Heaven on Earth?

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Preacher: Simon Attwood

[0:00] Here are Exodus chapter 40 on page 80 of the Church Bibles. Exodus chapter 40 starting at verse 1.

And you shall set up the screen for the door of the tabernacle. You shall set the altar of burnt offering before the door of the tabernacle of the tent of meeting.
And place the basin between the tent of meeting and the altar. And put water in it. You shall set up the court all round and hang up the screen for the gate of the court.
And you shall take the anointing oil and anoint the tabernacle and all that is in it. And consecrate it and all its furniture. So that it may become holy. You shall also anoint the altar of burnt offering and all its utensils.
And consecrate the altar so the altar may be most holy. You shall anoint the basin and its stand and consecrate it. You shall bring Aaron and his sons to the entrance of the tent of meeting.
[1:23] And wash them with water. And put on Aaron the holy garments. You shall anoint him and consecrate him. That he may serve as priest. You shall bring his sons also and put coats on them and anoint them.

As you anointed their father. That they may serve me as priests. And their anointing shall admit them to a perpetual priesthood throughout their generations. This Moses did.
According to all the Lord commanded him. And so he did. In the first month of the second year. On the first day of the month. The tabernacle was erected.
Moses erected the tabernacle. He laid its bases and set up its frames. And put in its poles. And raised up its pillars. And he spread the tent over the tabernacle.
And put the covering of the tent over it. As the Lord had commanded Moses. He took the testimony. And put it into the ark. And put the poles on the ark. And set the mercy seat above the ark.
[2:24] And he brought the ark into the tabernacle. And set up the veil of the screen. And screened the ark of the testimony. As the Lord had commanded Moses. He put the table in the tent of meeting.

On the north side of the tabernacle. Outside the veil. And arranged the bread on it before the Lord. As the Lord had commanded Moses. He put the lampstand on the tent of meeting.
Opposite the table on the south side of the tabernacle. And set up the lamps before the Lord. As the Lord had commanded Moses. He put the golden altar in the tent of meeting.
Before the veil. and burned fragrant incense on it, as the Lord had commanded Moses. He put in place the screen for the door of the tabernacle, and he set the altar of burnt offering at the entrance of the tabernacle of the tent of meeting, and he offered on it the burnt offering and the grain offering, as the Lord had commanded Moses.
He set the basin between the tent of meeting and the altar, and put water in it for washing, for which Moses and Aaron and his sons washed their hands and feet. When they went into the tent of meeting, and when they approached the altar, they washed as the Lord commanded Moses, and he erected the court around the tabernacle and the altar, and set up the screen of the gate of the court.
[3:40] And so Moses finished the work, and then the cloud covered the tent of meeting, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle, and Moses was not able to enter the tent of meeting, because the cloud settled on it, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle.

Throughout all their journeys, whenever the cloud was taken up from over the tabernacle, the people of Israel would set out, but if the cloud was not taken up, then they did not set out to the day that it was taken up.
For the cloud of the Lord was on the tabernacle by day, and fire was in it by night, in sight of the house of all Israel, throughout all their journeys.

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Let's pray together as we come to God's Word. Father, you are good, and your gospel is true. And through your word, you speak to us by your spirit.
So we ask, Lord, once again, that you would reveal your glory to us, that we might know more of you, and that you would show us what it truly means for us to dwell in your presence. Thank you that it is possible through Christ, in whose name we pray.
[4:55] Amen. Well, as we have been journeying with the people of God through the book of Exodus, it's natural that we ourselves reflect on our own journey with the Lord.

As God was present with his people as they wandered through the wilderness, so Jesus is present with us on our journey to our eternal promised land. The question for us is, what is Jesus doing for us whilst we are on this journey?
How does he sustain us and walk with us? Because sometimes I think we struggle to answer that question. We'd probably be very quick to say, I know that in the past, Jesus died for my sins on the cross and was raised.
My salvation goes back to his atoning death, and rightly so. And we know in the future, Jesus will come as judge of the living and the dead. All things are headed in the right direction, but that is past and that is future.
What about now? How does the Lord lead us and guide us through our journey in all of our days? What is the active work of Jesus on behalf of the believer in the presence of the Lord?
[6:10] And it's something wonderful that we get a reflection of in this tabernacle. This tabernacle is a big living parable of what it means to enter the presence of God.

