

Forbidden Church

The Ark

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Bible Text: Exodus 25:10-22

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I do want to encourage you this morning to turn in your Bible to the book of Exodus chapter 25. As you are turning to the book of Exodus chapter 25 today we are going to find ourselves in verses 10 through 22. And if you are one of those first time guests or visitors, yes today looks a little different on the outside, but it is the same as far as content is concerned, for we continue, this is week two of our summer sermon series and, yes, that is a very difficult thing to say very quickly, through a study of what we know as the ark of the covenant, this, quote, box that we find in the Old Testament 16 cubic feet overlaid with gold, had two rods or sticks sticking outside of it that men would carry in a certain way. It had cherubim that were molded on the top. It was not large in size, but as we studied last week, kings and kingdoms and wars and fights have been engaging and fighting for many, many years. People just trying to get a hold of this item. Why would people give more money looking for an item that it is intrinsically worth as far as monetary value is concerned? Why? Because the ark of the covenant is more than 16 cubic feet. It is more than the weight of the gold that overlays its content. It represents, it pictures in the Old Testament the powerful presence of God, where the presence of God is and it is utilized properly there is victory and there is freedom and where it is opposed there is bondage and there is judgment.

Today as we turn to Exodus chapter 25 we are going to look at some particular aspects of the ark of the covenant. We are going to look at what did it represent to the past for those who were constructing it? What did it represent or what does it represent for the future? But most importantly, how does the study of the ark of the covenant, how does the message from God's Word today, how does it or can it or how should it impact when you leave this facility today?

You know, the ark of the covenant was known for its small size and it was known for the beautiful gold, but the thing that made it so powerful, as we will see in a moment, is when the blood of a sacrifice was sprinkled on it. And the ultimate question that we need to ask ourselves is: Have we applied the blood of Jesus Christ that was sacrificed so dearly for us? Have we allowed it to be sprinkled on our life?

In Exodus chapter 25 beginning in verse 10 we have the verbal blueprint for what we know as the ark of the covenant. It says:

And they shall make an ark of shittim wood: two cubits and a half shall be the length thereof, and a cubit and a half the breadth thereof, and a cubit and a half the height thereof. And thou shalt overlay it with pure gold, within and without shalt thou overlay it, and shalt make upon it a crown of gold round about. And thou shalt cast four rings of gold for it, and put them in the four corners thereof; and two rings shall be in the one side of it, and two rings in the other side of it. And thou shalt make staves of shittim wood, and overlay them with gold. And thou shalt put the staves into the rings by the sides of the ark, that the ark may be borne with them. The staves shall be in the rings of the ark: they shall not be taken from it. And thou shalt put into the ark the testimony which I shall give thee. And thou shalt make a mercy seat of pure gold: two cubits and a half shall be the length thereof, and a cubit and a half the breadth thereof. And thou shalt make two cherubims of gold, of beaten work shalt thou make them, in the two ends of the mercy seat. And make one cherub on the one end, and the other cherub on the other end: even of the mercy seat shall ye make the cherubims on the two ends thereof. And the cherubims shall stretch forth their wings on high, covering the mercy seat with their wings, and their faces shall look one to another; toward the mercy seat shall the faces of the cherubims be. And thou shalt put the mercy seat above upon the ark; and in the ark thou shalt put the testimony that I shall give thee. And there I will meet with thee, and I will commune with thee from above the mercy seat, from between the two cherubims which are upon the ark of the testimony, of all things which I will give thee in commandment unto the children of Israel.¹

The outline that we gave to you today discloses the verses of Scripture that we are going to be utilizing today. Lots of passages of Scripture and hopefully you are one who either on the smart phone that you have with you or your actual paper Bible that you have with you, that you are able to actually thumb through and see these Scriptures. But I want you to see today the powerful particulars that are present in this.

