

SET UP TENT

EXODUS 26:1-30 APRIL 27, 2016

You probably wouldn't recognize Frank Gehry if he was walking down the street, but you'll always notice his buildings. He's an architect like no other, whose works often look as though they were made of some material that doesn't obey the laws of physics. In Los Angeles you may have driven by the Walt Disney Concert Hall or the Loyola Law School building. Or maybe you've seen a picture of the "Crumpled Paper Bag" building at the Sydney University of Technology in Australia. They are spectacular structures to look at.

After God led Israel out of slavery in Egypt, He asked them to build a tabernacle. This tent wouldn't seem like much from the outside, but *within* it was like nothing else on earth. He said to Moses in Exodus 25:

Exodus 25:8 - ⁸ And let them make Me a sanctuary, that I may dwell among them.

God's desire was to be in the midst of His people in a real and meaningful way. Which has *always* been His desire, right from the beginning in the Garden of Eden and continuing till today. In fact, we remember that Jesus was called Emmanuel, God *with* us. Talking about Jesus, John wrote in chapter 1 of his Gospel:

John 1:14a - ¹⁴ And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us.

The word for 'dwelt' literally means that God *tabernacled* with us. He took up residence among us.

So, when we see the Tabernacle in the *Old Testament*, it is not only a reminder of God's desire to be with His people, but it prefigures the Person and work of Jesus Christ. Of course, now on *this* side of the cross, we know that the Levitical system is no longer in place. The veil was torn from top to bottom. Stephen and Paul both declared in the book of Acts that God no longer dwells in Temples made with hands. Instead, the Church has become the house of the Lord and our hearts are the Temple of the Holy Spirit. And what God does is take our lives and conform us into the image of His Son, meaning He is changing us to be a *likeness* or *representation* of Christ to the world around us. So, to that end, elements of the Old Testament Tabernacle can not only give us thoughts to think about Christ, but additionally they give us insight into our own spiritual lives and the character of Christianity as the Lord continues to build up His house and His Temple in and through us.

In Exodus 26, there is a lot of information. But tonight I want to aim our attention at 2 particular features of this tent: The **skin** and the **strength**.

First, let's look at the **skin** of this tent that Israel would construct.

Exodus 26:1-14 - "Moreover you shall make the tabernacle *with* ten curtains of fine woven linen, and blue, purple, and scarlet *thread*; with artistic designs of cherubim you shall weave them. ² The length of each curtain *shall be* twenty-eight cubits, and the width of each curtain four cubits. And every one of the curtains shall have the same measurements. ³ Five curtains shall be coupled to one another, and *the other* five curtains *shall be* coupled to one another. ