

The Ark: Preparation

The Ark

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Bible Text: Exodus 25:1-9,14-15

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In Exodus chapter 25 God gives Moses and the Israelites the instructions for how to build this tabernacle and we are going to draw a parallel today of how to build our lives to prepare for the presence of God. It says in verse one:

And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying, Speak unto the children of Israel, that they bring me an offering: of every man that giveth it willingly with his heart ye shall take my offering. And this is the offering which ye shall take of them; gold, and silver, and brass, And blue, and purple, and scarlet, and fine linen, and goats' hair, And rams' skins dyed red, and badgers' skins, and shittim wood, Oil for the light, spices for anointing oil, and for sweet incense, Onyx stones, and stones to be set in the ephod, and in the breastplate. And let them make me a sanctuary; that I may dwell among them. According to all that I shew thee, after the pattern of the tabernacle, and the pattern of all the instruments thereof, even so shall ye make it.¹

Now I hope you would admit with me when you read that, maybe for the very first time or the first time in a very long time, there is a lot of questions that come to your mind. Why is this what God had the Israelites get? Why do we need badger skins? Why do we need blue and scarlet? Why these colors? Why built in this manner?

And I think one of the things that we have to address from the very beginning is this. One of the ways that we miss out on or one of the ways that we void the presence of God in our life is we so question the way that God would have us build our life, that we never build it the way that he wants it built.

And so today we are going to study how does he want the tabernacle built, how does he want our lives built so that we can experience the power and the presence of God? Before we deal with the how, though, just a couple of things. And the first item that I want to address is this. What was the purpose of the ark? I mean, if you watch *Indiana Jones*, the movie and you see all that goes on with all the renditions of the World War II and all the acting there, you see a very secular Hollywood version of what this item, what this ark would possess. Yes, they get it right on the fact of the power and the holiness aspect, but when you look at the ark in the Old Testament, particularly as we will take a journey the next couple of weeks over the Jordan River, around the city of Jericho, into the temple of Dagon, what you will see is that the Ark of the Covenant had a two-fold purpose on planet earth. And the ark, or the presence, of God has a two-fold purpose in our life.

¹ Exodus 25:1-9.

Purpose number one, for God to dwell in us or for God to dwell with us. If you look in verse eight: Let them make me a sanctuary so that I might sit back and enjoy drinking sweet tea. That is not what the Lord says. He says: “And let them make me a sanctuary; that I may dwell among them.”²

If you will fast forward to verse 22, the dimensions of the ark have been given. The way in which it is to be carried has been given. Look in verse 22.

“And there I will meet with thee, and I will commune with thee.”³

When we look at this famous Ark of the Covenant, the first purpose that God had for its construction was so that he would dwell with us. And this is what I find so intriguing about our culture today is we spend countless hours, unbelievable, untold amounts of dollars trying to run from the things of God, trying to avoid the presence of God, wanting to live our life just the way we want to live it. We go to great lengths to try to construct life as we think it should be, to create an image that we think would be satisfying not only to ourselves, but even some people in good conscience, even toward God. You know what his number one purpose is? He wants to dwell with us.

I am reminded of Luke chapter 15. We know it as the story of the prodigal son. I like to rename it the story of the loving dad. You know the story. The younger brother gets his inheritance. He wastes it all on what the Bible calls riotous living. He loses all his friends when he loses all his money. He finds himself a young Jewish boy feeding the pigs in the swamp. The Bible says that he comes to his senses one day. He says, “If I will go home and just be a servant of my dad, I will be in much better shape than this.”

When he comes up to the house we do not find the father, the figure that represents God in the story, we do not find him at the dinner table saying, “Huh, wondered when you would get home.” We do not find him out in the back yard mowing the lawn saying, “When I get done we will spend some time together.” What we see is a picture of God himself on the front porch waiting day and night, desiring nothing more than just to dwell with his child.

