

A Better Sanctuary

Hebrews: Jesus is Better • Hebrews 9:1-10

Baxter T. Exum (#1693)
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It is good to be together this morning, and if you are visiting with us today (either here in person or online), we are glad to have you with us, and we would invite you to fill out an online visitor card by using the QR code on the front of the bulletin or by going to our website at fourlakeschurch.org/visitor. Or, you can use the cards in the pews this morning – not just if you are visiting with us, but also for special questions and prayer concerns. You can put those in the box on the wall in the entryway or give your card to me on your way out this morning.

Before we get to our study, I wanted to give just a brief update on the Bible correspondence course program. When I stop by this building during the week from time to time, it is so good to reach in the mailbox and grab a huge pile of envelopes! This was from a few weeks ago. And I hope you keep up with the figures in the bulletin and say a prayer for those who serve in this program, but especially for those who are taking the lessons. If you look on the lower left side on the back of the bulletin, that's where we put those figures every month, and you'll notice that in May, we sent out and graded 982 lessons from 299 students. This includes 65 new students, and there were 2 who finished everything we have to offer this last month. In addition to the numbers, we get letters, and I'll share the gist of two from the fairly recent past. The first one comes from a guy named Marvin (from Texas) who just wanted to express his thanks to his Christian brother Patrick for introducing him and so many others to our lessons. He says that Patrick has brought people to Christ from both Jasper and Nacogdoches, Texas. And then the other note comes from Melody (in Jacksonville, Florida), who is deeply appreciative that we not only took the time to read her previous letter, but that we also took the time to reply. And then she asks for us to pray for God's blessing in her life, for her believing, trusting, and obeying. She explains that she was recently re-baptized, and that she has turned her life around. She's a recovering addict with many years sober. She's asking that we pray for her to stay strong, and that she will always turn to God, believing God, trusting God, spending time with God, and always doing the good works that Jesus wants her to do. This program is made possible through our weekly collection, it's a valuable program, and I wanted to let you know that we plan on praying for Marvin and Melody at the end of today's study.

We are here this morning to preach the good news that the Son of God came to this earth to live and die, to be buried, and to be raised again on the third day. We obey this good news by believing the message, by turning away from sin, by confessing our faith that he is the Christ, the Son of God, and by allowing ourselves to be buried with him in baptism for the forgiveness of sins. And we've had many examples this week, starting

with an update from Ernie Collado, from somewhere in the Philippines. He says, “Lower Sambulawan gospel works and five baptisms. To God be the glory.” That’s all we know, but they do have such an interesting baptistry! It looks like it’s raining (which I assume it does quite a bit in the Philippines), and the downspout empties right into the baptistry. But so good to see this!

This next update comes to us from Kharkov, Ukraine, where they say that “Alexander Artyushenko was baptized today! Praise the Lord!”

And this last one comes to us from the Southern Hills congregation down in Franklin, Tennessee, where one of our former members is now serving as an elder! This one came across my feed last week, and I thought I recognized Clint Oppermann! They say, “So thankful for Mary Peters and her decision to put on Christ in baptism. Mary is a lovely young lady with a sweet spirit. She never meets a stranger and is kind to everyone. She has spent the past several months with our youth group and attending services. It has been such a blessing to watch her love for the Lord grow.” Awesome!

As our tradition has been, we share these pictures and these stories to illustrate what it means to obey the gospel. And if you have not yet obeyed the gospel yourself, we invite you to get in touch. Pull me aside after worship today or reach out using the contact information on the website or on the bulletin, and we would love to study together.

This morning we return to our study of Hebrews, and today we continue in the middle section of this book, where we are now in the “*meat*” of this series of lessons. We’ve looked at Jesus as being from a BETTER PRIESTHOOD (based on the priesthood of Melchizedek, in Chapter 7). We’ve looked at Jesus as being the mediator of a BETTER COVENANT (in Chapter 8), and today we get started in Chapter 9, where we start thinking about Jesus as a priest who serves in a BETTER SANCTUARY, and then (after these two lessons), we’ll take a look at Jesus himself being a BETTER SACRIFICE (in Chapter 10).

Today, though, we come to a chapter where we have several references to the TABERNACLE or to the SANCTUARY. And this week, we’ll be looking at the first ten verses of this chapter, where we focus on the OLD SANCTUARY – first, the SANCTUARY itself (in verses 1-5), followed by the RITUALS in that old sanctuary (in verses 6-10).