It is Christ in canvas, as we said last week. And as we come to the end of Exodus, our eyes are focused on to the future. Because we reach a new beginning in the life of the people of Israel, where God dwells among them.
So as we come to the end of Exodus, let's just remind ourselves where we have been. Israel started as slaves, forced labor in a building project under Pharaoh.
But Exodus 2, their cry for rescue and from slavery came up to God, and God heard their groaning. And God remembered his covenant.
The promises that he'd made in history to his people, he would keep. When we met Moses, Moses met God at the burning bush.
[7:15] And he was raised up as a mediator between God and his people. And through him, God promises he will save these people from their slavery, and take them to a land of their own.

God reveals his glory again and again in Exodus. He reveals his glory in the plagues over Egypt. He reveals his glory in the Passover. He reveals himself as rescuer and redeemer of his people, and leads them to Sinai.
His glory on the mountain. His glory given in the law. And he shows his intent to dwell among his people. That even when they fail terribly with the golden calf, because of the intercession of Moses, his mediator, they are saved, redeemed, and will dwell with him once more.
This is a story of people starting as slaves to being saved, to serving. From a forced building project under Pharaoh, to a joyful participation in building the tent of God.
How wonderfully the lives of the people of Israel have been changed through this book. And as we join in chapter 40, we see the conclusion of Exodus.
[8:35] Starting, the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, on the first day of the month, you shall erect the tabernacle of the tent of meeting. Why is this time marker important?

Well, because it's a new year. Given the time it actually takes to consecrate the tabernacle in the law, the tabernacle would be fully constructed for the one-year anniversary of the Exodus from Egypt.
A marker in the life of their people that God has made something new. This new year marks a new stage where he will dwell with his people. And God's anniversary gift to his people will be himself. A tent in which he will dwell among them. But I wonder if you noticed as we read, this chapter is so heavily focused on the work of Moses.
And there are two points this morning I want to make. One is to look at Moses and the second is to look at Christ. But we need to see Moses in this chapter first. Moses is the servant of God.
[9:40] Now if this story is one of the Exodus of God's people, their redemption from slavery to God's presence, none of this would have happened without two things.

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God's initiative and Moses as mediator. If God did not start this, the people would have lived in slavery forever. If Moses was not mediator, they could not have gotten it anyway.
The people simply couldn't save themselves. Without Moses, they never would have made it out. God chose a mediator between his holy presence and a sinful people for their safety and also their sanctification.
Moses is extraordinarily important to this story. And in this chapter, notice he is the one who does all the work. Previously in chapter 35, the people were called to participate.
And wonderfully, they do, they bring all the materials and they help construct the tabernacle, all the furnishings and items. But when the assembly comes of putting these things together, it is Moses who does the work.
[10:50] Because the first thing Moses does is construct the tent of God. Look at verses 2 to 8. God gives him the order in which to construct the tabernacle, inside to outside.

And in verses 16 to 33, we get two repeating refrains. First, Moses. Moses does the work, 16 to 18. This Moses did, according to all the Lord had commanded him.
So he did. In the first month of the second year, on the first day of the month, the tabernacle was erected. Moses erected the tabernacle. He laid its bases, et cetera, et cetera.
Fourteen times in 17 verses, you're told that it is Moses who does this work. Moses sets up the tent. Moses burns the incest. Moses sacrifices the animal and gives the grain offering.
He is front and center at the end of Exodus. But the second refrain in those verses, is that it is all done as the Lord commanded before the face of the Lord.
[11:53] Eight times in that same set of verses, Moses does all he does, obediently, under the command of the Lord. Nothing missing. No instruction disobeyed.

The people contribute, but ultimately it is God's mediator who builds God's house. And again in Exodus, even after the Catholic, there is reconciliation, but still only Moses does the work.
His second rule, Moses consecrates the holy place. Look at verses 9 and 10. Then you shall take the anointing oil, and anoint the tabernacle and all that is in it, and consecrate it and all its furniture so that it may become holy.
You shall anoint the altar of burnt offering and all its utensils, and consecrate the altar so the altar may become most holy. Now the Lord gave instructions for this anointing oil, fragrant oil that was set to mark things as holy.
This is the Lord's. This is for holy use. This is set apart. All these things set apart for the service of the Lord. The altar, the courtyard, everything.
[13:07] It's marked as holy to him. The one thing we're told is most holy is the altar, the place where sacrifice is made. And every item of furniture in God's house is separate and apart for him.