Now this just looks like a blueprint. And if you have ever seen a blueprint of a building or of a house or some type of structure, at least on the surface level it is not that impressive. Now I know the drawings and this {?} that is incredibly impressive, the engineering that goes behind it, but when you are looking at a house that might have, you know, several hundred to several thousand square feet in it and it all is on a piece of paper that can be put on a single desk, it doesn't seem that impressive. What happens is when you take that blueprint and it begins to come to life and the concrete is poured or whatever instruments are used to put that and it begins to become three dimensional. And today's goal is to make the blueprint of the ark of the covenant three dimensional, not just words on paper, but three dimensional. What did it mean about the past? What did it mean about the future? What does it mean about our present?

¹ Exodus 25:10-22.

So in just a moment we are going to spend some time in the book of Genesis chapter two and chapter three, but I want to talk first about the past, the ark of the covenant in the past. When God had them build it as he had them, what did it say? What did it communicate? What was it representing not only to them as Israelites, but to humanity at large? And when we look at the past some of the elements we need to look at, the first one is this: The actual construction of this box.

Now we have talked about it. It was only 16 cubic feet and it was overlaid with gold, but I find it intriguing what God had them put on the top of the box. I mean, of all the things that God could have done. All of the things he has created, of all the items in the world, why cherubim? Why these mysterious angelic beings that we find in Scripture? And if you have done a study of angelic beings we find that there are cherubim. We find that there are seraphim. We find there are all types and all kinds of abilities and representations. Why cherubim? Why these creature and why were they to be multiplied? Why are all they all tall? Why do they face one another? Why is the mercy seat in the middle?

You have your Bibles open to the book of Genesis chapter three. I want to take you to the passage of Scripture post sin. Adam and Eve have been in the Garden of Eden. They have, as we will disclose in just a moment, they have chosen very unwisely. They have eaten of the fruit of the tree that they were not supposed to eat thereof. The, quote, punishment has been distributed to the serpent, to the man, to the woman. They have been banished from the garden. They have been banished from the garden. They are now going to have a life of thorns. They are now going to have a life of labor that is tedious and a struggle. They are now going to have pain in child birth, struggling with the relationships. The world that you and I know today is the world they are assumed to know and the world we have never known and hope to one day they are leaving behind.

I want you to notice what verse 23 and 24 of Genesis three says.

Therefore the LORD God sent him forth [that is Adam] from the garden of Eden, to till the ground from whence he was taken. So he drove out the man; and he placed at the east of the garden of Eden Cherubims, and a flaming sword which turned every way, to keep the way of the tree of life.²

The construction of this ark of the covenant, these cherubim on top are a very realistic, but yet painful reminder that the gravity of sin... Sin often times is cultural in our day. Sin often times is that which is convenient, that which is excused, that which is justified. But when the high priest would go in on the Day of Atonement and actually sprinkle the blood that we are going to talk about in a moment on what we know as the mercy seat of the ark of the covenant, he would be staring at an image of the very things that guarded the place that humanity used to reside in.

Why do we no longer have access? Why do we no longer have the means, as we will talk about in a moment, to walk with the Lord in the cool of the day? Because sin is that

² Genesis 3:23-24.

grave. Sin is that important to God. And we could chalk it up to all kinds of justifications and excuses, but when they built the ark of the covenant it is a very fresh reminder of what happens with sin. Sin takes you from where you used to be and takes you now where you don't want to be. Before sin there was peace and prosperity. After there is pain and anguish. Even the very construction of this, quote, box reminded them of the severity of the sin of the past, in particular Adam and Eve, but also every one of us.

But then there are the contents. And in just a moment we are going to deal with the specific contents that are actually found in the ark of the covenant. But back in Exodus chapter 25 it does not list the jar of manna. It does not list Aaron's rod and it does not list the 10 Commandments. We will deal with those in a moment. But I do want you to notice what it does say in verse 16.

“And thou shalt put into the ark the testimony which I shall give thee.”³

Verse 22.

“...the two cherubims which are upon the ark of the testimony.”⁴

God makes it very clear that when it is the... that the contents, that which is going to be inside is going to be a testimony. It is going to speak the truth of God in their life. It is for them to remember, but, as we are going to see in a moment, to also see the future.