Have you thought about the picture here in Exodus? What have the Israelites been doing? Rebelling. They have been doubting. They have been questioning. Does that sound kind of like your life some days? Maybe you spend a day or two, a week or two, or maybe some of you have spent months running from the things of God, doubting the truth of God.

I have got some great news for you. Do you know what God wants more than anything? He wants to dwell with you. He wants your life to be so that his presence can be within you and that he can commune with you and he can converse with you. That is his purpose. He wants to dwell. And so when we look at the Ark of the Covenant, the first

² Exodus 25:8.

³ Exodus 25:22.

purpose was he wanted to dwell with his people. But the second purpose, which may get you a little bit more excited than the first, is that he wanted to destroy his enemies. God desired to destroy his enemies through what we know as the Ark of the Covenant.

Now in the next couple of weeks as we look at where this ark goes, we will see that because it goes around Jericho in a certain amount of time and in a certain way, the walls fall down, the Israelites win without a single shot being fired. We see that wherever the presence of God goes, those who would be named his enemies, those who would be against him, they fall in supernatural order.

As I have said, this is a parallel to our lives. Let me ask you a question. Maybe you are much like me. Have you looked at the news lately? Have you looked at the world that is around us and have you gotten the sense that I have that darkness, for lack of better terms, is increasing and light is decreasing, that the ways of the world are running rampant and the ways of holiness and righteousness seem to be ever shrinking? It seems like the world is getting more influence and the Church of Jesus Christ is getting less. And do you have that somewhat sick side inside of you, that I do, that says, "God, just knock them out. Just destroy them. Just bring down the brim." He is going to do it one day according to the book of, you know, the book of Revelation. Do you ever wake up one day and say, "God, why don't you take care of this right now? Why don't you take care of all this junk that is going on"?

You know, one of the exciting things about our study this summer is we are going to see that wherever the Ark of the Covenant went, when it was handled properly, the enemies and those who fought against God were supernaturally taken out of the picture.

I am reminded of 1 John 3:8. It says that Jesus Christ was manifested in the flesh, listen to this, to destroy the works of the devil. That is what it says in 1 John 3:8, that he was manifested to destroy the works of the devil.

Romans chapter 12:19, quoting Deuteronomy 32:35 says: "Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord."⁴

Do you know what one of our big problems is? Particularly when it comes to the presence of God? We think when we see the darkness, we think when we see the world running rampant, when there is a Jericho in our lives for, some reason we get this idea that God needs us to take those walls down. God needs our voices. God needs our hands. God needs our feet. And, yes, you can say that God utilizes his children. But when we get to Jericho he did not use his children to sling bows or to swing axes. He used his children to march around and to defeat in only a way that God would get the credit. The Bible doesn't say utilize vengeance on my behalf. He says, "Vengeance is mine."

Zechariah 4:6 says: "Not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit, saith the LORD of hosts."⁵

⁴ Romans 12:19.

⁵ Zechariah 4:6.

How do you explain that a box 16 cubic feet can take down an entire city just by being marched around it? Why? Because vengeance is mine says the Lord. Why, because not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit says the Lord. And so what I have presented to you in the purpose of the Ark of the Covenant paralleling it to the presence of God in our lives, we have access to the dwelling of God in our lives and that through that God will destroy the darkness that is around us.

Now let me ask you a pretty rhetorical dumb question. Who doesn't want that? Who doesn't desire that in your family? Who doesn't desire that in your neighborhood? Who doesn't desire that in your community? God dwelling in you and the works of the devil destroyed before you. In fact, I always say as I talk to people every day. That is what people desire. That is what the people of God desperately want. So why are they not experiencing? Why are you not experiencing? Why am I not experiencing it? Why do not communities experience it? Because often times we build the tabernacle with our own set of blue prints.

