

A Better Sanctuary

Hebrew 9:1-14

Halifax: 16 April 2023

Introduction:

Today we continue our sermon series in Hebrews.

- In the first part of chapter 8, we were told that the main point of Hebrews is that we have a High Priest who is able to save us to the uttermost.
 - He is seated at the right hand of the Majesty on high. He has a better covenant with better promises, at a better sanctuary, with a better offering.
 - Last week we focused on the better covenant with its better promises.
 - Today, we are focusing on the better sanctuary.
 - Next week, we will focus on the better offering.

Our scripture reading about the better sanctuary is found in Hebrews 9.

- I will read the first 14 verses.

Please give attention now to the reading of God's holy word—beginning at Hebrews 9:1.

Hebrews 9:1-14: Then indeed, even the first *covenant* had ordinances of divine service and the earthly sanctuary. ² For a tabernacle was prepared: the first *part*, in which *was* the lampstand, the table, and the showbread, which is called the sanctuary; ³ and behind the second veil, the part of the tabernacle which is called the Holiest of All, ⁴ which had the golden censer and the ark of the covenant overlaid on all sides with gold, in which *were* the golden pot that had the manna, Aaron's rod that budded, and the tablets of the covenant; ⁵ and above it were the cherubim of glory overshadowing the mercy seat. Of these things we cannot now speak in detail. ⁶ Now when these things had been thus prepared, the priests always went into the first part of the tabernacle, performing the services. ⁷ But into the second part the high priest *went* alone once a year, not without blood, which he offered for himself and *for* the people's sins *committed* in ignorance; ⁸ the Holy Spirit indicating this, that the way into the Holiest

of All was not yet made manifest while the first tabernacle was still standing. ⁹ It *was* symbolic for the present time in which both gifts and sacrifices are offered which cannot make him who performed the service perfect in regard to the conscience— ¹⁰ *concerned* only with foods and drinks, various washings, and fleshly ordinances imposed until the time of reformation. ¹¹ But Christ came *as* High Priest of the good things to come, with the greater and more perfect tabernacle not made with hands, that is, not of this creation. ¹² Not with the blood of goats and calves, but with His own blood He entered the Most Holy Place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption. ¹³ For if the blood of bulls and goats and the ashes of a heifer, sprinkling the unclean, sanctifies for the purifying of the flesh, ¹⁴ how much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without spot to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?

Thanks be to God for His precious word.

This section has much to say about the tabernacle.

- Verse 9 tells us that the tabernacle in the Old Testament was symbolic for the present time.
 - It was filled with symbolism that shows us about Christ, our great High Priest.
 - Today, we will look at what it shows us about Christ and His ministry.

- I. First, the tabernacle was designed to show us that God is with His people.**
- Chapter 9 opens with these words: **9:1-2: Then indeed, even the first *covenant* had ordinances of divine service and the earthly sanctuary. ² For a tabernacle was prepared:**
- A. You see that the tabernacle is referred to as an earthly sanctuary.
1. A sanctuary is a place where God is present—
 - It is a holy place where God manifests His presence.
 - A tabernacle is a tent.
 - This tent was prepared according to God’s instructions in the first covenant (used here to refer to the covenant God made with Israel in the time of Moses when He brought them out of Egypt)—
 - This tent was prepared according to God’s instructions to be God’s tent, a holy sanctuary, that was pitched in the midst of their tents.
 2. The idea was that God dwelt in the midst of His people!
 - This was a remarkably encouraging arrangement.
 - It was a visible token that He was with them.
 - It gave them a concrete expression of His promise that He would be their God and would dwell among them as His people.
 - When they settled in the land, it was then that God had them build Him a house in the midst of the land.
 - Just as He had been in a tent when they were in tents, so He was in a house when they were settled in houses in the land He had given them.
 3. This was suitable to their relationship with Him at that time—before Christ came—and it is instructive to us now that He has come.
 - Now Christ who came and dwelt among us in human flesh is said to be God’s tabernacle or temple, and we are living stones in that house where God dwells.
 - John 1:14 says of the divine Son of God, the *word* or *logos*, **And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us** [literally, *tabernacled* or *tented* among us], **and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.**
 - We should not look at church buildings as temples or sanctuaries, as Jesus also told us in John 4:23-24—God is no longer to be worshipped at Jerusalem, but in spirit and in truth (as opposed to image and shadow that only represent the truth).
 - Now we are His people, joined to Christ who is in heaven with the Spirit of God dwelling in us as a living temple or tent.
 - Paul speaks of us as seated with Christ in the heavenlies in Col 3.
 - In Ephesians 2, he speaks of us as: (v. 20): **having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief *cornerstone*, ²¹ in whom the whole building, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord, ²² in whom you also are being built together for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit.**
- B. The furnishings of the tabernacle are also rich with symbolism.

