

Hebrews 8:1-6

The Sanctuary and True Tabernacle

A minister of the sanctuary, and of the true tabernacle, which the Lord pitched, and not man – v. 2

As we make our way through this epistle to the Hebrews, it's interesting to note the designations for Christ that are found nowhere else in the New Testament but in this epistle to the Hebrews. Back in 6:20 we found Christ designated as our *Forerunner*. He's gone before us in death and he's gone before us into glory. And as the good Shepherd of his sheep he goes before his sheep where ever he leads them. Nowhere else in the New Testament do you find this designation for Christ as our Forerunner.

In 7:22 we noted that Christ is designated as our *Surety*. As our Surety he makes good on his promises. He promises to receive us and he promises to forgive us of our sins and he promises to give us eternal life. As our Surety he takes upon himself the responsibility for seeing his followers safely through to heaven. And again nowhere else in the New Testament do you find this designation for Christ. He is our Surety.

Now as we come to 8:2 we find another unique designation for Christ. It's an extension of what we have in v. 1 where Christ is said to be *our high priest, who is set on the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens*. And then the designation continues in v. 2 where Christ is called *a minister of the sanctuary and of the true tabernacle which the Lord pitched and not man* – A minister of the sanctuary and of the true tabernacle. Paul is making reference to that tabernacle which the Israelites carried with them in the wilderness. We're given a very detailed description of this tabernacle and the articles of furniture that went with this tabernacle back in Exod. 25. We find a more detailed description of this tabernacle in the next chapter of Hebrews – {**cf. 9:1-5**}.

What this tabernacle was, in essence, was a tent – a tent that the Israelites would set up or pitch at various places in the wilderness and that they would take down again when they were directed to move on in their wilderness journeys. You could call it a portable sanctuary, I suppose.

What we're being told in 8:2 is that there is a spiritual counterpart to this tabernacle and this sanctuary or tabernacle was specifically designed by God and built by man in order to function as an emblem for heaven. Notice what it says in v. 5 about the priests and the sanctuary itself: *Who serve unto the example and shadow of heavenly things, as Moses was admonished of God when he was about to make the tabernacle: for, See, saith he, [that] thou make all things according to the pattern shewed to thee in the mount.*

This tabernacle and the worship that was led by the priests in this tabernacle were shadows of heaven. But with Christ having come there was no longer any need for the shadows. And today, at this very moment, Christ functions as a minister in the sanctuary and in the true tabernacle that was pitched by God and not by man. Isn't it interesting to see the language that is used here. It's as if the author of Hebrews is saying to us that God has pitched a tent of his own a tent or tabernacle that only he could pitch and not man. And

when it comes to the service that takes place in the tabernacle that God has pitched and not man we're told in v. 6 that *Christ hath obtained a more excellent ministry*. You and I are the beneficiaries of that more excellent ministry this morning. And yet I dare say that this is not a subject that Christians think about all that much or that many Christians are even aware of. Christ is a minister of the sanctuary and of the true tabernacle which the Lord pitched and not man. But what does that mean to you and me this morning?

I dare say that if we can understand the truth behind this designation of Christ then we can also learn just what we can expect of Christ. And before I go any further let me simply ask you if you've ever considered what you can expect from Christ? I think I can safely say that across this city of Indianapolis this morning where many will be gathering in the name of Christ in churches of every size and shape and style of worship imaginable there will be a very strong emphasis on what God or Christ should expect of his people. And I'm not being critical of other churches because of that. Our own shorter catechism tells us that the Scriptures principally teach what man is to believe concerning God and what duty God requires of man. It's a valid and even necessary subject – the subject of what God expects of man.

But in contrast to what would have to be called a common subject in many churches, our attention is directed to an altogether different subject this morning by this designation of Christ as a minister of the sanctuary and of the true tabernacle which God pitched and not man. And if we're going to understand and appreciate what we can expect from Christ in this more excellent ministry that he's obtained then we're going to have to understand the meaning of this designation given for Christ in v. 2. And so that's what I want to direct your attention to this morning for the moments that remain.