So let's go back into Exodus chapter 25 and look at the blue prints that God gave for the building of a life that could house the presence of God. The second thing since we dealt with the purpose is this: some what I call preliminary concerns. In the very beginning of the instructions of the tabernacle, before the box was even built God says in verse two:

“Speak unto the children of Israel, that they bring me an offering: of every man that giveth it willingly with his heart ye shall take my offering.”⁶

We see one of the preliminary concerns that God had in building this tabernacle was that this was going to be a very distinct place, a very distinct set of issues here. Notice who the Lord put his presence in, the children of Israel.

Now I will confess and I will admit that I absolutely believe in what we call the three omnis of the nature or the presence of God. God is omniscient. He is all knowing. And God is omnipotent. He is all powerful. And God is omnipresent. He is everywhere. In fact, Psalms 138 King David says, “I can go to the highest hill or go to the lowest valley and, God, you are there.”

However, for the specific powerful presence of God, he does not dwell in the midst of unbelief. He does not dwell in the midst of those who do not believe and follow his commands and his orders. He spoke this to the children of Israel, not the world at large. The access to the powerful presence of God has nothing to do with the country that you are from or the passport that originates from your life. It has everything to do, no matter what your language is, your color is or your bank statement is, are you a “child of the King?” Do you know Jesus Christ as your personal Lord and Savior? That is why the paupers of the world can be rich in God and the princes of this world can be poor. Because it has nothing to do with the outside stuff, but everything to do with do we or are we in a position for the presence of God, the children of Israel.

⁶ Exodus 25:2.

That is why John chapter one verses 11 and 12 says:

He came unto his own, and his own received him not. But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name.⁷

We can be his children. We have access to being his heir and access to him as our heavenly Father. Here one distinctfulness of the presence of God is that it wasn't for a region. It wasn't for an area. It was to a people.

Now most of you would say, "Well, I have got that one taken care of." You can go back to a day, a time, maybe a couple of months ago or a couple of years or even a couple of decades ago where you can say there was a time in my life where I was lost. There was a time in my life where I was a sinner headed towards the gates of hell, but I understood that Jesus lived for me, died for me, rose again and I confess him as my Lord and Savior. And you have been what the Bible calls born again. You have been saved. You are a child of God.

You say, "I have got that covered." But here the tabernacle, the presence of God, the distinctfulness is even more than just being identified as a child of God. Look at the last half of verse two. Let them bring an offering willingly.

Now as we go through the next couple of verses you can look at the gold, you can look at the silver. You can look at the brass and say that those are, for lack of better terms, some aspect or related to what we know as currency or monetary means. But the overwhelming majority of the stuff mentioned is not "money." When it says that they brought a free will offering it is in line with Romans chapter 12 verse one. It says that we are to make ourselves a living sacrifice to God. If we desire the presence of God, the powerful presence of God in our life, yes, we need to be saved, but we also need to be selfless. We also need to say, "Okay, God, it is yours, all of it, not just a portion, not just a part."

And I know sometime we get caught up in church talking about the 10 percent. I am also concerned about the other 90 percent. Not just that which we are to give, but that which is all to be used for his glory however. And what... not just finances. Let me ask you a question. Could it be that the presence of God is not powerful in your life because he doesn't have your marriage? He doesn't have your kids. He doesn't have your job. He doesn't have your neighborhood. I don't know what it is. And you can fill in the blank for you. But it says that they came and they brought a free will offering. They said, "Okay, God, we trust you. This is the part that I love. God, we think you can do it better than we can."

When you do that to God, it doesn't matter if it is a marriage, being a parent, a grandparent, a job. It doesn't matter what it is. When you say, "God, you can do this

⁷ John 1:11-12.

better than I can, tell me how to do it,” he says, “All right. Now we can get some stuff done. Now you have positioned yourself for the powerful presence of God in your life.”

And I am convinced that the overwhelming majority, if not almost all born again Christian believers, particularly in our culture, are missing out on the powerful presence of God, not because they are not saved, but because they are selfish and they are not saying, “God, you can have my time. You can have my calendar in addition to other things.” So that is the distinctiveness of the preliminary thoughts.

