

## **Exodus 25 – 31 sermon Tregear 27.3.2022 – God camping with us**

Do you remember the first time you went camping? When Georgina and I first got married we enjoyed going camping. We were young and sleeping in a little tent on the rough ground was ok. We even managed to do a bit of camping when our first two children came along.

Nowadays as we get older we probably like to do the glamping thing, that is, camping but with a bed and toilet and more comfortable accommodation. Staying in a cabin at a caravan park rather than in a little tent. We're getting old! Today's passage is about camping. The Israelites all lived in tents for 40 years. And today it's all about God's special tent that he got them to set up so that he could live with them; so that he could tent or tabernacle with them.

**Readings:** Chapter 25: 1-22; 29:42-46

**What is the tabernacle?**

**Why a tabernacle?**

**Why all the detail of the tabernacle?**

**What is the tabernacle?**

A portable temple – 2 spaces, 3 areas and 7 bit of furniture. 2 spaces – outer courtyard and tent; 3 areas – courtyard and 2 areas in tent -most holy place and holy place; 7 bits. In most holy place is the ark – surprisingly small – 1 metre long and half metre wide. It's covered in gold – three items inside – 10 commandments on 2 tablets; jar with manna

and Aaron's staff . Then there are the 2 cherubim on either side of the ark, to protect the ark.

Holy Place – 3 pieces of furniture – 1. Table with bread on it; 2. Lampstand with seven stands; it's a menorah, but different to normal menorah – it's got buds , leaves supposed to look organic; 3. A little plinth or altar for the burning of the evening and morning incense.

2 pieces outside on the courtyard – altar for the sacrifices and basin for the washing of the priests.

In one way a very simple design but as read through all the details it is rich in symbolism. As you look at each detail and look for associations – why this colour? What this material? You're invited into this kind of symbolic universe. Christians down the ages have sometimes gone overboard in attaching all kinds of weird symbolism eg the tent pegs are the nails of the cross – well????

Whatever else it is it is obviously a picture of Eden. Remember the story – the man and the woman are in a temple garden – they are put into the garden because that's where they are going to do their apprenticeship; where they're going to meet with God, that's where God meets with them in the garden on the cool of the day, where they know God's presence.

Because Adam and Eve have a mission which is to take the blessing of God from the garden to the world; a mission to be God's kings and priests.

Then remember they sin, cast out of the garden. Then last week chapter 19 Israel are called to be God's treasured possession, to be God's priests and a holy nation, a people belonging to God. They're called to be like a new Adam; to have a mission to the world that is based in fellowship to God; that is based in closeness to God. You have the

cherubim there and the menorah symbolising the tree of life; because God is determined to dwell with his people, to walk with them. That's the covenant. I'll be your God and you'll be my people. And the word "tabernacle" just means tent. They're in the desert in tents for 40 years . So for 40 years God comes and pitches his tent among them. Another way to put it – the God of all the universe and the God of Israel was not too proud to slum it with his people. And so in the NT, in John's gospel – John 1:14 – as John is describing Jesus coming into the world he says, "The Word, that is Jesus, became flesh, became a human and made his dwelling, or tabernacled, with us. God tabernacles with us. This makes sense because we have the OT. And we see that that's the kind of thing that God would do – which is ultimately what God does with Jesus. He comes to dwell with us.

### **Why a tabernacle?**

At Mt Sinai God is giving instructions about how they can worship him. With other religions – humans try and work out how to reach their god, how to appease them, they make big statues of them

Here is God graciously saying I want to dwell with you. Make me an appropriate building – I want to be with you. Other religions – how can we reach God? There is no sense that the god would want to live with the people.

While they were at Mt Sinai they were conscious of God's nearness, but once they set out on their journey, it might seem to them as though the link had been broken, unless there was in their midst a tangible symbol of God's presence. So I think this tabernacle is like an ongoing reminder of the link God made with Israel over that 10months at Sinai. They're his people. The tabernacle will help them to remember that.

Exodus 25:8, from our passage today is very important. First, there is the verb, “to dwell” (‘sakan’)– this leads to the use of the word ‘miskan’, which means “a dwelling” which is widely used in chap 25-40. The word that’s translated “sanctuary” means a place of holiness. God, in his holiness would live with his people.

The Israelites were living in tents. The word for tabernacle was the Latin or Roman word that simply means tent. Here is God saying I’m going to put my tent down here with you. I’m going to live with you. And it’s a permanent dwelling.

Hebrews 9 – comparison with this section; all about the tabernacle

This tabernacle would also be a reminder to the people that God’s law would be central in their lives; they were to obediently follow God as his people. The 10 commandments were put inside the ark as the reminder that this was central to them approaching God as the holy God and living as his people. But they were not going to be able to be obedient as we will discover next week. So we see God’s grace as well in the tabernacle. It was a place where they, through the sacrifices could receive atonement, cleansing and forgiveness every day.

We ask why didn’t God just go straight to the sacrifice of Jesus? A bit like the question we had before, why did God have 10 plagues and not just the big one of killing the first born right from the start. We saw some sense of what God was doing in the plagues – he showed one by one that he was more powerful than each and every god of the Egyptians.

