

It's a sign forever between me and the people of Israel that in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, and the seventh day he rested and was refreshed. That's a lot to take in.

I put it on your sheet on purpose. You can go back and look at that. But I hope it helps us see from the text how the tabernacle instructions describe, as it were, a new creation week, a tent formed and filled by God's word in the power of his spirit for his glory, just like the earth in the beginning.

[14 : 33] now that's all well and good, you say, but what's the point? Why a new creation tent? Well, because of what is inside.

So much good gold, overlay it with pure gold, pure gold, again and again. Countless angels, angels on the mercy seat, angels on the curtains, angels on the walls.

A very striking tree tree. That is the lamp stand with its branches, candle holders shaped like blossoms and flowers, wooden beams and structures, precious stones that glimmer on the priest's clothes, animal skins covering the hole, and of course, last but not least, human beings, the priests themselves, working and keeping God's special place, walking with God in his presence.

place. Where else could you find a place containing all those things but at the dawn of creation in a garden in Eden?

Go back this afternoon and you can read Genesis 1, 2, and 3 and things will pop out of the page for you that have never popped before because it's the original tabernacle or more accurately the tabernacle is a replica garden of Eden.

[16 : 04] For like the tabernacle and Mount Sinai, Eden itself was, as it were, a copy of heaven. It's the original copy of God's true home.

The outer court, Eden itself, the holy place, the garden, and the holy of holies, the middle of the garden, where we find the two trees, the tree of life, the tree of knowledge of good and evil.

Adam and Eve, our first parents, walked with God in his garden. They had access to the tree of life, the holy of holies, but they sinned against God in that most holy place and disobeyed his word. Once they walked with him, now they hid from him. And for their sin, God put them outside, in the outer courts, as it were, no longer royal priests with access to his holy presence, but those who stood outside needing a sacrifice to cover their sins.

But now, now God has planted a garden again by pitching his tent and furnishing it as the Garden 2.0, a new garden of Eden, planted afresh by God inside a little new creation, so that the sons of Adam and the daughters of Eve could once again walk in his presence, come back into the garden, eat from the tree of life, enjoy the blessing, in part, that Adam forfeited in whole, to taste for the first time what it was we'd been created for, but never truly known, peace, rightness, intimacy with God our creator.

[18:02] That is what the Lord was holding out to his people in the tabernacle, a way back, a gateway into the garden, a doorway into the new creation.

So can you hear again the Lord calling from within his tent, where are you? Where are you? Where are you? Come out of hiding, come in and walk with me, come in and have the blessing your first father lost, come in and have eternal life.

I asked at the start of last week, what would it take to press the reset button on planet earth and take us back to before it all went wrong?

A tent in the wilderness that held within its walls a fresh start with our creator. That's got to be better, hasn't it, than a few more pictures up on the wall?

It is a step towards paradise regained. So now we've seen that's our big point, what's going on in chapter 31. Let's just see what it means for us today.

[19:12] So much there, let's catch our breath a bit, okay, bring us up to speed. Three big implications I think for us. And the first one is step into the new creation.

Step in. I'm guessing if I told you that I had a tent like this out the back of the church, where you could stand in a little patch of heaven, you would want to see it, right?

Take your cup of coffee out there. If all you needed to do was bring your goat, your pigeon, whatever, have it sacrificed, and you could go back to Eden and eat of the tree of life in the presence of God, why wouldn't you?

You wouldn't do that. Especially when the Lord is calling, inviting us, come in, come near, have life, know me, and have peace with me. If a tent like that existed now, you'd have to be mad not to go in. Friends, a tent like that does exist now, but not made with wood and goat skins, but with flesh and bone and blood.

[20:23] God. We touched last time on the supreme way God has come to dwell with us in history when the word became flesh and dwelt among us.

Literally, that word dwelt there means to camp or pitch a tent. In Greek, it's the same word used for this specific tent, the tabernacle. So John, who wrote that, is saying this, the word who is the creator God, tabernacled among us when he came down and was made like us in every way apart from sin.

In his incarnation, the son of God took to himself a pure human nature, body and soul, and became that tent of meeting. Jesus Christ, where we can come and truly know and meet with God again. Indeed, the book of Hebrews compares Jesus' body to the curtains of the tent. Those curtains, it says, were torn open on the cross so that we might go through into God's holy presence through his sacrifice of himself.

His blood washes us clean so that we can come before the holiness of God and not be consumed for our sin. Earlier, we heard these words from 2 Corinthians 5.

[21:45] If anyone is in Christ, what? New creation. The old has passed away, and behold, the new has come. Because to step into this tent, Christ crucified and risen, is to step into the new creation.