But there are also some unique details that God presents. And when you look at verse three and on, there is gold and there is silver and there is brass and you look at that and you say, “You know, that makes a lot of sense to me.” It needs some precious items. But when you get down to verse five would you just be honest with me that you kind of have to question. God, do you really know what you are doing? Rams’ skin? Oh, back to verse four. Goats’ hair. That is what every church really needs is a bunch of goat hair. Rams’ skins. Not just any rams’ skins, rams’ skins died red, badgers’ skin. Well, that is unique. In fact, one of the great debates and it is an issue we call a hermeneutical problem for lack of better terms, but one of the debates about this passage of Scripture and if you have a study Bible, one of the things that they will allude to is this debate over badger’s skins. Why? Because the badger as an animal was not indigenous to the area that the Israelites were traveling in at that current time. So why would God have them get something that they had no access to?

Well, last time I checked, Solomon when he built the temple got the trees from Lebanon, not where they were dwelling either. And what I think is so important to understanding the presence of God in our life is sometimes the details are specifically difficult to attain. In other words, God said, “I want you to set it up this way.” And how many times have you said in life, “But, God, that is not convenient for me. God, that doesn't work with my schedule right now. That is not in the budget. That is not in my time frame. God, do you know how busy my life is and you just messed it all up”?

Can you imagine the group of guys? And I can just imagine if I was in this group of guys. If I had been assigned to the badgers’ skins and they are 200 miles away and so we are on this overnight trek and we are sitting in front of a campfire. I can promise you, because I am a lot like Peter. I open my mouth and insert my foot on occasion. I would have looked at all the other guys with me and said, “You know what? Could we not just use some squirrel? Because we have got squirrel everywhere.” I mean, we... I mean I hit them in my car all the time. I mean, they... let’s just go get some squirrel.”

But God said, “No, no, no, no. I want badgers.

You know, a couple of years ago I had an opportunity to invite a musical group in to where I was serving at a local church. Musicians don’t get upset with this, okay? This is just a story that happens all the time. When you “book” a music group in whether it is a secular group or a Christian group, they have what are called riders. A rider is a long detailed contract of all the things that need to be done in order for the concert to go

exactly as they want it. And if you have ever read a rider from a music group, particularly the larger the group the more detailed the rider is, it is odd at times. They want 18 bottles of Ozarko water, 12 ounces in size. They want the room to be a certain temperature and designed in a certain way. And I will be honest with you. I was dealing with this situation and I got kind of a chip on my shoulder. I got... who do you think you are? I mean, do you think you are that important to Jesus that you need Ozarka water at a certain temperature and a certain amount? And I began to gripe and whine and fuss. And I called an old friend of mine who used to be, for lack of better terms, a touring artist. And I said, "What is up with this? What is this? Why do they want? This is ludicrous."

And he got to laughing and he said, "Jeff," he says, "Let me explain something to you, because obviously you are not a musician." That doesn't take much to realize. I got that. He said, "When you preachers show up and you go preach somewhere," "All you need are live bodies and a microphone. If you don't get a microphone you just yell at us."

He said, "But musicians are a little bit different. We have amplifiers and microphones and acoustics and the set up."

And I said, "Okay, I get that."

He said that when he was "touring" years ago, that as a part of the rider that they would send to churches and to cities and such, that they required in his room there would be a jar of 40 green M&Ms. Now I thought to myself that is the most unmusical thing I have ever heard of in all my life. Why do you need, number one M&Ms? Number two, do they all need to be green? And why do they need to be in a jar in your room? And here is what he told me. He said, "When you are traveling the country singing, usually when you get to a new site, you have got about four to five, maybe six hours before you go on stage." And he said, "If the details aren't taken care of, you have got a mess on your hands." He said, "When we went into the hotel room if there were 40 green M&Ms there, we knew that if they paid attention to the M&Ms, that the microphones were going to be okay." He said, "When we walked in and there were no M&Ms, we put our bags down, went straight to the arena that they were going to be singing at because they knew something had not been paid attention to."

