A Backstage Pass to the Throne Room of God

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[0:00] Please take a seat and we are going to be in Exodus in quite a long section. We are in chapters 36 through 39.

! You'll be glad to know I'm not going to read every single verse of that. We're going to take our reading from Exodus 38 verse 21 to 31 initially on page 78 and then skip over to part of chapter 39. So Exodus 38 verses 21 to 31.
A hundred talents and 1,775 shekels by the shekel of the sanctuary. A bika head that is half a shekel by the shekel of the sanctuary for everyone who is listed in the records from 20 years old and upwards.
For 603,550 men. The hundred talents of silver were for casting the bases of the sanctuary and the bases of the veil. A hundred bases for a hundred talents.
[1:52] A talent a base. And the 1,775 shekels he made for hooks of the pillars and overlaid their capitals and made their fillets from them. The bronze that was offered was 70 talents and 2,400 shekels.

And with that he made the bases of the entrance of the tent of meeting, the bronze altar and the bronze grating for it and all the utensils of the altar. The bases around the court and the bases of the gate and the court.
All the pegs of the tabernacle and all the pegs around the court. And if you can turn to the next page, page 79, I'm going to read chapter 39, 32 to 43.
Thus all the work for the tabernacle of the tent of meeting was finished. And the people of Israel did according to all that the Lord commanded Moses. So they did. When they brought the tabernacle to Moses, the tent and all its utensils, its hooks, its frames, its bars, its pillars and bases, the covering of tanned ramskins and goatskins, the veil of the screen, the ark of the testimony with its poles and the mercy seat, the table of all the utensils and the bread of presents, a lampstand of pure gold and its lamps, the lamp set and all its utensils and the oil for the light, the golden altar and the anointing oil and the fragrant incense and the screen of the entrance of the tent, the bronze altar and its grating of bronze, its poles and all its utensils, the basin and its stand, the hangings of the court, its pillars and its bases, and the screen of the gate of the court, its cords and its pegs, and all the utensils for the service of the tabernacle and for the tent of meeting, the finely worked garments for ministering in the holy place, the holy garments for Aaron the high priest and the garments for his sons and their services priests.
According to all the Lord had commanded Moses, so the people of Israel had done all the work, and Moses saw all the work, and behold, they had done it as the Lord commanded, and so they had done it.
[3:56] Then Moses blessed them. It's probably the longest passage about a single full stop we've read in a long time, but let's pray for our time in God's word this morning.

Father, you invite us into your presence through the Lord Jesus Christ. And we see in this passage, Lord, you invite us to see your dwelling place with man on earth.
Through it, Lord, let us see your holiness, your goodness, your compassion to your people and desire to dwell with us. And through it, Lord, show us more of Christ, we pray. Amen.
Amen. Well, a phrase we've kept saying in the last couple of weeks is that structures tell stories. I wonder when you walk around a new city or a new place, what you look at in the buildings.
Some people just don't care about looking at architecture, but some people are obsessed with fine details. I lived in Glasgow for eight years, and I've got to say, Glasgow on street level, not particularly pretty.

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[5:01] But if you lift your eyes to the buildings, there's some amazing architecture, beautiful carvings, the way the stones are put together. And they're all designed to tell you something, to tell you something about the purpose of the building or the owner of the building.

Buildings are meaningful. Think about the room that we are in. It is a room that is remarkably ornate in lots of ways. We don't live in or go to a church in a square concrete block with no windows. Buildings are made to tell you a story, to make you feel something comfortable or confronted. If you go to Balmoral, the gates, the grounds, and the architecture are all meant to tell you that someone important lives there for some of the year.

So the question this morning is, what kind of story does the tabernacle tell? What does this structure tell you about the God who dwells in it? Because the tabernacle is one big living parable to teach God's people about how he dwells with them.

And so the question for us, having read so many words about furniture, is what do a tent, a box, a table, a basin, and a grill have to do with the death and resurrection of Christ?

[6:22] What do you think about the text? Wonderfully, the answer is going to be very much indeed, but we're going to have to start dissecting this to find out. And as we saw last week, the whole book of Exodus has been telling us a story.

The tabernacle chapters are either side of the golden calf incident, showing that God is faithful to his plan and sin will not get in the way, no matter how grievous. And Joe already gave us an overview of this tent, saying it is a new creation under canvas, God doing something new amongst his people.

But today we're going to zoom in on the details. If you were looking through the book of Exodus, chapters 25 to 30 describe how all the items of the tabernacle are made, and that picture moves from the center outwards.

When at 36 to 39, we're told how the tabernacle is constructed, not just instructions, but the actual making of it. And we're told in a practical order, because the tabernacle, most importantly, is portable.

These people have not yet reached the land of promise, but God is going to go with them. So the order we're given is a construction order. If you take all the pieces, what order would you put them together?

[7:37] It is a portable temple for the presence of God among his people. And in a sense, people are lifting up and carrying with them a little slice of heaven until they reach the land of promise.

So what story does the tabernacle tell? Well, our first point this morning is a throne room fit for a king. At this point, I must admit that my undergraduate degree was in biomedical science.

So unlike Joe Hall, I really quite like diagrams. I had a lot of them at university. So we're going to diagram out what we see. Hopefully that should be up on the screen. You can see it.

I will say, initially, this is completely bewildering. What is this all about? Well, Bezalel and his team of craftsmen are given the designs to make this to God's specification.

And we're told over and over again, they did as he commanded, using a colossal amount of metal. So let's look through some of these things.

[8:42] First, the courtyard, the outer blue rectangle on the screen. It's 150 foot by 75 foot rectangle. And this sets the tabernacle apart from the rest of the tents of Israel.

God's tent isn't one amongst many. His house isn't down the same street as everyone else. It is set apart from everything else. There is a wall of linen, seven foot high, screening this place from the rest of Israel.

Bronze bases, wooden poles, silver hooks. And when you come into this courtyard, as if you're approaching God's throne room, you have to go past an altar where sacrifices are burned and a basin where the priests are washed.

And it's as if you're entering the palace grounds. These are the gardens of the palace of the king. Now we're going to come back to some of the altar and wash space before, later.

But we're just going to go straight to the tabernacle for now. That smaller blue rectangle on the left. This is the king's palace itself. 45 foot long and 15 foot wide and high.

[9:53] Embroidered in the royal colors of scarlet and blue and purple cloth. Wooden frames covered with gold, silver bases. And notice as you go inside, the metals get more precious.

Everything is gold and glittering inside the tabernacle, whereas it's bronze and useful outside. And so you have a tent. It is covered with another layer of goat skins to keep it from the elements.

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And importantly, the items of the furniture in the tabernacle, you'll find these in chapter 37 if you want to follow along. Some of these are on the top row of the diagram here. Each one of them is covered in gold.
So let's just look at these. First we have the table of bread. God invites his people to come into his presence and eat with him.
We're told later in Leviticus, there are 12 loaves of bread put on the table of the bread of presence. A sign that we've already seen in Exodus, as we've already seen God have a meal with his people at the bottom of Sinai, that they are still as welcome in his presence through the work of the priests.
[11:04] Secondly, there is a big golden lamp stand, a very impressive single piece of gold that's hammered into shape. Seven cups of an oil lamp, reflecting light into the whole tent, making everything glitter with all the gold in there.

It would otherwise be pitch black inside the tabernacle, but it's reminiscent of a God who made light out of darkness, who lights the way for his people to come into his presence, and has just a hint of the tree of life in Eden coming back again, although we'll look at that in the future.
Next we have the altar of incense, something the Bible will hold up as the prayers of God's people arising to him like incense going up to heaven. Again, this will be a place of prayer for the priests of God, and it's just on the verge of the most holy place.
And as you look through all of this, nothing here is for show. In a way, it's surprisingly functional. There are bowls and plates and jugs and all the things one would need to do real tasks inside the tabernacle.
And it's all made to be portable. As God leads them, this palace goes with them. But right at the back of the tabernacle, the square at the back of that diagram, we have the most holy place.
[12:32] A curtain, a veil with cherubim embroidered into it, is the thing you have to pass through in order to get to the most holy place. And inside that is the ark of the throne of God, an ornate golden box.

It's gold inside, it's gold outside, and it is central to the tabernacle. It is right at the heart of God's presence with his people. And we're told that it is the mercy seat.
It's an interesting translation. But notice it's not actually a seat. Very important, this God doesn't have an actual seated throne at the center of his people, as if someone will sit on it.
But instead, two golden cherubim with their wings held upwards, where the presence of God is among them. This is, above the ark, the meeting place of heaven and earth.
Now, hearing that the cover is called a mercy seat might seem slightly strange to us. It's an odd translation. But the Hebrew word for that covering is kaporet, which sounds a bit like the word for atonement, which is kippir.
[13:39] And so on the day of atonement, the priest comes and makes atonement at this ark. On the day of Yom Kippur, the whole thing you're being told about the most central thing in all of the tabernacle is that it is a place of atonement.

