

# Sermon 122, Moving In, Journeying With, Exodus 40:34-38

**Proposition:** God tabernacled among His people, temporarily in a tent, permanently in His Son. Journey with Christ toward the Father, deeper into the book of the knowledge of God.

- I. God's Glory Filled the Tent of Meeting, v. 34
- II. God's Glory Can Only Be Approached through Blood Sacrifice, v. 35 with Lev. 1-8
- III. Even at the Tabernacle, God Concealed His Glory in the Cloud, vv. 35-36
- IV. God's Presence Abides, vv. 36-38
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## Introduction

Dearly beloved congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ, what a wonderful adventure it has been to travel with Israel from Egypt's land to Sinai, and along the way to meet with God. We have been touring this book of the knowledge of God for nearly three years now; I preached the first sermon on Exodus on Sunday, November 22, 2020. We have seen how God brought His people from slavery to worship, how He revealed Himself first at the burning bush, then in the ten plagues, in the passover, in the Exodus, and in His words establishing a covenant with Israel at Sinai. Now we approach the final climax of the book as God's glory moves into the tabernacle to dwell among His people — the very thing for which He brought them out of Egypt. "And they shall know that I am the LORD their God who brought them out of the land of Egypt, that I might dwell among them; I am the LORD their God" (Exodus 29:46). He wanted to dwell with His people — *and He is*. That, my friends, is where the book closes. But though it's a great stopping place from a literary point of view, it is not the end of the story the Bible tells. God's residence with Israel in a tent was temporary — but His residence among us in Christ is permanent. Meanwhile, the book ends with the word "journey," pointing forward to Numbers

and the route to the Promised Land, and reminding us that we are called to journey with Christ, our true tabernacle, toward the Father, deeper into the knowledge of God.

### **I. God's Glory Filled the Tent of Meeting, v. 35**

The text tells us Yahweh came down in the cloud and covered the tent, and then filled it with His glory. Does this mean that the uncreated light of God burst out of every seam, that it was just visible around the curtain over the door frame? I rather think so. Clearly, even though no one was in the tabernacle to witness this, the tabernacle was so full of glory that it was bursting out of every chink and crevice.

In other words, God Himself was in the building. He had taken up residence there, and He showed it by shining His uncreated light. "God is light, and in Him is no darkness at all." His radiant glory, the sum total of all His wonderful attributes, was in the tabernacle. He was dwelling with Israel.

### **II. God's Glory Can Only Be Approached through Blood Sacrifice, v. 35 with Lev. 1-8**

Yet the next sentence is astounding, particularly since in both vv. 34 and 35 the tabernacle is referred to as "the tent of meeting." The whole point of this structure is that it is a place where the Mediator will meet with God. So why on earth do we have these two plot points?

1. God moves in.
2. Moses is kept out.

That should trigger you in a major way, brothers and sisters. Why did they build the tent of meeting if there was going to be no meeting going on inside it?

Exodus doesn't answer that question. If you want to know the answer, you have to keep reading. In a few verses, you will see that the scene continues in the first chapters of Leviticus. Indeed, Moses is standing at the tent door, while God is in the tent. We have a reversal of the situation in ch. 33, where Moses is in the tent and God is outside. Now Moses is out and God is in. They are still separated by tent walls. But God answers the question of how to approach Him in the first 8 chapters of Leviticus. The answer is sacrifice, and especially blood sacrifice. Moses can't come into the tabernacle of meeting without blood.

Do you see the lesson, brothers and sisters? The presence of God is not accessible to sinful human beings without a sacrifice opening the way. Moses, as many times as he has talked with God, as obedient as he has been to God, can't just waltz into God's house. He has to be washed in the blood of the Lamb. And so do you and I. Exodus does not spell out this whole backstory; it simply assumes that you will be able to connect the dots from the rest of Scripture.

