

The Tent of Meeting - Week 81

There is a lovely phrase occurring several times in the Book of Exodus that reads in various English Bible translations as "the Tent of Meeting" (for example, Exodus 27.21 / 38.8 / 38.30 / 39.32 / 40.40 / 40.1 and following).

These references come within the lengthy, meticulous instructions given by the Lord to Moses concerning the tabernacle, to be found in Exodus Chapters 25 - 40. The fact that the tabernacle is given what are now sixteen chapters of Scripture demonstrates just how significant it is within the whole covenant relationship between the Lord God and His chosen people the Jews. Much of that significance remains today for those of us who, by God's grace, are members of the New Covenant.

Every detail was explained to Moses, and every detail was duly carried out (Exodus 39.42-43).

So there it was in their midst whenever the people of Israel camped - the tabernacle enclosure, with the Tent of Meeting at its centre. Its presence, its contents and its activities taught them a great deal about Almighty God, if they would bother to look and think!

Above all else, that tabernacle demonstrated the Lord's steadfast love for them, and His very presence dwelling in their midst. That divine presence was made visible over the Tent of Meeting by the cloud by day, and by the fire within the cloud by night (Exodus 40.37).

But the tabernacle, with all its precise design and procedures, also showed them that God was not to be "messed with". The priests and the people were to behave before Him *impeccably*! If even a detail was got wrong in how they were to act, prompt judgement followed - as Nadab and Abihu, two of Aaron's sons, were to find out to their cost later on (Numbers 10).

The tabernacle also placed the shedding of blood at the heart of the covenant relationship between God and His people. At this stage of God's dealings with us all, the blood was only that of innocent animals. Blood was being constantly shed, by the priests, on behalf of the people, as an atonement for their sins. It is easy for us to forget just how bloody and gruesome a typical day's worship in the tabernacle courtyard would have been!

Now all those animal sacrifices, and the shedding of all that animal blood, was a constant, vivid, visual aid that the people were sinful in God's sight, and received forgiveness from Him *only by the shedding of innocent blood*. With the blessing of Christian hindsight, we now know that that animal blood was only a pointer to the full and final shedding of the innocent blood of Jesus Christ Himself, the Son of God made Man.

And at the heart of the tabernacle, in the midst of all this blood-letting, there was the Tent of Meeting itself - a small, unremarkable tent divided by a veil into two parts, the Holy Place and the Holy of Holies.

Access to the Tent of Meeting was severely restricted, to demonstrate the utter holiness of God, and the utter impossibility of anyone - whoever they were and whatever was their office - approaching Him lightly, casually or informally.

Under the New Covenant today we are free from the meticulous rules and regulations of the tabernacle and the Tent of Meeting at its heart. But we are not free in the least from the obligation to remember *the reasons* for all those rules.

For God is still utterly holy! - and we in our natural state remain utterly UN-holy! Amazingly, we can now enter into the Tent of Meeting, and on into the Holy of Holies itself, for the veil is long gone (see for example Hebrews 10.19-22). We enter through no merit of our own, and do so solely by virtue of the shed blood of the Lord Jesus Christ. That is the Christian Gospel, the Good News indeed!

How vital then that we never let this God-given access degenerate into a sloppy casualness towards Him on our part. At the heart of our worship, our prayers, our Bible reading and our conduct, may He always be shown our awe, reverence and gratitude towards Him.

For Almighty God, now fully and finally revealed as Father, Son and Holy Spirit, is still dwelling in our midst; and He is still the God who is not to be messed with.

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