- There were two parts—the holy place and the holy of holies, or as it says in our text, “the holiest of all.”
 - I will say more about them in a minute, but first let’s look at how they were furnished.
- 1. Verse 2 says that in the first part was the lampstand, the table, and the showbread.
 - The lampstand had oil lamps in it that the priests were to tend every day to keep them burning, and the table had the showbread on it, twelve loaves that were replaced every Sabbath.
 - a. The lampstand showed them that God was the source of light and truth—the One who made known the truth to them.
 - 1) This, of course, represents Christ, the light of the world, who is the prophet by whom all the prophets spoke, who enlightens all of His people.
 - By His light, we are enabled to see the truth about God, the truth about ourselves, our sin, the way of forgiveness, the way we are to live.
 - God dwelling in our midst is the source of light!
 - 2) Be sure that you receive His word with true understanding.
 - When Christ is shining in you, the word of God is alive—it convicts you of sin, it gets into you; it comforts you with promises that you actually trust; it tells you about God to whom you respond.
 - b. The table of showbread shows that God is the source of our sustenance.
 - 1) He gives us our daily bread to maintain our bodies, but much more to the point is that He spiritually nourishes us with the bread from heaven.
 - Jesus Christ declared that He is the bread of life that came down from heaven and that unless we are nourished by Him, we will perish.
 - 2) Without this bread, you have no power to live for God.
 - You are not able grow and thrive in your walk, advancing from glory to glory.
 - You are dead, even while you live, because without Christ, your life is not lived for God.
 - c. So you see that in the first covenant, in the Old Covenant, God was pleased to show them that He was their source of light and life.
 - Now Christ is the tabernacle and we, through faith in Him, are made holy and we have the light that He gives and the life that He gives in us as His holy temple.
 - God the Holy Spirit fills the whole tabernacle, Christ and His people, with light and life. We are joined to Him by faith.
- 2. In the second part of the tabernacle, the holy of holies, there are even more items mentioned. Let’s look at them. This chamber represents God’s throne room.
 - a. First, it says that the holy of holies had the golden censer.
 - 1) The word here simply means a holder of incense.

- The word itself could refer to either the *altar* of incense which was actually in the first part of the tent—the holy place instead of the holy of holies—where it was to be kept burning constantly; or it could refer to the portable *censer* (incense holder) that the High Priest used when he went into the holy of holies once a year to atone for sin—never without incense with which he was to fill the chamber while he ministered there.
 - The main idea is clear. The incense was for the holy of holies.
- 2) Incense represents the offering up of pure and holy prayer, which rises with the sacrifice as a sweet savour to God.
 - Such prayer is not offered up by sinful humans, but only by Christ—thus the incense represents His prayers offered up with His sacrifice.
 - In the tabernacle of old, it showed that such prayer was essential—thus it was symbolised by holy incense made by a unique formula.
 - Now that Christ has come, it dishonours Him to use incense because now we have His holy prayers—not a mere representation of them.
 - 3) This is a huge encouragement to us. Always there is faithful prayer rising to God from our Saviour in the true tabernacle.
 - On our part, we are to pray in His name, joining our prayers to His that they might be accepted by the Father as a sweet savour.
- b. Along with that, there was the ark of the covenant which was the centrepiece of the whole temple—representing Christ before God’s presence.
- This is what we read of Dan 7 where one like the Son of Man went up to God the Father in glory and was given dominion and a throne at His right hand.
- 1) There was a sense in which the whole tabernacle was built to house the ark. It was here that God was represented as connecting with His people.
 - This inner chamber was God’s footstool where He connects with us.
 - The ark represents Christ who is before the Father for us.
 - 2) We are told that there were three things that were in the ark, but the principal thing that was in it were the tablets of the covenant.
 - These had the ten commandments inscribed and are the requirement for men to have communion with God.
 - We have broken these, and God showed Israel that they had also broken them, but as we saw in Psalm 40, the law is inscribed in Christ’s heart. He has the commandments, and He keeps them before the Father as our priest and representative.
 - This is what God requires of His people and this is what Christ does.
 - 3) The other two items were the pot with the manna in it and the rod of Aaron that blossomed.
 - When Jesus was here, He told us that He is the true manna that came down from heaven to give life to the world.
 - He is also the one who has authority as the anointed priest and king, the thing represented by the rod when Aaron’s authority was challenged and the staffs of the men who challenged him were put with his staff to see which one would bud and blossom—and it was only Aaron’s. This may be the staff that was used to do miracles as well.