And even though there are two parts to the designation given to Christ in this verse I'm going to narrow the scope of our study to the second of these two things by calling your attention to:

Christ, the Minister of the True Tabernacle

And I will endeavor to answer the question this morning of what we can expect from Christ because he is the minister of the true tabernacle.

I. We Can Expect Christ's Presence

And I draw this truth from the literal meaning of the term *tabernacle* in the Bible. When the Israelites were given those very detailed instructions by Moses, which Moses had received from God about the building of the tabernacle in the wilderness, they were to build that tabernacle for a very definite purpose. Listen to the words of Ex 25:8 *And let them make me a sanctuary; that I may dwell among them.*

You begin to see, then, the meaning or the purpose of the sanctuary or the tabernacle – it was a place where God would manifest his presence. And it was in the inner chamber of this sanctuary that God would meet with Moses and speak to him face to face. It was

above the tabernacle that a cloudy pillar would appear by day and a pillar of fire by night. That cloud and that pillar represented the presence of God among his people. And by his presence he would guide them and protect them and provide for them throughout the days of their journey in the wilderness.

Now if you know your Old Testament history then you will recall that the time came when the Israelites were settled in the promised land. Their wilderness journeys ended when they crossed the Jordan river and conquered the land of Canaan. And when David came to the throne to be the king of Israel he was distressed by the fact that while the Israelites lived in their stable houses the tabernacle was still the place for worship. This seemed unfitting to the Lord's honor and so David had it in his heart to build a temple for the Lord.

David would not be the one to build that temple – he would draw up the plans for it with the guidance of the Holy Spirit and he would gather the materials for it but the actual task of building that temple would fall on David's son, Solomon. And in 1Kings 6 we read how the word of the Lord came to Solomon where God spoke to him beginning in v. 12: *Concerning this house which thou art in building, if thou wilt walk in my statutes, and execute my judgments, and keep all my commandments to walk in them; then will I perform my word with thee, which I spake unto David thy father: And I will dwell among the children of Israel, and will not forsake my people Israel. So Solomon built the house, and finished it.*

Oh the building was grander but the purpose of the building remained the same – a dwelling place for God which meant the presence of God with his people. Now keeping this bit of Old Testament history in mind and remembering how our text tells us in Heb 8:6 that Christ has obtained a more excellent ministry the thing we must ask now is how does this ministry of the true tabernacle function today?

And the answer is found in the truth that Christ himself is the true tabernacle. Remember the concept of *dwelling*. God would dwell among his people. And with that concept in mind listen to the words of Jn. 1:14 *And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth.* Add to that verse Col 2:9 *For in him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily.*

Add to these verses the promise that is given to us by Christ at the end of Matthew's gospel - *Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen* (Mt. 28:20). Based on the truth and the promise of these verses we are led to conclude that as the minister of the sanctuary and the true tabernacle we can expect that Christ will minister his own presence to our souls and to our church.

This is what lifts our religion out the realm of mere academic theory and gives it a life breathing vitality. Christ is with us. Where two or three are met together in his name he is there in the midst of his people. This is what keeps our religion out of the realm of dead orthodoxy and mere theological academia. We have the presence of Christ. It is the primary ministry of the Holy Spirit to minister Christ to our souls.

I know I've referred often along the way to my favorite book – the one I would want if I was stuck on an island and could only have one book besides my Bible. It's a book written by an old Scottish Presbyterian in the 1800's by the name of Hugh Martin called *The Abiding Presence*. I was informed recently by Ruben, our book researcher, that this book is now back in print.

What Hugh Martin does in this book is to take the very first verse of Matthew's gospel – Mt. 1:1 *The book of the generation of Jesus Christ* and he compares this verse to the last verse in Matthew's gospel, the verse I cited a moment ago – Mt. 28:20 *Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world*. And from these two verses he explains in great detail how the presence of Christ is manifested to the people of God through the book of God. The book represents the objective truths of Christianity – our doctrine. But the book without the presence of Christ becomes a dead letter. And the presence of Christ without the book becomes some undefineable mystical experience. It takes the objective elements of our faith working in connection with the subjective elements of our faith to know the abiding presence of Christ.