I. But first, let’s take a look at the TABERNACLE itself (in verses 1-5).

For those who heard this for the first time, this would have been a review, but we may not be too familiar with the tabernacle, so let’s notice Hebrews 9:1-5,

¹ Now even the first covenant had regulations of divine worship and the earthly sanctuary. ² For there was a tabernacle prepared, the outer one, in which were the lampstand and the table and the sacred bread; this is called the holy place. ³ Behind the second veil there was a tabernacle which is called the Holy of Holies, ⁴ having a golden altar of incense and the ark of the covenant covered on all sides with gold, in which was a golden jar holding the manna, and Aaron’s rod which budded, and the tables of the covenant; ⁵ and above it were the cherubim of glory overshadowing the mercy seat; but of these things we cannot now speak in detail.

And we don’t have time to go into great detail either, but the author looks back over his shoulder (in a sense), and uses the old tabernacle to teach something. Ultimately, he’s making a comparison between the old and

the new, and in the process, he explains that the tabernacle itself (and even its furniture) was designed to point to Jesus. And this is where he basically goes back to the book of Exodus. We are just now starting a study of Exodus in our Wednesday class (I hope you can join us online or on the phone for that), but Exodus is one of the most action-packed accounts anywhere in the Bible. And it's a picture of what comes later. In Exodus, God's people become enslaved in Egypt, but God causes them to prosper and multiply in their slavery, so a wicked Egyptian pharaoh does everything possible to make them miserable, he orders the murder of all the male children, one of those children is saved, is raised in Pharaoh's household, and is raised up by God to lead the Israelites out of slavery and toward the Promised Land following a series of ten plagues. As they leave, God destroys the Egyptian army in the Red Sea after bringing the Israelites across on dry land, and once they make it out into the wilderness, God delivers his Law to Moses on Mt. Sinai. And it's interesting to me that the author of Hebrews doesn't want to focus on the exciting stuff in the first half of Exodus, but he focuses in on the Law and the regulations in the second half of Exodus, starting with a brief description of the Tabernacle, followed by a long list of regulations for worship.

And there's a lesson here concerning the fact that God doesn't just tell us to worship, but he tells us HOW to worship. We don't just do whatever we want to do in worship, but in every covenant, God has always had a plan. I mean, imagine what would have happened if the priests had taken it upon themselves to add to God's plan, "We could add a little altar to Baal over here to the side to appeal to the locals, we could put a few extra doors in here to make this thing more accessible to the people, we could add a window into the Holy of Holies so we can see what in the world is going on in there, we could add some comfortable seating so the priests can sit down while they do their work," and so on. No! God commanded worship, but he was very specific (for a reason – all of this pointed to Jesus, who would someday serve in a BETTER sanctuary).

So, we start with the tabernacle. The tabernacle was basically a two-room tent, divided into the Holy Place and the Most Holy Place. As a tent, it was mobile. It could be packed up and moved, and they did move it, for the remainder of their 40 years in the wilderness. What's interesting about a tabernacle is that God would dwell with his people. God didn't ask for a monument or a pyramid (like they would have been familiar with in Egypt, but he asked for a tent, a dwelling place. Nevertheless, in this tent, in verse 5 we have the *"lampstand,"* described in detail in Exodus 25, basically a golden lampstand shaped like a tree with seven branches and a total of seven flames, perhaps reminiscent of the Tree of Life in the Garden of Eden, and later found in Heaven, perhaps foreshadowing Jesus as the *"light of the world."* There were no windows in the tabernacle, so this was the only source of light.

We then have *"the table and the sacred bread,"* perhaps reminding the people that God would provide, tied to the manna, tied to the unleavened bread from the Passover, foreshadowing Jesus as being the *"bread of life,"* along with the feeding of the 4,000 and the feeding of the 5,000, and ultimately looking forward to the unleavened bread of the Lord's Supper.

Only the priests could enter this, the first room, but starting in verse 3 we have a curtain, separating a second (smaller) room. The whole tent was 15 feet wide by 45 feet long (roughly half the side of the room we are in this morning), but this second room, the Most Holy Place was 15 feet in all three directions, a perfect cube, woven with figures of angels, perhaps reminiscent of the angel that was left to guard the entrance to the Garden of Eden. This was the veil in the temple that was torn from top to bottom at the exact moment Jesus died on the cross.