The place that the high priest comes to do the work by which the relationship between God and man can be restored. That is what God wants at the heart of his people, at the heart of his dwelling. At the heart of this tent is a message that he will dwell with his people by the atoning blood of a sacrifice. Now, that's a whole lot of detail.
I'm sure some of you have glazed entirely over because you're just not furniture people. That's fine. But we have to think that reading this is a privilege. Because if you're an average Israelite, you will never, ever see inside the holy place.
Even the priests can't go in. Only the high priest can go in. Only one day a year. And only with a huge amount of sacrifices.
[14:47] The tabernacle, and especially the holy place, has a big keep out sign. It is not open to the public. And yet, just in reading this, we're being invited to see inside.

This is not secret rituals done behind closed doors. We are being welcomed in, the people of God being welcomed to see what the Lord is putting in the middle of his people.
And I think some of you probably feel a slight pang of disappointment at reading this as well. You kind of wish you could go and find this tabernacle, go find the lost ark, go reconstruct the temple, see inside.
Some of you might even be tempted to think, shouldn't we get a bit more scarlet and blue cloth for Bon Accord? Just make it feel a bit more like a holy place? But friends, that's not the point of this

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tabernacle.
It never was. This was all a big living picture to point people to the presence of God. The question for us is, where do we go to meet with the presence of God?
[15:54] Well, if the tabernacle is a place where atonement is made, the question for us is, where do we go that atonement is made for us? The place that atonement is made for us is just so clearly the cross of Christ.

If we want to dwell with the Lord, we need to go to a place of atonement where God will dwell again with his people. And through Jesus' sin-atoning death, we take his place forgiven and welcomed in, his holiness and righteousness credited to us that we might be able to access the presence of God in full.
We don't need a tabernacle or a temple. This church building is neither of those things, but the people of God together are called to be his dwelling place.
The people that he has atoned for are the place where God's spirit dwells in his presence among us. Which is why the New Testament describes the people of God as a temple so often.
Hear these words from 2 Corinthians 6 verse 16. Paul says, we are the temple of the living God. And God said, I will make my dwelling among them and walk with them and I will be their God and they shall be my people.
[17:19] In Christ and by the presence of his spirit, God's people have become God's dwelling place. The tabernacle was a big sign pointing into the future for a day when God's presence would be fully with his people.

Because think, every Israelite dwelt next to the presence of God, but it's insulated, a whole courtyard, a whole tent, a most holy place, you can't get in because the presence of a holy God is not safe for you.
But friends, in Christ, we dwell in the holy place all the time. In Christ, we are invited fully into God's presence and not kept out and not insulated from him.
Because the place where God dwells on earth, his true tabernacle, is his church, his people. But that begs the question, if the tabernacle creates a difference and most of the Israelites couldn't enter, then how is it that we are welcome through Christ?
What has Christ done for us? Well, that moves on to our second point, the tabernacle is a meeting place for a mediator. Now, when preaching on the first set of tabernacle instructions in 25 to 30, Joe said that the tabernacle was like Mount Sinai laid flat.
[18:49] A holy place at the top of the mountain, like the holy place in the tabernacle. Only safe for one person to go at one time. And so in the tabernacle, only the high priest can enter.

And that distance is maintained of the tabernacle. The holy God dwells among sinners. If these sinners are to be safe, there needs to be distance. So how does the average Israelite make their way into the holy place?
Well, what Moses did for Israel at Sinai, with the mountain, is what the high priest will do for Israel in this tent. And so look how the high priest is robed.
You can follow along in chapter 39 for the instructions for the robes. Aaron's work attire is surprisingly complex. It's all highly symbolic, so we'll go from the top.
There's a golden plate on his head that says, holy to the Lord. If you want to be in God's presence, you must be holy. Later laws would show all the sacrifices that a high priest would have to make just so he could be holy before the Lord.
[19:56] On his shoulders, are two stones inscribed with the names of the sons of Israel. And it's to remember where they have come from. It brings to mind the patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and all of Jacob's children that have later formed these tribes, which brings to mind God's covenant promises to his people.