By having this sacrificial system God is showing his grace and mercy. There was a way to be free. But it was not permanent. It had to be repeated day after day. Jesus comes. Compared to the sacrificial system he was the final answer. His sacrifice fulfils and is the

once and for all effective way of becoming righteous. So the sacrifices, the tabernacle are a wonderful foreshadowing or preliminary event that shine light up on Jesus. Jesus is better than the tabernacle, Jesus is better than the sacrifices; Jesus is the best high priest of Hebrews 10:11-14.

All of this is part of the story we want to remember. Our God wants to dwell with us; to treat us as treasured possessions.

A side comment. The ultimate desire of God is that we are with him. That is the ultimate blessing. Last week the people saw God – this is the ultimate blessing. In this season, in our church, of people dying. Not young people I might add. None of the three people who have just died recently were under 70 years old. I think we can easily have a wrong view of being blessed. Being blessed doesn't mean flourishing with health or material prosperity; Rather, it involves an ache, a lament, a looking forward to a coming order in which the kingdom of God turns our ideas of status and prosperity upside down. Blessed are the poor in spirit, those who mourn, the meek—not those who think they've already achieved victory. Blessed are those who seek the temple, who "hunger and thirst for righteousness," who are "pure in heart," for they will be prosperous—but not in our usual way of conceiving of prosperity. The pure in heart are blessed, Jesus says, "for they will see God" (Matt. 5:8). In the NT to be blessed is quite clearly, to know God and especially to have Christ dwelling or tabernacling in us by his Spirit. That is true blessing

The tabernacle is the forerunner of the temple – the place where God dwells here on earth to commune with us, the place where we come to worship him, to offer our sacrifices.

This earthly temple has been supplanted by Jesus – he has performed the once for all sacrifice, he has opened the holy of holies to all. He is described as our temple. There is no house of God anymore; this church building is not the house of God. This building is

not a holy place. We meet with Jesus, with Jesus at the centre – wherever we meet with Jesus, that is holy ground, that is a holy place. So Jesus says, “whenever 2 or 3 of you are gathered in my name there I am in the midst of them.”

In the book that I’ve been reading about dying well, the writer thinks about what it means for the NT to call God’s people, a temple. If we are God’s people you and I are temples. In 1 Corinthians 6 Paul says, “Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit

within you, which you have from God, and that you are not your own? For you were bought with a price; therefore glorify God in your body” (1 Cor. 6:19–20). Your body belongs to God. Therefore give your body as a thank offering back to God, as the dwelling place of God. For you are not your own but belong to Christ. Just as “two shall become one flesh,” so believers have been united to Jesus Christ and have become “one spirit with him” (1 Cor. 6:17). We are a temple, a tabernacle where God dwells. Being a “temple” does not make God our own possession; on the contrary, it reminds us that we do not belong to ourselves.

### **Why all the detail of the tabernacle?**

There is the huge chunk on the tabernacle. Seven chapters in Exodus to the instructions about building it and then the priests who, in a sense, are to operate it; and then a further 4 chapters at the end as they build it, but seemingly giving the same details. There are only 2 chapters on God creating the world; what’s with 11 chapters on the tabernacle? Some would say, it’s not the details of the tabernacle account that make up its significance, but the underlying notion that God elects to be present with God’s people.

2 things:

**The Lord is holy** – all the details about cloth used; the materials used and even the workmanship that's used they all have a purpose. There are basically three sections of the tabernacle. As you get closer to the centre, to the Holy of Holies, the cloth and the decorations on it are more exquisite and beautiful; the materials are more costly – so there's gold over all the things in the Holy of Holies, none of the cheapest metal bronze is there, whereas in the outer section there is bronze but no gold. There are three different words used for workmanship – they correspond to the level of skill needed – the most intricate is in the Holy of Holies and so on. The same principle applies to the clothing that the priests wear. The most intricate, costly clothing is for those who come into the Holy of Holies. The whole idea is that God is holy – the tabernacle pictures this so that the Israelite people have a concrete reminder in the middle of the camping ground – God glamping with us.

**The Lord is king** – God's rule over Israel is expressed by the association between the tabernacle and Mt Sinai. So the tabernacle serves to remind the people of what Mt Sinai signified to them. Mt Sinai is divided into 3 sections; the very top, covered in cloud, only Moses can come up there to talk to God; second level, only a few of the leaders can come there; the bottom of the mountain everyone else, and they had to be careful that they didn't cross over the boundary to come up further. Again, a reminder of God's holiness; a strict separation between the holy and the common. Because God was there, the mountain was holy; so God warns the Israelites not to come on the mountain because it is holy. The issue at stake is not whether God is a stuffy monarch, who does not think enough honour has been shown to him. Rather the warning is given for the sake of the people, who have no experience as yet of the dimensions of God's holiness, and unless they're warned they will destroy themselves. It's an interesting note of warning for us too. We easily forget that God is holy. As focus on Jesus, which is right to do, we see God's love, and we can forget that God is holy. Because Jesus took our sin on the cross, he was killed. God is holy and sin cannot be a part of him. Very much like the Israelites could not approach God on the mountain until they are clean. So there are all

the cleansing requirements that are mentioned in this passage today and also in Leviticus – in order that we might approach God. In the past only the High Priest, or an appointed priest who had performed the right cleaning ceremony, could approach God in the holy of Holies. Because of what Jesus did on the cross we can all approach God. What an amazing truth. But let us not forget that God is holy. We'll think a bit more about that next week when we have our last dive into Exodus.

**God is holy but he comes to camp with his people.**