

Forbidden Church

The Ark

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Bible Text: Exodus 25:10-22

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What a lesson we need to learn today. Often times we know God has moved in the past. We know God has blessed at some point in the previous and then we question whether he can duplicate it in the future. We question whether he can still have the ability or the authority or the power to do so and what we see from the Word of God that is that jar of manna didn't just say, "I fed you then." It says, "I will feed you again one day." The ark represented their future survival, not just their past survival. But it also pictured for us what I call a substitution.

Back in the book of Numbers chapter 17 there is this what I find this very curious scenario that happens. In Numbers 17 and for the sake of time we won't go back and read it, but in Numbers 17 verses one through nine Moses is distributing to the 12 tribes. And as you study the 12 tribes which, by the way, will be important as we turn to Revelation chapter seven in a moment. He has the 12 tribes of Israel get a rod, a walking stick for lack of better terms and write their name on it. And then he has the Levites take Aaron's rod and write their name on it. Remember. The Levites were a tribe, but they were a priestly tribe. They were not to own land. They were not to possess any what we would call material possessions. But all of the other 12 tribes were responsible for the taking care of them and the providing for their needs in their life. They were the tribe without a land grant, for lack of better terms.

And yet in the book of Numbers chapter 17 there is a very prophetic thing that occurs, because Moses takes all these sticks, these walking sticks and he lays them out and he says the one that is budding the next day they are the ones that are going to be blessed. And it is the tribe of Levi that is blessed. It is Aaron's rod that is budding.

Now let me tell you the significance of this. Last time I checked walking sticks are dead on both ends. Nothing grows on one end and nothing grows on the other. They are, in our terminology, they are a dead item. And God demonstrated in Numbers 17 that that which we call dead he can make alive. That is why they Bible says in John three that through Jesus Christ we are born again, why we are dead in our sins, dead in our trespasses.

If you have Revelation chapter seven open at the end of your Bible there is a listing of the 12 tribes of Israel. We are familiar with the 12 tribes that came from Jacob, that came from Isaac, that came from Abraham. You know the famous children's son. Father Abraham had many sons and many sons had father Abraham. If you go in the Old Testament and you see them listed, I share with you how Levi is very different than the rest. But I want you to notice in verse seven of Revelation seven in this time period that we know as the great tribulation, one day in the future of the tribe of Simeon were sealed 12,000, of the tribe of Levi were sealed 12,000. Now what is Levi doing there? In fact, if you were to broaden the context and study this more thoroughly you will discover that the tribe of Dan is no longer listed. The tribe of Dan fell into Baal worship. The tribe of Dan began to worship Ashtoreth which is the female goddess of Baal worship, the one that Jezebel made so famous. And the Lord cut him off and said, "No longer will you represent me. No longer will you be counted among your brethren." And here there is a substitution. That which was dead now has life. That which was not counted is now counted again.

Do you realize historically how many times the world has rendered the Israelites dead, how many times they have attempted to eliminate them from the face of the earth? It is a testimony that that which is appearing dead can be brought back to life again. That tribe that had no land grant is counted in Revelation. And here is the thing that is neat about this for us today. Have you ever had anything in life that is just dead on both ends? Maybe it is your finances, just dead. Maybe it is a marriage, dead. Maybe it is a relationship with kids, a job. I don't know what. Have you ever had anything where you say, "You know, when you look at this on both ends it is just dead"? But according to the contents of the ark of the covenant the presence of God is there. That which is dead can bud again. That which is dead can be made alive again and that which you thought would never possess or have anything can possess it when the Lord instructs it.

And so when we look at the future of the Israelite people and the people of God in particular with the content, it is powerful. Not only will they survive based on an item in the ark. There is also the substitution that will take place, a life out of death in Aaron's rod.

But there is one last element. There is one last item that probably is the most emblematic of what we know as the Israelite people and the story of the Exodus, those famous 10 Commandments, those ... that rock by which the hand of the Lord wrote on that were to be put in the ark. By the way, people ask, "How big were those, you know, items?" They had to be small enough to fit in the ark. And just put two and two together there. So they put them in the ark. What did it represent about their future?

I want you to turn to the book of Colossians chapter two verses 16 and 17. In the context of this as you are turning there, what the apostle Paul is communicating via the Spirit of God is this. Do not get off of Jesus. Don't make it about something else. It needs to be about Jesus Christ and him alone. In fact, in a moment we are going to be back in the book of Colossians chapter one. But in chapter two of Colossians, verses 16 and 17, he says:

“Let no man therefore judge you in meat, or in drink, or in respect of an holyday, or of the new moon, or of the sabbath days.”¹

Those are all the things that Israelite people prided themselves on participating at a very legalistic and perfectionist manner in the past. This next verse, 17:

“Which are a shadow of things to come.”²

That means the future. Now we understand what a shadow is. Based on where the light is, a shadow is a presence or a picture of whatever that item is. We will just take a human being, for example, that is in the path or on the other side of the source of light. What does it say here? They are a shadow. That is the commandment that he sabbath, that the laws are a shadow of things to come.