You don't go and take the lampstand from the temple and take it out to light a birthday party in Israel. It stays in the temple. It is important that it is there. And if that's true, then all the people handling these holy objects must be holy too.
Verse 13, Put on Aaron the holy garments, and you shall anoint him and consecrate him that he may serve me as a priest. You shall bring his sons and put coats on them and anoint them as you anointed their father that they may serve me as priests.
And their anointing shall permit them a perpetual priesthood throughout their generations. The holy place needs holy people to do holy work.
Now the roles of the priests are expanded on much more in Leviticus and in the coming books. But for now, these men are set aside to serve the Lord. Invited into the place of rest that Israel can't access, to act as mediators for the rest of Israel's life.
[14:27] It is a great privilege to be a priest, a holy burden to be carried. But unless we miss it, who is the first high priest of Israel?

We might answer, factually, well, it's Aaron. Yes, but think about who Aaron has been. Aaron the calf maker. Aaron the sinful failure who led the people astray.
Aaron the, well, here the repentant, restored, holy high priest over the house of Israel. Who less likely than Aaron to be made a holy priest over the house of God and yet by God's choice, his sovereign goodness, his restoration, even his kindness and grace on display, Aaron is restored to this role and marked as holy among of his sons to do this work.
Could there be a more gracious picture at the end of Exodus than the fact that Aaron keeps his role as high priest even after the calf? Well, as Moses mediated for him, so Aaron and his sons will go

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on to mediate for the people.
God, by his grace, will take sinners and make them holy and set them apart for a holy task. How important that Aaron knows as he serves the sinners of Israel that he is a sinner too and can empathize with their weaknesses and intercede for them before the throne of God.
[16:03] So all's looking well. The tabernacle is made, the tabernacle is set up, the priests are consecrated and ready to go. Moses puts everything in place, he makes the courtyard, and the people of God watches the last tent peg is hammered in and as the curtain of the courtyard closes in verse 33, Moses finished the work.

But then verse 34, the clouds cover the tent of meeting and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle. Moses was not able to enter the tent of meeting because the clouds settled on it and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle.
This is a stunningly beautiful and absolutely terrifying moment because God now does dwell with his people, the holy God dwelling among them as he promised that he would.
But the glory of the Lord is so holy that even Moses, the servant of God, cannot access his presence. He can't get in. Shut out from the glory of God and that should ring an alarm bell because if none of this could have happened without Moses, if he was the one whom the Lord appeared to in the burning bush and he went up Sinai and received the law and he came down and interceded for the people at the golden calf and now even he can't get in.
The presence of the Lord is a problem for the people. He is too holy to dwell among them, so holy that even Moses, though a mediator, is still a sinner and cannot enter.
[17:51] Even he, set apart, isn't fit for the presence of God. Exodus is an unfinished tune. The people are rescued.

God dwells among them. They're on the way to a promised land, but the presence of God in their midst is not a safe thing for them. He will go everywhere with them.
He will spread his name among the earth through his people, but the people still need a mediator. They're still locked out of the presence of God.
The Eden project is still on hold. If Moses can't get in, what hope is there for these people? Exodus ends telling us that we need a better mediator even than Moses, the servant of God.
And the question is, where will we find one of those? Now, I have to confess that pretty much my favorite Bible book, if we're allowed one of those, is the book of Hebrews.
[19:00] It's a beautiful, multifaceted, New Testament reflection on Moses and the tabernacle and the Exodus and everything we're reading here, what it means to be the people of God.

