

EXODUS: The Person, Promise, and Power of God

Exodus 37 – Worship and Holiness

“... not even the first covenant was inaugurated without blood. ¹⁹ For when every commandment of the law had been declared by Moses to all the people, he took the blood of calves and goats, with water and scarlet wool and hyssop, and sprinkled both the book itself and all the people, ²⁰ saying, “This is the blood of the covenant that God commanded for you.” ²¹ And in the same way he sprinkled with the blood both the tent and all the vessels used in worship. ²² Indeed, under the law almost everything is purified with blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins.”
Hebrews 9:18-22

The Great Dilemma:

The HOLINESS of God ...

² *“There is none holy like the Lord: for there is none besides you; there is no rock like our God. (1 Samuel 2:2)*

Our translation for holiness comes from the Hebrew word *qadowsh* which means "to cut." To be holy means to be cut off, or separate, from everything else. It means to be in a class of your own, distinct from anything that has ever existed or will ever exist. *Qadowsh* means a second thing: to be holy means to be entirely morally pure, all the time and in every way possible. (Paul Tripp)

On the one hand, God’s holiness COMFORTS us. *How?*

¹¹ *“Who is like you, O Lord, among the gods? Who is like you, majestic in holiness, awesome in glorious deeds, doing wonders? (Exodus 15:11)*

But on the other hand, His holiness CONDEMNS us. *How?*

¹⁵ *but as he who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, ¹⁶ since it is written, “You shall be holy, for I am holy.” (1 Peter 1:15-16)*

“... a highway shall be there, and it shall be called the Way of Holiness; the unclean shall not pass over it.” (Isaiah 35:8a)

The SINFULNESS of man ...

²³ *for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, ... (Romans 3:23)*

How then can there be reconciliation between the two?

In a word – GRACE.

²⁴ *... and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, ²⁵ whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith. (Romans 3:24-25a)*

¹⁴ *Strive for peace with everyone, and for the holiness without which no one will see the Lord. ¹⁵ See to it that no one fails to obtain the grace of God ...” (Hebrews 12:14-15a)*

The Grace-Saturated Message of the Tabernacle:

Remember the purpose of the Tabernacle?

“... let them make me a sanctuary, that I may dwell in their midst” (Exodus 25:8)

1) The Courtyard of God

The tabernacle was surrounded by a large rectangular enclosure, measuring roughly seventy-five feet by 150 feet. The perimeter of this enclosure was marked with a tall fence made of linen fabric stretched across wooden fenceposts. The description:

⁹ And he made the court. For the south side the hangings of the court were of fine twined linen, a hundred cubits; ¹⁰ their twenty pillars and their twenty bases were of bronze, but the hooks of the pillars and their fillets were of silver. ¹¹ And for the north side there were hangings of a hundred cubits; their twenty pillars and their twenty bases were of bronze, but the hooks of the pillars and their fillets were of silver. ¹² And for the west side were hangings of fifty cubits, their ten pillars, and their ten bases; the hooks of the pillars and their fillets were of silver. ¹³ And for the front to the east, fifty cubits. ¹⁴ The hangings for one side of the gate were fifteen cubits, with their three pillars and three bases. ¹⁵ And so for the other side. On both sides of the gate of the court were hangings of fifteen cubits, with their three pillars and their three bases. ¹⁶ All the hangings around the court were of fine twined linen. ¹⁷ And the bases for the pillars were of bronze, but the hooks of the pillars and their fillets were of silver. The overlaying of their capitals was also of silver, and all the pillars of the court were filleted with silver.

Like the rest of the tabernacle, the fence around the courtyard was made with costly materials, including fine linen and precious metals. The whole complex was made possible by the FREEWILL offerings of the Israelites.

Exodus 38 ends with an inventory of the treasures they brought, **starting with the gold** that went inside the tabernacle:

²¹ These are the records of the tabernacle, the tabernacle of the testimony, as they were recorded at the commandment of Moses, the responsibility of the Levites under the direction of Ithamar the son of Aaron the priest. ²² Bezalel the son of Uri, son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah, made all that the Lord commanded Moses; ²³ and with him was Oholiab the son of Ahisamach, of the tribe of Dan, an engraver and designer and embroiderer in blue and purple and scarlet yarns and fine twined linen.

²⁴ All the gold that was used for the work, in all the construction of the sanctuary, the gold from the offering, was twenty-nine talents and 730 shekels, by the shekel of the sanctuary.

The Israelites also brought silver, which was used to make the bases for the sanctuary and to make the hooks and clasps that secured the courtyard fence. This silver came from the price that the men of Israel paid for their REDEMPTION (see Exod. 30:1–11):

²⁵ The silver from those of the congregation who were recorded was a hundred talents and 1,775 shekels, by the shekel of the sanctuary: ²⁶ a beka a head (that is, half a shekel, by the shekel of the sanctuary), for everyone who was listed in the records, from twenty years old and upward, for 603,550 men. ²⁷ The hundred talents of silver were for casting the bases of the sanctuary and the bases of the veil; a hundred bases for the hundred talents, a talent a base. ²⁸ And of the 1,775 shekels he made hooks for the pillars and overlaid their capitals and made fillets for them.

Finally, **the Israelites brought bronze**, which was used for the outer fence and for all the sacred objects that stood in the courtyard:

²⁹ The bronze that was offered was seventy talents and 2,400 shekels; ³⁰ with it he made the bases for the entrance of the tent of meeting, the bronze altar and the bronze grating for it and all the utensils of the altar, ³¹ the bases around the court, and the bases of the gate of the court, all the pegs of the tabernacle, and all the pegs around the court.