Let me ask you. Have you got any badger skins in your life? We say, "God, I have got this covered, this covered. But surely you don't need green M&Ms. That is no big deal, right? I know you want me to do this with my life and that with my life, but this issue. That is just one little thing, God. It is no big deal. Surely you could overlook that one."

It was a big deal about the green M&Ms and it is a big deal to God. It was the badger skins and the rams' skins dyed red, the details were very specific and God took them very, very seriously. In fact, the last verses of your Bible make this statement.

Anybody who adds to or takes away from these words of the prophecy so shall be added unto them the plagues found in this book. In other words, we do not possess the right to look at how God orders life and say, "But, God if you would just add this, life would be a

lot better.” Or, “God, you really don’t mean for me to do that, right? No. I don’t really need to do that, because you really don’t need that.”

Do you understand that the tabernacle wasn’t what God needed. In fact, if you read Isaiah chapter 65 it says that heaven is his throne and earth is his footstool. He did not need a temporary building that was 30 by 30 feet. What we understand here is that God didn’t need it, that the people, the Israelites, needed it so that they could be in a position to experience the power and the presence of God. It was a distinct place. But the details were incredibly important.

And then there is one last final thought. Verse nine. “According to all that I shew thee, after the pattern of the tabernacle, and the pattern of all the instruments thereof, even so shall ye make it.”⁸

There were some particular aspects not only of the Ark of the Covenant, not only of the tabernacle, but of our own lives that we are to pay specific attention to.

Notice what it says in verse nine. “...after the pattern of the tabernacle.”⁹

In other words, God had already designed, God had already orchestrated what it was to look like before they even put the footholds in. He knew exactly what the dimensions were, exactly what the materials were before they even went to go in... after the pattern.

Now, guys, I am going to be honest with you. I am about to get a little bit touched with my feminine side for just a moment. But I really, I don’t know about you, but my dad taught me when it comes to marriage you can either be right or you can be happy. I choose happiness. My wife loves and adores fashion. Some of you all know that she is what I call my Goodwill girl. If you all see her today walking around, everything on her body came from Goodwill. It is incredible.

You say, Goodwill, she thinks it is like going into 100 women’s closets all at one time. She loves it, okay? She is into all that stuff. And you say, “Well, what about your feminine side?”

This last television season, because I want to be happy, I sat down night after night and I watched a television reality show with her called *Fashion Star*. Yeah. You have got to kind of check your masculinity at the door when you walk into that one. If you did not see it, it was the reality television show of a group of want to be top line designers. Men and women creating dresses and blouses and suits and jackets and all this stuff and they would create it and the goal was to be the last one standing or the last woman standing and she was. It was a female who won. And the purpose of this was for them to take it to the next level. But I noticed something when I was watching this show. That these, for lack of better terms, these artists, I would call these designers artists, because they are creating out... it is literally out of nothing. They would design a dress, they would design

⁸ Exodus 25:9.

⁹ Ibid.

a jacket, they would design a pair of pants and then once they got it the way they wanted it, listen to what they did. They made a pattern and then a brand name company and store would buy the pattern and mass produce it so that you and I, if we so desired could look just like or wear just what they had.

Here is the fascinating thing that I have learned via my wife, that if you were to go and buy the dress or the suit that was the original one, that that designer made, it would cost you thousands and thousands of dollars, because there is only one real one. But there are thousands of imitations, small replicas of the real thing, designed according to a pattern. They may not be made of the same material. They may not possess the same value, but they look the same. They have the same measurements and they are built to look and represent.