When you study the book of Revelation, in particular chapter 11, you will see that that temple is rebuilt. You will see that the courts are reestablished. You will see that the worship that we know so relevantly in the Old Testament is restored again. And the commandments are as real and relevant as they have ever been. After all, when you read Exodus chapter 20 God gave them the commandments and said, “If you do these things, I am you God and you are my people.”

The standard comes back, which reminds me that it doesn't matter who you are, it doesn't matter how much power you possess or how much authority that you have, you cannot in human ways eliminate the standards of God. We think we can. We can establish laws. We can establish rules. We can establish policies that say we want to do it our way, the human way. We do not want to do it according to God's standards and we debate. Can we put the 10 Commandments on the courthouse? Can we put them in the school house? I am not so much concerned about those things. I am really concerned what about your house. And I am not talking about a big rock in the front yard, beaus then you have to weed eat around it. I am talking about in your life. The standards of God. It doesn't matter there may be legal. It doesn't matter if you can't post them. They have not nor will ever go out of date and according to this one day it says they are a shadow of things to come. Do not fall into the trap of thinking that just because you can't put it on the wall that it is not relevant anymore, because it says these things are a shadow of things to come. The contents, the construction, relevant to their past, powerful for their future.

But what about today? What about tomorrow? How do we take the teachings of manna? How do we take the teachings of the commandments? How do we take the teachings of Aaron's rod? And how does it impact our life today?

If you will go back to Exodus chapter 25 I want you to see some things about the present. What happens when the present of God is powerfully present in your life?

¹ Colossians 2:16.

² Colossians 2:17.

It says in verse 22 God's desire was to commune with them from the mercy seat between the cherubim. The book of Ezekiel and in the book of Revelation we find more disclosure in the Bible regarding these cherubim creatures. And the picture that you get in Ezekiel one is that the cherubim or these creatures are surrounding the throne of God. In the book of Revelation chapter four there is a picture of the saints of God and the elders of God who are casting down their crowns at the feet of the throne of God and who is also there? These creatures. These cherubim creatures. But somewhere in between chapter one of Ezekiel and chapter four of Revelation we are reminded in chapter 28 that there was an individual who had the status as a cherubim at one time. His name was Lucifer. The name Lucifer literally means lighted one. He was the one who was in charge of what we know as the worship of the Lord Jesus Christ. He was the one who was, in our terminology the choir director, the worship director. He was the one who the Bible says that the pipes in his tabernacles were beautiful and perfect. And yet he was lighted and became the accuser. He was lighted and became the opposition. He went from Lucifer to Satan.

The reason this is significant for the present is the ark of the covenant, the presence of God pictures for us this concept or this desire for worship. Now I have defined worship for you as our response to a self revealing God. God has revealed himself through creation, but God has also revealed himself through his Word and worship is when we respond in obedience. Worship is not and should never simply be limited to, quote, music, although that is a vital piece. Worship is really obedience. When we do what the Lord says to do, we are worshipping him and yet in the construction here in verse 22 of Exodus chapter 25, the cherubim weren't just a reminder of the past. It is also a reminder of the present, that we were designed to worship.

The question is: What are you worshipping? We are by nature worshippers. We are by nature those who ardently obey something.

You say, "I thought we had a rebellious society."

No. They are obeying their own wishes. They are obeying something, their own desires. They are obeying a bad influence. The question is: What are we paying attention to? What are we obedient to? You were designed. Listen. Every one of us was designed to openly and completely be obedient to the things of God. We were designed to be worshippers. And when we talk about the presence of God, the holiness of God, it tells us today that you are living and breathing, I am living and breathing. We were designed to be God worshippers. We were designed to be followers {?}. We were designed to be disciples. We were not designed to be rebels. We were not designed to be rebellious. We were designed to be holy and to be righteous.

And the construction this ark shares with us in the present, what we were designed to be and what our purpose for living truly is, which brings me to the second point under the present: the wonder of this whole concept.

Hopefully you have your Bible in hand and you can go to the book of 1 Peter chapter one. If you turn to 1 Peter chapter one we come across a word that is used often in Exodus chapter 25. In verses 17 through 21 four times in the book of Exodus chapter 25 it talks about this seat above the ark called the mercy seat. God did not call it the big gold seat. He did not call it the papa seat. He did not call it he recliner. He called it the mercy seat.