And it is nigh on impossible to preach the end of Exodus and the tabernacle about referencing back to Hebrews continuously. If you were here last week, last week's sermon was chock full of quotes from Hebrews.
And what I want to say is, if it isn't broken, don't fix it. So we're going to continue in Hebrews again. Hebrews chapter 3, verses 1 to 6. You might want to turn this one up. It's really entanglement for our understanding of this passage.
Hebrews 3, verses 1 to 6 says this. Consider Jesus, the apostle and high priest of our confession, who is faithful to him who appointed him, just as Moses was also faithful in all God's house, for Jesus has been counted worthy of more glory than Moses, as much more glory as the builder of a house has more honor than the house itself.
Every house is built by someone, but the builder of all things is God. Now Moses was faithful in all God's house as a servant to testify to the things that would be spoken later, but Christ is faithful over God's house as a son, and we are his house.
[20:26] Hebrews says our thoughts of Moses should lead us to Jesus, because Jesus is the son of God who has perfect access to God's dwelling place.

That's the second point this morning. Jesus is the son of God, and he has perfect access to God's dwelling place. Because when God comes home, Moses the servant is locked out, but Christ the son is welcome in.
Christ's glory is so magnificently on display, as he is the one who has already come from God's presence in his incarnation from heaven to earth, which means that he can freely access that which is his own rightful home.
Moses was faithful, wonderfully. It is no denigration of Moses in the role that he was given as servant to say that he is only a servant, but that is all Moses is able to do, wonderfully faithful, to

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serve the Lord, but not the son.
But Christ is the son over the house of God, and Hebrews just tells us that we are the house of God now. What started with the tabernacle, the place where God's glory dwelt, is now God's people, the place where he dwells by his spirit.
[21:52] In Christ, and through his atoning death, the veil separating man from the presence of God was torn as we saw last week. Through his death, we are forgiven and made clean, and by his resurrection offered eternal life.

We receive both by being united with Christ by his spirit. The presence of God comes to dwell in us and with us as his people.
And so taking that idea further, we want to reflect on the way that Christ is with us as we walk through the wilderness now.
So Exodus 40, verse 36, throughout all their journeys, whenever the cloud was taken up from over the tabernacle, the people of Israel would set out.
Now God's glory is made manifest to Israel once more. But God's glory has been manifested multiple times, as we said before, at the Red Sea in conquest, appearing ominously in the wilderness when Israel grumbled against the Lord, the fire at Sinai.
[23:04] But when Moses asks to see the glory of God, what did God do back in chapter 33? Well, God revealed not more of his physical glory, but spoke to Moses more of his name, more of his character.

that God is a God who punishes evil as a God of justice, a God of salvation who rescues, a God of forgiveness who can forgive even the most grievous sin, a God who will dwell with his people, and a God who intends to do all of those things is a God of immense glory.
It's a God's glory that we see displayed in the face of Christ himself, a glory that leads us in the wilderness even now. For the Son of God, by his Spirit, leads his pilgrim people, the church, on their way to their heavenly home.
Throughout all the journeys, Christ walks with us by his Spirit. If Israel could not have gotten through Exodus without Moses, how much more can the church not get to our heavenly home without Christ?
We live out the Exodus pattern, rescue from slavery to sin, through the death of Christ, our Passover lamb, taking the wrath of God away, guided and guarded in the wilderness until we reach our heavenly home.
[24:30] And before we think about the way in which Christ does that, I want us to just pause and meditate on one final aspect of the tabernacle that we haven't quite had time to look at yet, and the way it points us forward to our heavenly home in the promised new creation.

So I want you to cast your minds to the most holy place. The most holy place is the room at the back of the tabernacle. Now I want you to follow with me for a minute.
This is quite detail-orientated at this point. In the tabernacle, at the back, is a holy place. It is a 15 foot by 15 foot by 15 foot cube.
In it, the golden ark of God, the throne of his presence, exists amongst his people, and it is framed in gold. One day later, King Solomon will build a temple, and there will be a bigger, more permanent holy place, and it will be a 30 foot by 30 foot by 30 foot cube in which the ark rests, the throne room of the palace of God.
You might think, well, so far, it's so cryptic. Let me say, there is only one more golden cube in the entire Bible. It's right at the end. We actually already had it read out, cursed in, in our reading in Revelation.
[25:48] Read about the vision that John gave, was given, and it was laden with symbolism about the heavenly city of God's people. And the heavenly city in that passage is described as a 12,000 stadia by 12,000 stadia by 12,000 stadia golden cube at which the throne of God rests in the center.