What is so important about God calling it a testimony? I want you to turn back to Genesis chapter two as we look at the past importance of the construction of the ark and I want you to see the testimony of God to Adam. In Genesis chapter two beginning in verse 15 Adam and Eve have not sinned. They have not eaten of the fruit of the tree of life. God is giving Adam the testimony of how to live this thing called life. Verse 15 of Genesis two.

And the LORD God took the man, and put him into the garden of Eden to dress it and to keep it.

And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat: But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die.⁵

What was the testimony that God gave Adam? If you do what I command you to do, everything is great. If you rebel and decide to do things your way it says, “You will surely die.” Literally it says you will die twice. You will die, die.

³ Exodus 25:16.

⁴ Exodus 25:22.

⁵ Genesis 2:15-17.

It was in the next chapter, as we will study in a minute, when Adam and Eve partook of that forbidden fruit that they knew that they were naked. They realized that they were exposed, not only to each other, but to God himself.

You know, on that fateful day in the Garden of Eden Adam and Eve did not physically die, but they spiritually died. And when that ark of the covenant was constructed and they put it together just like God said, the contents that it would be, it was a testimony to them, just like it is a testimony to us. Every one of us today as far as I can tell is leaving and breathing physically. We are all on this side of death. We have not experienced a physical death personally. But according to the Word of God and the reminder when they built the ark of the covenant, every one of us today has experienced a spiritual death, because the Bible says:

“For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God.”⁶

And when the contents are going to be put in the ark of the covenant it not only communicated what these cherubim, that which had been lost and the gravity and the importance of sin in God’s eyes, but it testified to the Israelites. It communicated to them that that which they had done in the past, that which they said in the past, that which they had thought in the past rendered them guilty of going against the laws and the commandments of God. It was a testimony. God had told Adam, “If you do what I tell you to do, you shall have life. And if you do not, you shall surely die.”

These individuals upon the construction and the implementation in worship would have had the experience of realizing that though they were alive physically it testified to them that they had died spiritually. So its construction communicated what had been lost. The contents communicated the testimony.

But the third item that it would have spoken to them and to us today about the past is the whole issue of communication with God. If you know the story of the Exodus and the Israelites coming out under Pharaoh’s reign and going across the Red Sea and traveling in the wilderness for 40 years and the building of the tabernacle which we see, it was a unique experience in the fact that Moses goes on Mount Sinai. God communicates to him and then Moses communicates to the people. In fact, there is a story in Exodus where the people were scared to go into the tabernacle because Moses’ face was glowing and they said, “You are good Moses. You just tell us what to do.”

But I want you to notice in these passages that we read in Exodus 25 the testimony was given to them, not him. Why is that significant? Because on the Day of Atonement, in the ritualistic worship of the Old Testament Jews whether it be in the synagogue or whether... or, I am sorry, whether it be the tabernacle of the temple, it was one man, one day, one time that he would go in. But what was it to do? In verse 22 it says, “Let me commune with them.”

⁶ Romans 3:23.

God's desire was to communicate with them again. His desire was that which had been broken by sin to be restored, that breach to be repaired.

If you will turn back again to Genesis chapter three I want to share with you a verse or two immediately after what we know as sin enters the world. In Genesis three verse eight their eyes are opened. Their understanding that they did not do what God asked them to do and they are in a mess because of it. I want you to look at verse eight of Genesis three.

And they heard the voice of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day: and Adam and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God amongst the trees of the garden.

And the LORD God called unto Adam, and said unto him, Where art thou?⁷

Now an all knowing God knew exactly what bush they were hiding behind. The question wasn't a matter of geography. The question was a matter of confession and repentance. He knew that they stood naked before him. He knew they had violated his commands. He said, "Where are you?" In other words, "Would you please confess that we have got a problem?" And we know the rest of Genesis three and often times we make light of it, because everybody starts pointing the fingers and blaming everybody else. But I want you to notice what happens in that verse. It says they heard him walking in the cool of the day. Wow. The thought that that even pictures in my mind, that which the bible says one day in the future we will experience again was something they had not experienced in the wilderness. It was something they had not experienced in Egypt.