But in this back room, in the Holy of Holies, we have a golden altar of incense. In Exodus, this altar of incense is described as being in the Holy Place, we might assume that the writer of Hebrews is describing the Day of

Atonement here, where the altar was perhaps moved into the Holy of Holies. Wayne Jackson has a good article on this. But the main feature of the Holy of Holies was the ark of the covenant, a gold covered box a little bit smaller than the table we have up here. If you've seen *Indiana Jones and the Raiders of the Lost Ark*, you may have some idea of what this is. The box contained a golden jar holding a sample of manna (a constant reminder not only of the people whining for food, but also a reminder of God's miraculous care for them in the wilderness). The ark also contained Aaron's rod which had budded (during the challenge to Aaron's leadership back in the book of Numbers – a reminder of the people's rebellion). And then the ark also contained the Ten Commandments, written on tablets of stone. Some have suggested that the tablets were a constant reminder that the people had failed to keep God's law, which explains the lid on the box, referred to as the Mercy Seat, with two cherubim on top, with their wings touching, as if covering the seat. The high priest would enter this back room only once a year. We'll get back to that in just a moment.

But this is the furniture, this is the tabernacle. And the author is giving this as background, preparing us to appreciate Jesus as doing his work in a much greater tabernacle. And I say this because of what he says in verse 1, ***“Now even the first covenant had regulations of divine worship and the earthly sanctuary,”*** and then he goes on to describe that first sanctuary. And at the end, he moves on, ***“...but of these things we cannot now speak in detail.”*** He's moving toward something here. That first sanctuary was merely a shadow of what was coming, a shadow of what is now here.

But as we think about the first sanctuary and the purpose of it, as we back away from this for just a moment, it seems one of the main reasons for this tabernacle was to create a sense of separation. Yes, God came to meet them in the tent, but the tent was special; certain parts of it were off limits. I'm reminded of making visits here in our local hospitals. There are places in our hospitals where normal people are not allowed to go! Many areas are restricted. There are many places where you may need a key card, or where somebody may need to let you in. And there's a reason for that. They don't want people like me, covered in germs and ignorance, wandering around the operating rooms. I am not qualified to be messing with that stuff. As I've said a number of times now in this study, *“There's no such thing as a perfect illustration,”* but I think this may help us to understand that the tabernacle allowed access to God, but that access was restricted. The tent itself was designed in such a way so as to allow only certain people in, and in a certain way, and so the tabernacle was designed to create a sense of separation.

Something I find interesting in this study is that in the book of Exodus, we have something like eight chapters describing the instructions for the tabernacle in excruciating detail. We only have two chapters describing the creation of the entire Universe! That doesn't make sense to me; however, I think it's to emphasize this idea that God is holy; God is different; God is separate.

A second reason for the tabernacle to be designed like this is to serve as a contrast to something much greater that would be coming in the future (and is now here) – the fact that Jesus is now serving, not in a tent, but in heaven itself. So, there's a stark contrast. Has anyone had an Easy Bake Oven? We never had one, but if I remember the concept: They made an oven (a children's toy) that would pretty much bake stuff with a light bulb. As you can imagine, the stuff you could cook with a light bulb wasn't the greatest food you've ever had! But the purpose of the Easy Bake Oven was not to bake gourmet meals; no, the purpose of the Easy Bake Oven was to point to something greater. Again, there's no such thing as a perfect illustration, but in a similar way, the tabernacle (as glorious as it was for its time), pointed to something greater.

Or, we might think of going to Olive Garden and thinking that we've been to Italy. There are some parallels, but it's not really the same, is it? I mean, at Olive Garden, they have string lights, and pasta, and some Italian-

looking artwork on the walls, but it's a cheap substitute for the real deal. By the way, our first night in Rome, I think I ran out with our son late at night to find some food, we walked into a restaurant, asked for some kind of pasta there at the bar, and the guy reached into the deep freeze and whipped out some kind of Lean Cuisine microwave meal, "No! No! No!" We backed away slowly. We did not come to Italy to eat a Hungry Man meal (or whatever). So again, not a perfect illustration, but we know what it means to settle for something lesser while we wait for something greater. That's the tabernacle. The tabernacle was designed to serve as a contrast, to point to something greater.

II. Before we pause for today, let's continue into the next paragraph as we move on to the REGULATIONS or the RITUALS associated with the tabernacle.