- c. On top of the ark there was the mercy seat, essentially a lid of gold upon which the blood of the was sprinkled each year to make atonement for the priests and the people on Yom Kippur (the day of atonement).
 - This represented the sacrifice that atones for sin—that sacrifice that Christ was to eventually make and that He now has made.
 - We will have more to say about that later—even in the weeks to come.
 - d. Above the mercy seat, you have the cherubim.
 - They represent those who guard the holy place.
 - They would execute vengeance on anyone who tried to profane it.
 - Only holy offerings were acceptable here—these offerings and these cherubim were only symbolic of the real offering that Christ would make.
- By all these things, we are shown how God dwells with His people.
- C. To have God dwell with us is an inestimable privilege.
1. It is the restoration of how things are meant to be for us.
 - We are meant to dwell with God.
 - We are meant to have communion with Him as our source of spiritual light and life (our bread).
 - We are meant to have commandment keeping lives with pure prayers and service that are as an offering of sweet incense to Him.
 2. With the tabernacle, the LORD shows that He provides for us all that we need as His people to live with Him.
 - It is Christ who is the tabernacle, the sanctuary where we are able to come to God and have everlasting communion with Him.

TRANS> But there is clearly a second thing that is shown by the tabernacle and its ordinances.

II. The tabernacle with its ordinances shows us how unfit sin has made us to dwell with God.

- A. We need to see this because we minimise our sin.
- We do not accept how unacceptable sin has made us to God—how unfit we are to dwell with Him.
1. Sadly it has become a normal thing for churches to turn the message of the gospel upside down.
 - Instead of showing people that they are desperate sinners who are unfit to dwell with God, we tell them that even though other people look down on us, God sees how wonderful we really are.
 2. Such deception!
 - We think we are good when the Bible says our very hearts are deceitful and desperately wicked—so much so that we can't even know them (Jer 17:9).
 - The Bible tells us that our sin has separated us from God and turned His face from us (Isa 59:2).
 - We think hell is too extreme because we are so deceived.
 - We think nobody deserves to go there when in fact we all deserve to go there forever, even if we are only judged on the basis of what we have done today.

B. With the tabernacle of old, God erected barriers by which His people were kept apart from Him lest they be consumed on account of their sin.

1. Verse 6 & 7 describe the restrictions:

- a. First, verse 6 says that nobody but the priests could come into His house at all, and that only to do their service and after being purified.
 - v. 6: **Now when these things had been thus prepared, the priests always went into the first part of the tabernacle, performing the services.**
- b. Verse 7 shows that only the high priest could into the inner sanctuary:
 - **7 But into the second part the high priest went alone once a year, not without blood, which he offered for himself and for the people's sins committed in ignorance;**
 - Note well—he was the only one who could go in and he could only do so once per year for the purpose making a sacrifice to atone for sins committed in ignorance...
 - By sins committed in ignorance, it means for sins that were not committed in defiance of God by those who did not even want to be His people.
 - He could offer the symbols of atonement and prayer as one who was symbolically purified, and then he had to get out.
- c. But you see the point.
 - The tabernacle shows that even the people God called out to be His own people were not fit to come to Him. Sin made them unfit.
 - There were all sorts of washings, all sorts of sacrifices, all sorts of gifts and offerings to purify them even to be accepted in the earthly tabernacle—all showing that they still needed to be purified and atoned for.
 - If purification was needed for ritual acceptance, how much more for real acceptance!

2. By not letting people go in except the high priest for a moment once per year to make atonement, the LORD was showing His people how unfit they were.

- a. That is not my interpretation, that is what we are told in verse 8.
 - **the Holy Spirit indicating this, that the way into the Holiest of All was not yet made manifest while the first tabernacle was still standing.**
 - The people could not go into the holy place that was a copy because the way to actually come to God had not been accomplished.
 - If they could not approach the symbolical holy place, how much less the real one?
 - As long as the temple stood, it showed that the way for sinners to come to God had not been opened.
- b. It showed that until Christ came, all of their offerings did not open the way for sinners to come to God.
 - Verse 9-10 say of the tabernacle: **It was symbolic for the present time in which both gifts and sacrifices are offered which cannot make him who performed the service perfect in regard to the conscience—¹⁰ concerned only**

with foods and drinks, various washings, and fleshly ordinances imposed until the time of reformation.