Those 12 names, again, appear on the breastplate on the high priest. 12 stones, 12 names, 12 tribes carried into God's presence by the high priest every time he does his work.
And the gold of the breastplate and the scarlet blue and purple linen that he's dressed in all show is that Aaron's dressed as a walking tabernacle himself.
It's probably a little bit hard to look at. A man dressed as the building he's walking into, I think my eyes would cross. But importantly, the focus of the work of the tabernacle is focused on the high priest and what he is called to do.

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A holy man serving a holy purpose in a holy place. That's what it's going to take to bring the people back into the presence of God. Now the priests perform work in the tabernacle that's all to do with atonement every set.
[21:21] So think, if you're an Israelite and you want your sin to be atoned for, what do you do? Well, you bring your lamb or your goat, whatever your sacrifice is, and you bring it to the tent of meeting.

That allows you to come into the courtyard. But from there, the sacrifice is killed and only the priest can take its blood in to the holy place.
But even then, only the high priest can get into the most holy place. Ultimately, in order to get into God's presence, you need to go via sacrifice and a mediator.
And the mediator needs to be cleansed and made appropriate for this. That's why the priest would carry blood into the holy place. A sense that the price paid for the worshiper is taken to the presence of God, but the whole time representing God's people, their names, with them and carried in.
And if we've been thinking about the book of Exodus, we've already had the Passover, the time when God's people sheltered under the blood of the lamb. And that continues in the tabernacle.
[22:33] People bringing a lamb, its blood shed, and people hiding underneath it. God paying the price to cover over the sins of the people, but in the way that goes with them.

It should be no great surprise to us then that the book of Hebrews describes Christ as our great high priest. Now we heard a lot of this in the reading that Wilma read for us, where an earthly priest like Aaron had to make atonement for his own sin before he could do the work of mediation.
And one day an earthly high priest would die. The only sacrifice that he can bring is the blood of an animal. And he could only make atonement once a year.
And there is so much blood involved. But with Jesus as our high priest, the whole situation changes. Hear these words from Hebrews 8, verse 1.
Let's say of him, We have such a high priest, one who is seated at the right hand of the throne of the majesty in heaven, a minister in the holy places, in the tree tent that the Lord set up, not man.
[23:44] Hebrews is telling us that the one who ministers in the tree tent, in the heavens to make atonement, is also the one who sits on the throne. If you're going to take the temple of God, the tabernacle, and make that the place where his throne dwells, Jesus sits on the throne and makes atonement from there always.

Ministering in the heavenly tabernacle, sinless, so that he does not have to do any sacrifice for himself. Living forever to intercede for the people of God that there may always be mercy and grace for us in our time of need.
Providing atonement through the cost of his own blood, not a sacrifice he brings separately. Which enables him to be our great high priest as well as being our king.
Jesus is both. And the place of his crowning glory therefore is still again the cross where he is crowned and makes atonement for his people.
Jesus is the mediator that we need. The one who can truly take his people into the presence of God through the atonement he provides through his own blood. And if that's the case, Hebrews 6, 19 says this, We have a sure and steadfast anchor of the soul, a hope that enters into the inner place behind the curtain where Jesus has gone as our forerunner and our behalf.
[25:15] As the high priest took the people in to the holy place, so Jesus anchors us in the heavens and the holy place of God connected to us through his sacrifice.

It's almost as if Christ was connecting us back to Eden. And rightly so. Our final point that this tabernacle is like Eden revisited.
Now, chapter 39 wonderfully ends with the work of the tabernacle being complete, done, in accordance with all the Lord's commands. So here again these verses from Exodus 39, 42 to 43.
According to all that the Lord had commanded Moses, so the people of Israel had done all the work.
And Moses saw all the work and behold they had done it as the Lord had commanded.
So they had done it. Then Moses blessed them. Again, if we're keeping our ears open, we should just be getting little moments to remind us of other places in God's word.
[26:22] because the work being finished or complete is just like the completion of the very first creation in Genesis 1. On the seventh day, God completed the work and beheld the work and blessed the seventh day.