Moses stands on the porch, ready to enter the tabernacle, while God gives him instructions on sacrifice and priesthood. Only after the priests have been ordained and waited seven days at the doorway of the tabernacle does the long-awaited consummation occur on the eighth day:

And Aaron lifted up his hand toward the people, and blessed them, and came down from offering of the sin offering, and the burnt offering, and peace offerings. And Moses and Aaron went into the tabernacle of the congregation, and came out, and blessed the people: and the glory of the LORD appeared unto all the people. And there came a fire out from

before the LORD, and consumed upon the altar the burnt offering and the fat: which when all the people saw, they shouted, and fell on their faces. (Lev 9:22-24 KJV) Moses and Aaron went into God's house, and then came back out to bless the people. It's astonishing; it's glorious; and it's a wonderful reminder that there is no entry without the blood of the Lamb. Are you washed in His blood? If not, you cannot enter the house of the LORD where His people will dwell forever.

### **III. Even at the Tabernacle, God Concealed His Glory in the Cloud, vv. 35-36**

I would also point out that even to enter the tabernacle is not to see God's face. The cloud hovered over the tent. God continued to conceal a large portion of His glory from His people's eyes. The same is true today, of course. If you come to church disbelieving, even here, where we believers find so much evidence of God's existence, work, and power, you will say "There is no convincing evidence that any supernatural presence is there." The glory of God is real, and it is overwhelming — but on this side of eternity, it is hidden.

### **IV. God's Presence Abides, vv. 36-38**

The book ends with two contrasting points, if you could call them that — they are really the same point. The first way of putting it is that God's presence abides. He is at the tabernacle day and night, showing Himself as cloud and fire. He does not leave Israel or forsake them. He is with them every step of the way. He did not come to the tabernacle as a hotel, simply to leave it again after a few hours. He came to it as a home, as a place in which He would dwell for centuries. What can we say about His abiding — among Israel, and among us?

#### **A. Israel has permanently grown in the knowledge of God**

First of all, this represents major progress. God is with them! He lives with them. It is easier to get to know your neighbor than it is to know a deity of whose very name you are ignorant. The book of the knowledge of God ends with a situation, a permanent situation, in which God's abiding blesses His people with better and better knowledge of Himself.

#### **B. Guiding them morally through His law**

Part of that knowledge was moral knowledge. His presence provided moral guidance. We'll talk in a moment about the physical guidance He gave in moving ahead of Israel through the wilderness. But whether camped or moving, the omnipresent cloud and fire were always there, always watching over the camp, always telling Israel "I gave you Ten Commandments; trust and obey them; I am watching you!" God had revealed a perfect set of laws for Israel's moral life. And those laws are still valid for us today. How do you know how to make decisions, what you ought to do, what's right and wrong? Learn the Ten Commandments! Memorize them word-for-word. When a moral question comes up, apply these ten words to it. At least one of them will provide insight, and probably many will. God was abiding with Israel, reminding them that His commands still apply, for the lawgiver is not dead, but very much alive and well and watching.

Do you let God's presence determine your choices? Are you driven by what His word says to you about the Christian life?

### **C. In Christ, who Tabernacled among us**

You see, God's presence is with us just as much as it was with Israel — indeed, more so. John tells us that the Word became flesh and tabernacled among us. He uses that verb to tell us that the coming of Jesus is the perfect fulfillment of God's instructions to Israel regarding the tabernacle. And though Jesus has gone to Heaven, in Him, God is still dwelling with man, two natures in one person. And He has sent His Spirit to us, who abides with us and is in us. You don't need to look at the window to see cloud and fire to know that God is with you. You need to remember the promise of Immanuel, and look at the fruit of the Spirit that He is growing in your life. He is with you — otherwise you would not be full of love, joy, and peace.

### **D. In heaven, where we will see His face**

Finally, the ultimate fulfillment of this glorious abiding of God with Israel is found in Heaven. We will see His face — something not vouchsafed to Moses, even in the holy of holies. And when our Lord was on earth, when the disciples and crowds saw His face, they did not see His glory. Many did not believe on Him, for His glory was still as it were hidden by the cloud. But in heaven, there will be no cloud, only the direct presence of God. And we will abide with Him forever. Are you longing for that day? Do you enjoy God's presence enough here on earth that you want it in unlimited quantities? Remember that every human good is just a splintered piece of the Almighty and His full-orbed perfection. Imagine all of your friends and family rolled into one. All of those perfections and excellent qualities are abundantly present in God. Where do you think your mom or your sister or your best friend got them? Yes, that's right: God gave them, because they are facets of His own perfection. We will see His face; He shall abide, and be great to the ends of the earth.