Let's close today by looking at Hebrews 9:6-10, where the author continues and says,

⁶ Now when these things have been so prepared, the priests are continually entering the outer tabernacle performing the divine worship, ⁷ but into the second, only the high priest enters once a year, not without taking blood, which he offers for himself and for the sins of the people committed in ignorance. ⁸ The Holy Spirit is signifying this, that the way into the holy place has not yet been disclosed while the outer tabernacle is still standing, ⁹ which is a symbol for the present time. Accordingly both gifts and sacrifices are offered which cannot make the worshiper perfect in conscience, ¹⁰ since they relate only to food and drink and various washings, regulations for the body imposed until a time of reformation.

So, before, we had the tabernacle; now we have the procedures or the rituals associated with the tabernacle. And these rituals center around the shedding of blood. In order to enter the temple, blood had to be shed, constantly. The high priest would shed blood, first, for his own sins, and then for the sins of the people. And you can't get to the back room without going through the first room, and you can't get into the first room without blood. We will come back to this in Chapter 10, but this blood thing is something most people today really don't understand. Imagine what would happen if we announced that we would be having a "sin offering" in our assembly this morning. And imagine we all bring a sheep, and we slit its throat, and we start sprinkling that blood all over the place. Imagine the outcry. I'm thinking of a Cuban immigrant down in Florida a number of years ago who threw a graduation BBQ party for his daughter. But it wasn't just a BBQ. This guy slaughtered, and gutted and cooked sixteen goats right there in his yard. Maybe we could try that for our next church picnic. Imagine the outcry! But that was the ancient tabernacle. That place would have been absolutely covered in blood.

We will look at this again in the near future, but when we sin, we deserve to die (life for life), so blood is shed, indicating that something else gave its life in our place. Blood is the universal symbol of life. Life is in the blood. Many people don't even want to think about it. I've got a yearly physical scheduled with my nurse practitioner this week, and I'm pretty sure that right after my appointment, she'll have me go downstairs and have my blood drawn. I'm not a fan! I'm pretty sure I'll be testing positive for cheese curds this week. They always do a good job, but I'd rather keep my blood inside my body. Blood is important.

And the author makes the point that this is a "*symbol for the present time.*" That word "*symbol*" is the same word we translate as "parable," "to cast or throw alongside." In my mind, I picture two people bowling side by side. Over here on the left is the story, but here on the right is the parallel, the meaning, the story behind the story. So, the author is saying that the tabernacle and those regulations are a picture: You cannot approach God without blood being shed. Of course, in those days, blood only made a person ceremonially clean (those

sacrifices kept you from getting kicked out and left behind in the wilderness), but the bloodshed back then couldn't fix somebody on the inside. The blood of birds, and goats, and bulls in no way fixed the conscience. It got the job done (in terms of being okay with God for a while), but it didn't make a person feel any better. But this weakness of the system pointed to something coming, to a ***"time of reformation"*** (in verse 10). And this, of course, refers to the coming of Jesus. By the way, in John 1:14, as John writes about Jesus coming to this earth, he says (referring to Jesus), ***"And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we saw his glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth."*** When John says that Jesus became flesh and ***"dwelt"*** among us, he uses a word that's the basis of the word "tabernacle" or "tent." Jesus came to this earth and ***"tabernacled"*** or ***"tented"*** among us. Anybody with a Jewish background back then would have recognized that immediately. The tabernacle and those regulations associated with it were a symbol for what was coming.

Conclusion:

And this gets us ready to look at the rest of Hebrews 9 next week, if the Lord wills. Today, we've looked primarily at the OLD – the OLD TABERNACLE and the OLD REGULATIONS for that tabernacle. Next week, we look at the new and the role of Jesus in the new sanctuary.

For now, we'll close with that reminder that Josh read for us earlier from Revelation 4, the good news that ***"...the tabernacle of God is among men, and He will dwell among them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself will be among them."*** What a blessing!

Before Caleb leads us in a song to prepare us for the Lord's Supper, let's go to God in prayer:

Our Father in Heaven,

You are the great and awesome God, the one and only. You came to this earth to dwell among us. Your only Son gave up the glory of heaven to come here to live and die for us, to die in our place, to shed his blood, to make our salvation possible. Thank you, Father, for your grace and mercy that was poured out on us through the cross.

This morning, we pray for Marvin and Melody and the thousands of others who are learning more about you and your word through mail. We are thankful for Patsy and Ruth and the others who make this possible. We pray for your blessing on this effort, so that more can learn and come to know you.

We come to you today through Jesus, who now serves in a new and better sanctuary. AMEN.

To comment on this lesson: fourlakeschurch@gmail.com