It was wonderful to then see Lewis baptized as God's visible way of symbolizing and confirming that truth that whoever is in Christ is indeed part now and belongs to the new creation order.

If you've taken hold by faith of what Jesus did for you upon the cross, you have eaten of the tree of life. If you believe in your heart that God raised Jesus from the dead, you have been raised with him and seated in the holy of holies, in heavenly places, in Christ Jesus.

If you've come to God through his death in your place, you have truly been welcomed into the holy presence of your creator. Baptism says, in part, that Lewis, like every believer in the Lord Jesus, now has one foot in a new realm.

We have begun eternal life in Christ. All this, all this, says Paul, is from God who through Christ reconciled us to himself.

[23 : 18] Here then is the tent. Here is the sacrifice. Here is God's summons to you, be reconciled to God for Christ who knew no sin was made sin for us so that you could come in.

If you're on the fence this morning, you don't know that you can come. If this is your first time in church, your first time in a long time, step in.

Step in. You can step in. Whoever you are by faith, step into the new creation that is in Christ. Next, friends, why wouldn't you?

Why wouldn't you? Have a fresh start with your creator today in a new, bright relationship with him. Begin eternal life in Christ Jesus, for he has made the way.

And once you have stepped into the new creation, then, second implication, live out the new creation week. We probably don't instinctively think about the Sabbath commandments in this way, but that is what they're doing here.

[24 : 34] They're directing God's redeemed people to make the pattern of God's creation week, the rhythm of their new creation lives. Just have a look there, verse 12.

The Lord said to Moses, you to speak to the people of Israel and say, above all you shall keep my Sabbaths, for this is a sign between me and you throughout your generations that you may know that I, the Lord, sanctify you.

In other words, the weekly Sabbath is a covenant sign in which God says to his people that they are his. So let's not make the mistake we often make with the Sabbath or the Old Testament as a whole, that this is something that his people have to do for God's benefit.

As if he's kind of booked out a day of their week to cheer himself up at the end of a long week. No, he's blocked out that day of their week so that they will never forget who they are.

Not only the people God has saved for himself, but his new beginning, his new creation, new humanity. That's the surprise.

[25 : 46] In a way, in verse 17, is it not, that it's a sign forever, he says, between me and the people of Israel that in six days the Lord made heaven and earth and the seventh day he rested and was refreshed.

Surely we think the creation week isn't just an Israel thing, it's an everyone thing, right? But it's a sign for his people especially that he's doing it in them again.

a new creation patterned on the old. And that holds for us today. We come together as a church family on a Sunday because that is the day Jesus rose from the dead, the first day of the new creation proper.

So we, the church, are set apart as the people of God, his new humanity, by Jesus' resurrection. Indeed, not only set apart for an hour or two when we meet, but we keep the Sabbath day set apart and holy because it reminds us who we are now in Christ.

Not traditionalists that pine for the day when everything was shut on a Sunday, or religious people who like to feel a sense of peace and comfort in a church building.

[27 : 08] No, but people who through faith in Christ have died to our old self and risen again. People who have entered heaven through the blood of Jesus and the torn curtain of his flesh.

People who belong now to the new creation that dawned on a Sunday morning 2,000 years ago. It is because Christ has done all of that for us, achieved it, and bought it for us through his death and resurrection, that we rest in that truth.

We rest in order to remember who we are, that we are a people set apart for God by Christ's resurrection. And that's not just who we are on a Sunday, as it is who we are all week long.

We live, in a sense, in an unending seventh day because, as Hebrews 4 says, we've rested from our works as God rested from his.

And in creation, those are not works that God returns to pick up again on Monday morning because they are finished. God finished his work of creation and rested.

[28 : 23] So Christ has finished his work of redemption and we rest in him. And so we live the new creation week all week when we find our rest in Jesus and stop pretending that we still live in slavery to the harsh pressures and impossible expectations of the world.

I don't know what the Israelites did with their free time, but I take it that throughout the week in their evenings, they did not play pharaohs and slaves. They worked, but now as a free people under a gracious loving king.

And so tomorrow morning we pick up our tools again or our pen, our laptop, the changing bag or whatever out of a posture of rest in Christ under his good and gracious rule for his glory but also for our own goods.

His rest is a gracious gift that reminds us we are his and he has done all we need for all eternity.

Which makes Sunday today the kind of Sabbath of Sabbaths, doesn't it?

If we don't set Sunday apart to rest from our work full stop, well, we won't be ready to work out of our rest during the week.

[29 : 50] If we don't set aside a day in our week to single-mindedly pursue our life's great purpose to glorify God and enjoy him forever, we're not going to give it that much thought when we have other things to juggle.