## **V. God's Presence Journeys, v. 38**

Yet not only does God abide with His people; He also journeys with them. That is the last word of the book, with good reason.

### **A. Guiding them from place to place in the wilderness**

It was God who personally guided them from place to place in the wilderness. If you had to wander the trackless desert, would you want someone with only a hazy knowledge of where the oases are? Yeah, I thought not. But God is better than any human guide, for not only does He know the wilderness perfectly, He can change it, make water flow, send manna and quail, and do anything else that needs to be done for His people. He was so committed to being with His people that He, the omnipresent one, journeyed with them.

### **B. A Literary Anticipation of Numbers, Deuteronomy, and Joshua**

Of course, this word "journey," as I mentioned a moment ago, is a literary anticipation of how the rest of the story will unfold. Israel's journey toward the promised land is described in Numbers, with a bit more in Deuteronomy. And then Joshua tells how that journey reached its end, when Israel crossed the Jordan into Canaan and took possession of the land. In all their journeys, God was with them. He did not have to run off to a council of wizards to drive the Dark Lord out of Dol Guldur. He was with them the whole time, in all their journeys. And guess what? He will be with you.

### **C. Israel is traveling with God toward God**

God is with them in all their journeys. But what is the destination of all those journeys? It is God Himself. “You will bring them in and plant them on your own mountain, the place, O LORD, which you have made for your abode, the sanctuary, O Lord, which your hands have established. The LORD will reign forever and ever” (Exo 15:17-18).

They are journeying toward Heaven; God is leading them to Himself. Oh the depth! Of Him, through Him, and to Him are all things — especially the travels of His people.

The movement from Egypt to the promised land is an outward symbol of a deeper and more ultimate journey — of humanity into the knowledge of the very life of God. “I will espouse you to me in faith, and you shall know the Lord” (Hos. 2:20, my translation). The supernatural faith of Israel is obscure, but the light that Israel gathers from the law is the beginning of the vision of God promised to us on the last day.<sup>1</sup>

Brothers and sisters, Israel traveled with God toward God. So do you. Are you ready for that? Do you love that? How badly do you want to come and appear before God?

### **VI. Application**

What do we do with this text about the glory of God filling the tabernacle, brothers and sisters?

#### **A. In all your journeys, look for the fire of His presence, hidden for your protection behind His cloud**

I would first of all ask you to indulge me in a somewhat squishy application. You can and should look for the fire of God’s presence. That doesn’t mean ascribing every happy event to God and every negative event to Satan, or saying when something works out for you “It was such a God thing” as if God is not involved when one of your plans doesn’t work out. But what I mean is this: God is indeed at work in this world; His kingdom is coming every time someone repents, believes, and obeys. When you see that, know that God is at work. When you see someone manifest one of the fruits of the Spirit, know that God is at work. When you see the beauty of creation, know that God is at work.

Look hard for the fire of God’s presence; when you see His works, don’t be faithless, but believing. Learn His ways rather than simply letting His works pass dumbly in front of your eyes.

#### **B. Reject the light of Pharaoh for the darkness of God**

Secondly, reject the light of Pharaoh for the darkness of God. Allow to quote once again from White.

The book of Exodus begins in darkness and ends in light. The Israelites are delivered from the darkness of slavery and enter into the luminous glory of the covenant. The

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<sup>1</sup> Thomas Joseph White, *Exodus*, Brazos Theological Commentary (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2016), 289.

vision of God granted to Moses is Exod. 34 illumines his visage and serves as a promise to all Israel: God wishes to share with Israel the knowledge of his own identity.