When God gave them the instructions in Exodus 25 about building this ark in a certain manner and a certain way, he was communicating to them, not only the gravity of their sin, not only communicating to them that if you do what I tell you to do, if you don't, you are not. He was saying to the whole corporate body, humanity who all but, both great and small had sinned, that God's desire more than anything was to communicate and to commune with us.

Now let me share with you the importance of this understanding this. The Israelites had rebelled against God for hundreds of years. They had falsely worshipped Baal. They had rejected the teaching of Moses. They had done all kinds of horrific things and God said, "Yet I still want to commune and communicate with you." It was an important message that no matter how their dad or mom or grandparents or forefathers had acted or behaved, that their relationship with God was not dependent primarily on what they had done, the past, but on what they personally did, the present. It was a powerful message about the past as they constructed.

But what about the future? What about the ark of the covenant and the future, particularly of the Israelites, but even broader, what does this speak about the presence of God in our

⁷ Genesis 3:8-9.

lives? And this is where we are going to break down the three elements that are contained within the ark of the covenant, three famous elements. There were the jar or the omer of manna, crispy cream, we will talk about that in a moment. There was Aaron's budding rod and the 10 Commandments. What were these items? What was so significant of them? What did they say not just about the past, but what did they communicate about the future?

The first thing is this. They communicated survival. Let's take the first element, manna. The first element that was put in there, they would not have survived in the wilderness without the manna. Why? Because they would have starved to death. And they complained and they whined and they moaned. Hey, we had food to eat. We don't have food here. So what did God tell them to do? By the way, this is found in the book of Exodus chapter 16. In Exodus chapter 16 God gives them the commandments. Wake up in the morning. Go out and get as much as you need. When the button says hot and fresh, buy a dozen. That is exactly what it said right here.

The Bible actually said, "Take what you need and you will be good."

But there were some stipulations to the manna. If they decided to hold it over to the next day because I have a feeling that unlike crispy creams you cannot microwave manna for five seconds and it still taste good, just in case you needed to know how to do that, not that I would know. I have heard from many of you all how to do this, confessions, is that the worms would eat it and it would go bad. But it was the manna that allowed them to survive for 40 years.

I want you to turn in your Bibles to the book of Revelation to a time period that we know as the great tribulation, a time period that we studied very much in detail last summer at last summer's sermon series as we went through the book of Revelation. And you can go online and get access to all that or it is even in print now. You can have access to that. But in the book of Revelation chapter 12 we find a picture of the antichrist attempting to devour the people of God, attempting to devour the Israelite nation. As we are going to disclose in just a moment, they have been divided into the 12 tribes again. I want you to look at verse 14 of Revelation 12. And it says:

"And to the woman were given two wings of a great eagle, that she might fly into the wilderness, into her place, where she is nourished for a time, and times, and half a time, from the face of the serpent."⁸

Now if you don't understand what times and times and that, that is three and a half years. That is an extended period of time. Notice it says she goes to her wilderness, not to just any random wilderness, but God has specifically said, "When you go here, I will take care of you. I will provide for you." Just like in the past when he said, "Cross the Red Sea here. When you get across everything is going to be ok," it is at this point at some point in the future that the people of God, the Israelites, the 12 tribes are going to come under

⁸ Revelation 12:14.

incredibly oppressive attack. And if you read through the book of Revelation you will see all this laid out.

But notice what it says that God nourishes her. Let me ask you. How many fast food joints have you seen in the middle of the desert, particularly where there are no roads and there is nobody that dwells? How are they going to eat for three and a half years? How are they going to survive this demonic attack that is oppressing them?

I just think God was telling them, “God, I fed you in the past. I am going to feed you in the future.”