I was reminded of this yesterday when I had lunch with Jason and Danielle Boyle. Danielle was tracing for me the history of her family how they started out in the Dutch Reformed Church and then went to a Pentecostal Church before ending up in the Free Presbyterian Church in Cloverdale. She went from a dead church to a lively church but lively in ways that they were not altogether happy with until at last they ended up in the Free Church. Her testimony reminded me of Hugh Martin's book *The Abiding Presence* and I think the reason I've come to esteem that book so highly is because it brings doctrine and experience together.

We can and should know the presence of Christ in our lives. That's a part of Christ's ministry of the true tabernacle. But in order to know his presence we must know the ministry of the Holy Spirit bringing the reality of the truth of God's word to our hearts. And when we know this then we certainly bask in the excellency of Christ's more excellent ministry to our souls.

The first thing we come to expect, then, from Christ being the minister of the true tabernacle is the presence of Christ. But the excellence of Christ's ministry doesn't stop there. For we see next that due to Christ being the minister of the true tabernacle:

II. We Can Expect Christ's Power

I find it very interesting that when you read the accounts of the building of the tabernacle and the building of the temple you find in both cases that when the service of these tabernacles was inaugurated they were both inaugurated with a manifestation of the glory of God.

Listen to the words of Exod. 40:33-35 *And he reared up the court round about the tabernacle and the altar, and set up the hanging of the court gate. So Moses finished the work. Then a cloud covered the tent of the congregation, and the glory of the LORD filled*

the tabernacle. And Moses was not able to enter into the tent of the congregation, because the cloud abode thereon, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle.

We find the same thing with the temple when the temple was built. Listen to the words of 2Chron. 7:1-3 which describe for us the dedication of that temple: *Now when Solomon had made an end of praying, the fire came down from heaven, and consumed the burnt offering and the sacrifices; and the glory of the LORD filled the house. And the priests could not enter into the house of the LORD, because the glory of the LORD had filled the LORD'S house. And when all the children of Israel saw how the fire came down, and the glory of the LORD upon the house, they bowed themselves with their faces to the ground upon the pavement, and worshipped, and praised the LORD, saying, For he is good; for his mercy endureth for ever.*

These accounts of the glory of the Lord certainly show us the power of God to humble and to fill and thrill his people. When such manifestations of God take place they have the powerful impact of impressing upon those that behold his glory the majestic splendor of God's holiness, as well as our unworthiness on account of our sins and God's graciousness to receive us nevertheless on account of Christ. Such manifestations of God's glory have the power to transform the lives of Christ's followers.

How then, does Christ, as the minister of the sanctuary and true tabernacle manifest the greater excellence of his ministry in such fashion? The answer is to be found in Acts 2 where we have the account of the Day of Pentecost. *And when the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place. And suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting. And there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance.*

And before that day was over you would find thousands of souls coming under conviction of sin – souls who heard the preaching of the gospel in their own languages – that was the gift of tongues. Souls who would cry out *Men and brethren, what shall we do?* (Acts 2:37). To whom Peter would respond - *Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost* (Acts 2:38).

This was power indeed – the power to bring men low and then to lift them up in salvation – the power to penetrate hard hearts, enabling men and women to see the awful nature of their sin and the truth that their sins crucified the Son of God. I love to think on the power that was manifested on the Day of Pentecost but the thing I want you to see now is how this glorious event fits in to the more excellent ministry of Christ as the minister of the true tabernacle.

His ministry is revealed to us in v. 33 of Acts 2. Speaking of Christ in his sermon Peter says: *Therefore being by the right hand of God exalted*, doesn't that correspond to our text in Hebrews – especially v. 1 - *We have such a high priest, who is set on the right hand of*

the throne of the Majesty in the heavens And how does Christ execute that ministry of the sanctuary and true tabernacle? We go on to read in Acts 2:33 *and having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Ghost, he hath shed forth this, which ye now see and hear.*

Here, then, is the glory of God in the temple – the Holy Ghost shed forth by our high priest! And in that power the gospel would go forth and transform lives. In that power the followers of Christ would know a fire of devotion lit in their hearts and fanned to a blaze and there would be no power on earth that could restrain the power of the early church. I have heard it said and I believe it's true that the wave of that Pentecostal power has continued through the ages and reaches us here at this very hour.