Or perhaps the imagery might be reversed. The book begins in the region of the light of man (represented by Pharaoh)--a world of reason marked by efficiency, calculation, and cruelty. As the people of Israel move out of Egypt they pass over into the darkness of God, represented by the cloud that always accompanies them.<sup>2</sup>

The light of Pharaoh is the idea that the corporation, and the biggest and baddest of all human creations, the state, is sufficient. The head of state is god, functionally or even (as the Egyptians claimed) ontologically. We need nothing more than what Pharaoh provides for us; he is judge, lawgiver, and king; he will save us.

Brothers and sisters, statism presents itself as thoroughly enlightened and modern, though it is really as ancient as man. Reject this false fire, this human enlightenment, this light of man. Pithom and Rameses are not your eternal home. You were made to dwell with God, and here on earth that is going to mean putting up with more cloud than you or I would like.

If I can only believe what is propositionally revealed in the Bible, and if my name is not propositionally revealed in the Bible as one who believes the promises of salvation rightly, then how can I believe the promise? How can I believe any promise there? Do I have direct warrant? No, not at all. I can, however, believe indirectly, but I must supply one of the missing ingredients (which I cannot do apart from grace) . . . The thing that closes the circle is always faith. This particular faith cannot be based on propositional warrant from Scripture, because Scripture says nothing about my prayers, nothing about my children, nothing about whether I am elect. I close the circle by faith. God gives the general enscripturated promise. He then works in me specifically through the person of the Holy Spirit to bring me to the conviction that these general promises are mine, and so that I may enter into rest. Not only do I have reason to believe the promises, I am commanded to believe them.”<sup>3</sup>

How do we operate within the cloud that conceals God’s glory? The answer is *faith*. You must believe that Jerusalem is greater than Pithom and Rameses, that Pharaoh is not omnipotent, that there is life outside Egypt (aka this world), and that it is worth giving up *everything* to follow the Mediator from here to eternity.

### **C. Know God as Yahweh, Savior, fire, lawgiver, tabernacler, and destination**

To continue in that vein, let me make application from the whole book of Exodus. Since this is the book of the knowledge of God, the most important thing you can do with it is to know God as He has revealed Himself in these pages. Half-a-dozen truths about Him spring instantly to mind from what we have seen.

The first goes right back to the burning bush and the declaration the Almighty makes: “I am who I am.” Do you know Him as Yahweh, the one who is and who is not dependent on

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Doug Wilson, *The Auburn Avenue Chronicles*, 119-120.

anything outside Himself to be that? Do you trust that though heaven and earth pass away, He will not pass away?

Furthermore, know Him as savior. He brought Israel out of Egypt. He delivered them from slavery to Pharaoh. Do you know Him as the one who brought you out of slavery, delivering you from this present evil age and the god of this age?

He is fire, too. That is how He showed Himself to Moses, under the symbol of fire. He crackles with His own energy, always moving, always going upwards.

He is lawgiver, the one who wrote the Ten Commandments on stone, the one who gave the book of the covenant so that you and I can see His instructions for how His people ought to conduct themselves.

And finally, He is tabernacler, the one who dwells with His people forever and ever. Imagine that God had simply given you a list of these six attributes. You would be very puzzled over what to make of it. But instead of a list, He gives you a story — the book of Exodus. Because of the narrative context in which all of these occur, they are clearly explained. When I say that God is fire or God is lawgiver, you know exactly what I mean.

**D. Seek God's presence through Jesus, your Priest, Mediator, and Tabernacle**  
Finally, brothers and sisters, a huge part of Exodus describes the work of the mediator, the garments of the priesthood, and the construction of the tabernacle. Don't redo all that work — but don't ignore it either. Jesus Christ is your priest. He is your Mediator. He is your tabernacle. Through Him we both have access by one Spirit to the Father. Use that access; go to your Father through Jesus!

We have read and heard sermons on every verse of the book of the knowledge of God. Now you know more of what He's like. Believe. Trust. Obey. Learn His ways; go with Him in all your journeys. Amen.