If you were to go in the book of Hebrews chapter nine specifically verse 24 it speaks that the things of earth are to be a pattern of the things of heaven. When you look at the tabernacle here, I don't think one day when I walk through the pearly gates of heaven there are going to be badger skins hanging on the wall. I don't know what the colors are going to look like and I am sure there is going to be a lot of gold, particularly on the streets. But the idea that you get in the book of Hebrews is that everything that God had them make in the tabernacle was to give them an earthly picture of a heavenly reality. It wasn't the same material and it wasn't the same value, but it was at least to represent here what is there.

Now you remember the Lord's prayer, right? We call it the Lord's Prayer. It actually should be called the disciple's prayer. In the gospels the disciples come to Jesus. They say, "Jesus, how should we pray?" He says, "When you pray, pray:"

"Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven."¹⁰

Let me ask you a question. How many times in life do we want God to change heaven so our earth can be different? And yet even the prayer Jesus taught us to pray, the picture of the tabernacle is that our life ought to represent on earth what it is one day going to represent in heaven.

Let me ask you a question. When it comes to the presence of God in your life, could it be that part of the void, part of the problem, part of not having the powerful presence of God in your life is because we are involved in participating or endorsing things on earth that we would never promote in heaven? Things we would never talk about in heaven, with words we would never use. And, guys, I know this is a southern thing. But it is still humorlessly sad. How many times have you ever heard somebody come unto you and say, "I got a funny joke to tell you, but I can't tell it in church"? Or "Don't use that kind of language in church."

¹⁰ Mathew 6:9-10.

Well, I have got a question. Why should we use it anywhere then? Why should we tell it anywhere then?

And so what we see is there was a pattern that what is on earth should imitate or should emulate that which is in heaven. And then there is this certain protocol. And I am going beyond what I read earlier. If you look down to verses 14 and 15 it says that when they had the ark that would be inside this tabernacle, that these two men were to carry it in a certain way on these staves and they were to carry it in a certain manner. In fact, in a couple of weeks we are going to see what happens when they carry it the wrong way. They die instantly. The protocol for the presence of God is that it was a mobile presence of God. The Ark of the Covenant did not just stay in the tabernacle. It would go across the River Jordan. It would go around the city of Jericho. It would go into Dagon's temple. It would go back into what we know as Solomon's temple later. It was mobile. In other words, wherever the people of God were with their lives designed for the presence of God, the presence of God was.

And I think one of the biggest problems that we run into as believers in Jesus Christ and I understand and I believe that this room and this campus is a special place. But I am convinced that our living rooms have just as much access to the powerful presence of God as this room does. I believe that the school room can have just as much of the powerful presence of God as this room does. I am convinced that any room, any place, any place of geography can have the powerful presence of God just like the Ark of the Covenant. Wherever it went, the presence of God was there. It was mobile. It was nomadic. Wherever it went, there was the power of God.

You know, often times here in our time of invitation which we are about to transition into, I have made a statement over the last couple of years and maybe sometimes it has just kind of gone in one ear and out the other, but I make this statement sometimes. I am not so much concerned with what you do on Sunday as what you do on Monday.

Can I be honest with you? It is easy to celebrate the goodness of God here. We are among friends, right? When it is difficult to celebrate the presence of God is when we are around the pagans, when we are around the heathens, when we are out in the darkness of the world. And one of the things that I think is so necessary for us to get week one of this study is that the Ark of the Covenant was no more powerful in the tabernacle than it was in the River Jordan. And it was no more powerful in the tabernacle than it was circling the walls of Jericho. The presence of God does not zap away when you exit the backdoors. The presence of God does not vaporize if you are not on this campus. The presence of God, because we are to house it, is to be anywhere and everywhere and we can experience the powerful presence of God anywhere an individual is who has a relationship with Jesus Christ. We have access for him to dwell with us and to destroy the works of the devil. And what we are going to learn this summer is this, that we have the opportunity to be in the inner jail with Paul and Silas, the furthest thing away from a church and have the powerful presence of God that would knock out the doors of the building and have someone come in and run and fall on their knees and say, "How and what must I do to be saved?"