This was a vast quantity of precious metal, amounting to more than a ton of gold, three tons of silver, and two tons of bronze. ¹

¹ Philip Graham Ryken and R. Kent Hughes, *Exodus: Saved for God's Glory*, 1123.

One particular feature draws our attention – The ENTRANCE.

The fence separated the camp where the Israelites lived from the tabernacle where God lived. It formed a boundary between the Creator and his creatures.

But there was ONLY ONE WAY to enter.

At the front of the tabernacle was an opening thirty feet wide that was covered with a special curtain. The rest of the fence was white.

18 And the screen for the gate of the court was embroidered with needlework in blue and purple and scarlet yarns and fine twined linen. It was twenty cubits long and five cubits high in its breadth, corresponding to the hangings of the court. 19 And their pillars were four in number. Their four bases were of bronze, their hooks of silver, and the overlaying of their capitals and their fillets of silver. 20 And all the pegs for the tabernacle and for the court all around were of bronze.

Why was the curtain decorated this way?

What was the message to the Israelites?

2) The Bloody Altar

When the people entered the courtyard, what did they see?

First was large bronze altar for SACRIFICES:

38 He made the altar of burnt offering of acacia wood. Five cubits was its length, and five cubits its breadth. It was square, and three cubits was its height. 2 He made horns for it on its four corners. Its horns were of one piece with it, and he overlaid it with bronze. 3 And he made all the utensils of the altar, the pots, the shovels, the basins, the forks, and the fire pans. He made all its utensils of bronze. 4 And he made for the altar a grating, a network of bronze, under its ledge, extending halfway down. 5 He cast four rings on the four corners of the bronze grating as holders for the poles. 6 He made the poles of acacia wood and overlaid them with bronze. 7 And he put the poles through the rings on the sides of the altar to carry it with them. He made it hollow, with boards.

The altar was nearly eight feet wide and five feet tall. It was set up like a giant square grill, complete with all the utensils that were needed to tend the fire, remove the ashes, and cook the meat. This is where the Israelites offered their sacrifices to God. (See attachment)

These sacrifices were for ATONEMENT for their SINS.

The great bronze altar was in almost constant use. The priests were required to make sure that its fire was always burning.

12 The fire on the altar shall be kept burning on it; it shall not go out. The priest shall burn wood on it every morning, and he shall arrange the burnt offering on it and shall burn on it the fat of the peace offerings. 13 Fire shall be kept burning on the altar continually; it shall not go out. (Leviticus 6:12-13)

Why?

What message does this emphatically communicate to the Israelites?

Did these sacrifices really atone for sin?

3) The Cleansing Basin

Though forgiven, the people still required a “cleansing”. The bronze basin symbolized the cleansing power of God’s grace in washing away sin.

For the priests, this was a matter of life and death:

20 When they go into the tent of meeting, or when they come near the altar to minister, to burn a food offering to the Lord, they shall wash with water, so that they may not die. 21 They shall wash their hands and their feet, so that they may not die. It shall be a statute forever to them, even to him and to his offspring throughout their generations.” (Exodus 30:20-21)

Vern Poythress interprets the meaning of the basin like this:

“The altar stands closest to the entrance to the courtyard. After that comes the washing basin, then comes the tabernacle itself with its two rooms. The Israelites’ own experience in the immediate past portrays the same sequence. First they are in bondage, in Egypt, then they are delivered through the sacrifice of the Passover lamb, symbolized by the altar. Then they pass through the Red Sea and still live, whereas their enemies are destroyed. The waters of the Red Sea stand for a kind of ceremonial cleansing from their enemies.”

R. Kent Hughes offers this insight:

Like almost everything else at the tabernacle, the bronze basin was a preview of the gospel. According to David Levy, “The laver speaks of Christ as our sanctification. As believer-priests, we are reminded that Christ has sanctified us for His service and is sanctifying us by cleansing us from the daily defilement of sin ‘with the washing of water by the word’ (Eph. 5:26).”

The Bible often describes our salvation in Christ in terms of cleansing from sin. There is a sense in which we receive this cleansing when we first trust in Christ for our salvation. The Bible calls this “the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit” (Titus 3:5). When God gives us new life in Christ, he washes us clean. This is absolutely necessary. We need to be purified from the pollution of sin. As Jesus said to Peter, “Unless I wash you, you have no part with me” (John 13:8). This is part of the symbolism of Christian baptism, in which water signifies the blood of Jesus that washes away our sin.

Yet we are still sinners, and even after coming to Christ, we have an ongoing need for God’s cleansing work in our lives. Like the Old Testament priests, we are called to serve a holy God. In order to serve him in real holiness, we need to be cleansed from the corruption of the sin that we continue to commit.

The message? God requires and provides more than just our JUSTIFICATION. He also requires and provides our SANCTIFICATION.

First came the atoning blood sacrifice that made sinners right with God by paying the debt of their sin; then came the pure cleansing water that made sinners holy before God by washing away the remaining corruption of their sin.

How necessary is sanctification to us today?

Tony Reinke:

Sanctification is more than saying “no” to sin. Sanctification says “yes” to holiness and glad obedience to Jesus. Sanctification says yes to loving God and what he loves. Sanctification is all about retraining our delights.

Puritan John Flavel:

What is sin but the corrupt and vitiated appetite of the creature, to things that are earthly and sensual, relishing more sweetness and delight in them, than in the blessed God? And what is sanctification, but the rectifying of these inordinate affections, and placing them on their proper object?

Next week: Exodus 37 – The Ark of the Covenant