Now if you will read with me in 1 Peter chapter one beginning in verse three:

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, To an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you, Who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.³

Now what part of that do you not want a part of? To be born again, to have an abundant life, to be undefiled, to have hope that does not fade away, to be kept by the power of God. Does this not make you wonder how would God or why would God even allow that to happen in our lives? Have you looked at your past? Have you honestly taken a look in the mirror and seen what you have done in light of what God has commanded? We are sinful creatures. We are rebellious creatures. If you have forgotten this, please volunteer in the preschool. You need about five minutes and you will learn this again. But that is who we are.

Does it ever make you wonder? It makes me wonder. Why would God desire our worship? Why would he want to commune with us? Why would he want to communicate with us? I read it very quickly, but look back in verse three of 1 Peter one.

“...according to his abundant mercy.”⁴

See, that is the wonder of the ark of the ... the mercy seat. It was not just a worthy God said, “Well, I don’t have anything else better to call it. Let’s just call it this.” He said, “No, this is the mercy seat, because through the sprinkling of the blood I am going to offer sinful humanity that which they do not deserve, cannot attain and never on their own volition could acquire mercy.”

How many times have you seen in a courtroom drama or maybe unfortunately in real life somebody who makes this statement to the judge or to the jury? I place myself on the mercy of the court. What that means is, please do not do to me what you are justified to me.

Aren’t you grateful that God doesn't call it the justice seat? If it were the justice seat we would be in trouble. He calls it the mercy seat. So when we look at the ark of the

³ 1 Peter 1:3-5.

⁴ 1 Peter 1:3.

covenant we say, “The presence of God in our life today.” Understand. We and you are designed to worship. We are designed to have a relationship with God. We have broken that through our sin, but God in his abundant mercy says no matter where you have been, what you have done, who you are or who you have been with, my desire is to give you an undefiled life kept by the power of God. Hopefully you are sitting there in your seat going, “How does this happen? By what means? What is the way to receive this? What is the way?”

You know, back in the book of Leviticus chapter 16 there is a very detailed expression in the Word of God about when that high priest would go into the temple and he would place the blood on the mercy seat. He was to take it and he was to sprinkle it seven times. It represented the sin of the people and the mercy and the forgiveness of God.

If you have still got 1 Peter one open, I want you to notice back up in verse two and right in the middle:

“...unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ.”⁵

If you will turn a few pages to the left in the book of Colossians I want to end our study today in Colossians chapter one. But as you are turning there, let me remind you that in the book of Hebrews chapter nine verse 22 it says there is no remission of sins without the shedding of blood. Let me remind you that back in the book of Genesis when Adam and Eve had sinned, the first thing the Lord did for them in his abundant mercy is there was the shedding of blood and the skins given to them. What we know as the message of forgiveness and the message of salvation in the Bible is a very bloody message. Why? Because it is not the miracles of Jesus Christ that allow you to be born again and saved. It is not the healing of a wounded individual. It is not the walking on the water. It is not the Sermon on the Mount. What is the way of forgiveness? What is the way of which we receive mercy is when the blood of Jesus Christ that was shed on Calvary is applied to our life. There is no other way. That is why Jesus said:

“I am the way, the truth, and the life.”⁶

Colossians chapter one verse 14.

“In whom we have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins.”⁷

The ark of the covenant was by human standards a very picturesque, beautiful, small item overlaid with shiny valuable gold. I don't know about in your house in times past or times present, but having three little boys we deal with a lot of blood. Sometimes it is purposeful. Hopefully it is not. How many times, I have lost count, when there has been a bloodied item present itself in our house, what do we say? Get away from the carpet. Get away from my... get away from me. Get outside in the grass. You know, blood

⁵ 1 Peter 1:2.

⁶ John 14:6.

⁷ Colossians 1:14.

makes the grass go. Get out there. Why? Because blood is messy. And in our world it messes stuff up. Redemption, forgiveness. They took this beautiful gold mercy seat and put blood on it. And that is the message that we desperately need today. As much as we love and appreciate worship services, campuses, anthems, music and air conditioning, all of this is for nothing if we don't have the blood of Jesus Christ. All of this no matter how often we attend or how much we do is nothing if the blood of Jesus Christ has not been applied to our life and we have received that abundant mercy and the forgiveness of sins.

And so when we talk about the particular elements of the ark of the covenant the most important element today is to ask yourself: Has that blood of Jesus Christ that was shed on Calvary been applied to your life and your sins and you have received his forgiveness? It is the question every one of us needs to answer this day.