Fill the Sabbath with good but ordinary things and it knocks the new creation week off course from day one. Keep the Sabbath holy and you are ready to live the new creation week until the next Sunday.

Friends, the Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath. It is God's gift to us as his people that we might be reminded who we are, we belong to him, we are his new creation.

And very final implication for us this morning, look forward to paradise properly regained. As great as the tabernacle was, it was only about, I found out this week, four and a half by nine feet or meters squared, much smaller area than this room.

It was a new creation under canvas but only a very, very small one in a very, very big world. If you've ever opened a bottle of Laphroaig whiskey, you will know that they offer a square foot of the estate to every customer.

[31 : 20] And they used to do this, I don't know if they still do, but once a year you can go and visit the Laphroaig distillery and if you have your square foot of the estate, they give you by recompense a dram.

The tabernacle in some ways was like that, a very small patch of ground that entitled the Israelites to a small taste of heaven. But beyond that 40 square feet, the world went on as it had done ever since the fall.

No other nation had access to the tabernacle and even then God's people couldn't access it all. It was bubble-wrapped, restricted. Having it there, their little taste must have made them want something more.

Maybe some of you who've arrived in Aberdeen over the last week or two are feeling homesick today. Glad that you're here, that's true. Mum and dad might FaceTime you, you get a little glimpse for a short time of home and then it's gone again.

Like that, going to the tabernacle would have made God's people miss home. But for them, a home that they'd never truly seen. A paradise home, a past home, which in the tabernacle God promised would also be their future home.

[32 : 49] Because in Jesus, God will spread the tabernacle as it were over the whole face of the earth. We've been back to the beginning of the Bible, we're going to finish at the end.

Revelation 21, John sees a new heaven and a new earth. And the Lord says, Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them and they will be his people and God himself will be with them as their God.

He will wipe away every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more. Neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore. For the former things have passed away.

On that day, the world will not go on as it has since the fall. On that day, the Lord will renew his whole creation. He will properly press the reset button.

All sin, evil, death, will be taken away. He will dwell with his people forever and they will dwell with him. That is the world contained within this tabernacle.

[33 : 58] But on that day, it will fill the whole wide world. Before paradise partially regained, then paradise properly regained.

All through the tabernacle that is Christ. Friends, if we come to God through him today, we will be in his presence on that day. If we are in Christ by faith today, we will live in that new world on that day.

Brothers and sisters, you don't need me to tell you that paradise Christ isn't fully here yet. In Christ, we have one foot in, but the other foot still bothers us.

The part that still gives in to our old sins. The part that forgets who we are now in the Lord. The part that ties us to the crushing burdens that this world lays upon us and the pain of spiritual opposition. Christ has not yet come to take all that away, but know through him he has prepared a place for you in that new world.

[35:06] His resurrection is the guarantee of it. Like the first fruits of the harvest, says Paul, Christ's resurrection gives us today a taste of what our resurrection will one day be.

he has already planted your foot in that new creation by his death, his resurrection, and his spirit so that you now have eternal life and belong truly to that world to come.

Be assured, brothers and sisters, today that if you are in Christ, your citizenship is in heaven. and rest in this hope that from there we await a savior who will transform your lowly body to be like his glorious body by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself.

So as in the tabernacle, so now, if you are in Christ, look forward to all that he promises, paradise properly regained. And this week, when your other foot is getting sucked back into the sinking sand of this world, lean all the more heavily on that foot which is planted in the new.

Stand firm on the ground of your true heavenly home and look forward with great longing to the day when Christ will come to roll up this world like a rug and plant both your feet on that new creation soil in him where you will live in his holy presence forever and never fade away.

[36:49] Let's set our hearts on that day as we pray. Let's come in prayer to God. our Father, we thank you for your precious and very great promises that are yes and are men in Jesus.

We thank you for the patterns and pictures, the types and shadows of the Old Testament and how they point us to him and through him to a world renewed.

Father, we pray that we would rest all our hope and all our faith in Jesus Christ today. Lord, we pray for those among us who as yet have not done that and we ask, Lord, that they would hear your voice calling them, inviting them to step into him.

We pray, Lord, for those of us who are struggling deeply with suffering, with temptation, with sin, that you would please assure us that our home is in heaven, that the Savior will come again to raise us with himself, that we will live forever with him there.

Please keep our hearts fixed upon that glorious day, we pray, and until then, keep us, Lord, tasting and enjoying your blessing and goodness and truth.

[38:05] Lord, sustain us on the way, we pray, and help us to rejoice in all the goodness that you grant to us here in this age in our Lord and Savior, Jesus. these things we pray in his name.

Amen.