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And here, Moses, with the work completed by the people, sees the work and blesses the people. Because here is a new creation among the people as if Eden has reappeared in their midst.
Now, chapter 40 will start next time with the first construction of the tabernacle on the first day of a new year. It's all pointing to a new creation, a new beginning.
The whole tabernacle and all of its actions are one big living parable of Christ's work to bring us back into the presence of God as if we were back in Eden.
There's two details that I want us to just focus on as we finish our thinking about how Christ brings us into the tabernacle. And the first is almost invisible.
[27:34] It's the direction the tabernacle faces. So if you were very careful in your reading of these passages in chapter 36 verses 24 to 30, you'd see that you enter the tabernacle through the eastern side and go west all the way into the holy place if you're trying to make your way in.

Hold that thought in your mind. You enter from the east. Second detail. On the veil between the main part of the tabernacle and the most holy place there is a curtain on which are embroidered two cherubim.
An angelic barrier separating the people from the presence of a holy God. And that's it. If you want to get back into the presence of a holy God you need to go east through the angelic barrier.
And that should be sparking off thoughts in our minds. Because just after the thal in Genesis 3 we hear these words. Genesis 3, 24 God drove out the man and at the east of the garden of Eden he placed a cherubim and a flaming sword that turned every way to guard the way to the tree of life.
On the east of Eden there is a cherubim that says you cannot come in barring your way back. But at the tabernacle you come from the east and go past the cherubim into the presence of God once more.
[29:02] It turns out there is a way to come back to him. God is not content for people to stay on the outside forever. The tabernacle is a big living parable of making our way back into Eden.

Going back past the angelic barrier to walk once more with God in the garden. And that's what Jesus does for us. We know so well when we think of his crucifixion that we think of the moment that when he dies the curtain in the temple is torn in two because the way has been made through his death for sinners like us through his atonement to come back into the presence of God.
And this is why the book of Hebrews which we keep quoting because it is just a huge analysis of everything going on with priests and tabernacle. But Hebrews 10.25 from verse 19 says this Therefore brothers since we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus by the new and living way that is open to us through the curtain that is through his flesh and since we have a great high priest over the house of God that is drawn near with a true heart in the full assurance of faith.
So brothers and sisters as we look at this tent from thousands of years ago be reminded that the curtain is torn that his blood is shed and through him we are welcome because Christ is our tabernacle.
Now that concludes our extremely quick tour of this tent but hope that we see as we look at it it was all pointing to what Christ would one day do where Israel dwelt next to the presence of God in Christ we dwell in the presence of God by his spirit.
[31:04] The tabernacle is Christ in canvas. It's an ongoing theme in John's gospel and when you go looking for it you see it everywhere. Think about what Jesus says of himself.

He says I am the door the one through whom we can access God's presence. Jesus says that he is the bread of life in the tabernacle there is bread provision for all.
Jesus says I am the light and you can't go into the holy place without God's presence lighting the room. Jesus says I am the way the truth and the life and truly without him there is no access to the presence of God but with him we are welcomed.
Friends it should astound us that Christ is able to fulfill every single part of this but it is no accident that God gave this tent to his people that he might show them that he is intent on dwelling with them and doing all that is needed to invite them into his presence forever.
And so how wonderful it is to hear John 1 verse 14 and the word became flesh and dwelt among us and we have seen his glory the glory of the one and only son from the father.
[32:22] How do we know in the end that we will one day dwell fully with God? Because God came down and dwelt fully with us because of what Christ has done incarnation his death on the cross and his resurrection we truly are welcomed into his presence.

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If you have put your faith in the Lord Jesus Christ you really are present with him in the holy place spiritually worshipping round his throne. On the day when Christ comes again on that final beautiful day of resurrection the big difference will be that we see it in full as now we only see in part.
But don't let that dissuade you from the knowledge that you dwell with him already by faith. As we close hear these words from Hebrews 4.16 let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace that we might receive mercy and find grace to help in our time of need.
With that thought in our minds let us pray together. Father you invite your people to dwell with you and do everything Lord that is needed that we might dwell with you.
Thank you for this picture of your intent to dwell with us that you would show us the way that you give your people the design for this tent that they might know you and dwell with you that you would give them the priests and the high priests that they may do the work of intercession and that we would be invited to your very throne room.
[34:03] Thank you that through Christ we find mercy and grace on tap for us as we are assembled round your throne in heaven and we ask Lord that you would give us great assurance and confidence of your presence with us always and to live lives worthy of living in your holy place as your Holy Spirit dwells with us and this we pray in Jesus name and for his glory Amen.

Amen.

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