And as a result of this aspect of Christ's ministry in the true tabernacle the people of God should expect the power they need – the power to overcome sin and the power to pursue holiness and the power to make known the glorious gospel of Jesus Christ. Anyone who has closed in with Christ to the saving of his soul is very much aware that it took supernatural power to penetrate his heart and convict of him of sin and then compel him to call on Christ.

And the same power it took to save a sinner initially is the same power that it takes to live the Christian life. Don't we know this? It takes power to pray and it takes power to strive for holiness. These are not things that come natural to the flesh. Indeed the flesh opposes Christian devotion and practice and the constant need in the Christian's life is for the power needed to overcome the world, the flesh, and the devil.

Thank God this morning that we have such an high priest who is set on the right hand of the throne of the majesty in the heavens; a minister of the sanctuary and of the true tabernacle of God. And as a part of his ministry he continues to grant the power of the Holy Ghost to those who believe in him.

And so we see some of the things we can expect from Christ on account of his more excellent ministry. We can expect his presence. Indeed we can expect his fullness for *he is given to be the head over all things to the church*, Paul writes in Eph. 1 *which is his body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all.* And we can expect his power because he sheds abroad his Holy Spirit from the his place at the right hand of God.

Could I say a brief word in closing that because Christ is a minister of the true tabernacle:

III. We Can Expect to be Where He Himself is in Heaven

Most commentators are in agreement that the references to the sanctuary and the true tabernacle are references to heaven. This makes sense since a tabernacle is a dwelling and heaven is generally regarded as the place where Christ dwells. And when it comes to the notion of a tabernacle which God pitches and not man it certainly brings to mind Christ's words in Jn. 14:2,3 *In my Father's house are many mansions: if [it were] not [so], I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, [there] ye may be also.*

One of my favorite Spurgeon devotionals from his Morning and Evening devotions is his devotion that is dated March 22 and is based on the verse Jn. 17:24 *Father, I will that they also, whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am.* Spurgeon makes an excellent point that every time a Christian dies and goes to be with Christ it is in answer to this prayer from Christ.

In a way that only Spurgeon can convey it he describes the odds with which Christians find themselves with Christ when they're burdened for a loved one that is dying. We would pray *Lord, we would that this loved one be with us where we are* while Christ prays *Father, I will that they also, whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am.*

Is this not a function of Christ's ministry of the sanctuary? He prays for us to be with him where he is and when the grieving Christian at last thinks about it and realizes that he is at odds with his Savior then he eventually relinquishes his hold on his loved one and finds the grace to let him go.

And we can let them go because we know that we'll be reunited with them in glory in just a short while. What a blessed hope we possess on account of our Forerunner and the one who is the minister of the true tabernacle. I've never forgotten the dying words of Charles Wynalda when he said to me *this world at its best is boring and at its worst is sinful.* What a blessing to know that there's a new heaven and new earth coming. What a blessing to know that life in this sin cursed world is not the end. What a glorious hope we possess in knowing that as the minister of the true tabernacle Christ has gone to prepare a place for us and that the day will come when we'll be with him forever.

I wonder this morning as we close – what are your expectations from Christ this morning? Some people never get beyond the expectations of this world. They hope they can have a happy and meaningful life. They hope they can enjoy good health and prosperity. They hope that things will go well for them regarding their children and grandchildren. If your expectations never get you beyond the here and now then I think I can affirm with certainty that you will be mastered by disappointments.

The Christian, on the other hand has great expectations – expectations that apply now and expectations that apply to the hereafter. We're taught to expect Christ's presence and to expect it now during our pilgrimage in this world. And we're taught to expect that he'll minister to us the power we need to live in fellowship with him with an aim to his glory. And we're taught to expect that when the time comes that we lay down the tabernacles of our bodies in this world we do pass immediately into his presence where we await the resurrection of our bodies just as Christ's body was resurrected.

These expectations are all made the more certain because our Savior is a minister of the sanctuary and of the true tabernacle. May the Lord, therefore, move us to deep reverence and appreciation for all that is Christ is to us because in him our expectations will surely be met.