It's bizarre symbolic detail until you come to realize that we're being told the vision at the end of all things, the holy, heavenly city will be the holy place becoming the whole place.
Instead of a courtyard and a camp and a tabernacle, God's presence will exist fully with all his people all gathered around the throne together and there will not be another place that the people of God can be other than made holy and welcomed fully into his presence finally.
Revelation 21, verse 3, 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 their God.

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One day, God's dwelling place will be among man fully. The holy place will become the whole place because God's people are his dwelling place and one day we will see that in full.
[27:13] Right at the center of the tabernacle is the promise that God will one day dwell fully and finally with his people. They will not be able to be on the outside if they are his, they will be with him forever.

But until that day, he will still dwell with us. it is not merely a future hope, but a hope that by his spirit now the Lord dwells with us and one day we will see the reality of that in full.
But his dwelling with us now is an invitation to that beautiful day of the new creation when we will be with him fully forever. Where one day, as the prophet Habakkuk says, the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord as the waters cover the sea.
If the work of Christ is to make new creations of men by his blood, the finished work will be making a new creation of all things with those newly created people dwelling in it.
And that is the hope the tabernacle ultimately points us to. And as God's pilgrim people taking the presence of God with us, so we invite people into the presence of God that they may see Christ, repent of their sins, come and know him and dwell with him and he in them and one day dwell with him forever.
[28:40] That is the hope of the glory of God that we preach, that we speak to those we meet. But as we conclude, if that is the future in the tabernacle and Christ death on the cross or the past, what is Christ doing for us as he dwells with us by his spirit now?

Well, the Lord Jesus ever lives to intercede for his people. If the whole story of the tabernacle was a place where holy people would do the work of intercession between the people and God, Jesus, the one who is qualified to sit on the throne of heaven intercedes for us from the throne of heaven.
He ministers to us from the holy place day and night interceding for the people of God, the perfect sinless mediator before the Father. And thus, Hebrews chapter 7, 25 and 26 say this, he is able to save to the uttermost those who journey to God through him since he always lives to make intercession for them.
For it was indeed fitting that we should have such a high priest, holy, innocent, unstained, separated from sinners and exalted above the heavens. What does Jesus do for you?
What does Jesus do for his church as we make our pilgrim way to that heavenly new creation? Jesus intercedes for you in heaven, your great high priest.
[30:21] The Father looks at your sin and the Lord Jesus offers his life as sacrifice on the altar of the throne of heaven saying, Father, I've died for them and he prays for you.

It's such a precious truth to think that the Lord's intercession for you is an active thing that he does as your great high priest. The Lord Jesus prays for you. As one minister I heard recently put it, there is not one Christian alive whose name does not pass the lips of the Lord Jesus before the Father.
He intercedes for us all. He intercedes that we may persevere. If you're ever worried about making that final day, know that Christ prays for you as you walk with him.
He will not leave you. He will always be with you. His presence guiding you and guarding you.
Making intercession for you because he does not want his people to be away from him but with him, to dwell with him forever and thus he will guarantee their way to preserve and persevere his people for that final day when we dwell with him.
Jesus does the full work of a perfect priest in a heavenly tabernacle that we might have perfect access to the throne of God above.
[31:51] You need never fear that you are cast out, never fear that your prayers will not be heard and answered because you are before the throne in Christ by his spirit. and one day we will join him there in full.

So as we finish and turn to prayer, hear these words of Jesus' own intercession before his father for his followers from John's gospel before we pray. Jesus says, Father, I desire that they also, whom you have given to me, may be with me where I am to see my glory that you have given me because you love me before the foundation of the world.
O righteous father, even though the world does not know you, I know you, and these know that you have sent me. I made known to them your name, and I will continue to make it known the love with which you have loved me may be in them and I in them.
Let's pray. Amen. Amen. Amen. Lord Jesus, we thank you that you are our heavenly high priest, that you intercede for us day and night before the throne of our heavenly father.

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We thank you for your prayers for us though we are so weak and lowly, so sinful. Lord, you love us and you never stop doing your work of intercession for us.
[33:25] Thank you for your atoning death by which we live, your resurrected life in which we have access to the throne and we long for the day when you come again and ask that it will come soon.

Come, Lord Jesus. Until that day, Lord, keep us faithful, thankful and trusting in you. Amen.

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