- These were only symbols of the purification that was needed.
 - There was encouragement that God was going to provide this, but these ceremonies themselves showed that sin still kept them apart from God at the present time.
 - These rituals could not make the consciences rest that their sin had been taken care of before God.
 - They could only encourage them that God had promised to take care of sin, but more than mere rituals were needed for that!
 - An animal, who has no idea why it is being killed, cannot be any more than a ritual substitute for a guilty sinner.
 - The tabernacle showed what God's Son must do.
 - Rituals have no power to make sinners pure and pardoned before God.
- c. The very symbolism itself did not allow the people to come even symbolically to the symbolically holy place—
 - to make it very clear that these symbols of purification and atonement had not and could never open the way for sinners to come to God.

III. In the tabernacle, we see what Christ had to do!

- A. The people under the Old Covenant were to see from these symbols what God was going to do.
 1. They were to see in their ceremonies that God was going to provide for them in the future.
 2. They were not to rest in those ceremonies themselves, which they sometimes did, but rather in God who, by the ceremonies, showed what He would do in the Son that was promised to them.
 - The ceremonies showed that an undefiled priest must go before God's throne. One who must be truly holy, to offer sacrifice for sin.
 - The ceremonies showed that He must go in with pure, holy prayers (like incense) that would be acceptable to God.
 - The ceremonies showed that He must make an atonement that would actually atone for sin—blood must be shed by one who stood in their place—represented by animals, but certainly not accomplished by them.
 - The ceremonies showed that the law of God, carved on the tablets of stone, must be set before God in our behalf—not in a wooden box, but in a living heart.
- B. We are to see that God, who provided a tabernacle in the Old Covenant, has provided Christ to be His tabernacle in the New Covenant.
 - He is the sanctuary where sinners truly meet God—not merely symbolically, but truly and actually.
 1. Look how our text shows us that Christ is in reality what was represented in the tabernacle of old:

- Verse 11: **But Christ came as High Priest of the good things to come, with the greater and more perfect tabernacle not made with hands, that is, not of this creation. ¹² Not with the blood of goats and calves, but with His own blood He entered the Most Holy Place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption.**
- a. Here is an offering much different than the offerings of old.
 - It is the offering of Christ Himself brought before God Himself.
 - What was only symbolised has now been done for real.
 - He has obtained eternal redemption!
- b. Notice how it says that He entered in once for all.
 - We saw before that the priests of old went in once per year to make the symbolic atonement.
 - That it was done every year showed that real atonement did not happen the year before or the year before or any years before.
 - If it had, there would be no need to ever do it again!
 - It was repeated because it was only symbolic.
 - Now that Jesus atoned for our sin in the true tabernacle, He will never have to do it again.
 - That's why God did not give us a church calendar in the New Testament with annual repetition.
 - Men were wrong to add annual celebrations of Christ's birth and death and resurrection and ascension—especially when they go through periods of fasting as if waiting for Jesus to come and then of sorrow on the anniversary of His death as if He were in the grave again, and then rejoicing as if He had just risen again.
 - No! Once Christ made the atonement, it never needed to be done again. He is risen and alive.
 - Now that He has come, we are to declare what has been done each Lord's Day and to rejoice in it.
 - No longer do we look at it as something that needs to be done or that has just been done; we look at it as what was done 2000 years ago.
 - Yes, we look for what is yet to be done—the rest of His people drawn in, we His saints perfected in holiness, the destruction of all His enemies including death, and His glorious return to gather us all to Him forever.
 - But what was shown at the tabernacle is now accomplished and we praise our living Saviour who is at God's right hand.
- 2. What assurance you ought to have that there is full forgiveness in Christ.
 - Verse 13 & 14 say: **For if the blood of bulls and goats and the ashes of a heifer, sprinkling the unclean, sanctifies for the purifying of the flesh, how much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without spot to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?**
 - If it worked symbolically, how much more does it work in reality.
 - We have God's Son Himself who made atonement by His own blood.
 - We have Him who presented prayers as holy incense and was heard.

- We have Him as the one in whom God's commandments are found.
- Christ Himself has tabernacled among us.
 - He has fulfilled all that was required to bring us into fellowship with God.
- 3. Don't be an idiot and try to do for yourself what only He can do, or try to do by rituals what He has already done in truth.
 - He is God's provision for desperate sinners—pure and simple.
 - He is the tabernacle, the sanctuary, where sinners can live in communion with God, not by coming to a building, but by trusting in Him who died and rose again.
 - Come to Him, lean on Him—or perish.
 - Come to Him—or go on in your aimless foolish destructive path of misery.

Rise and let us give thanks to God for our Saviour.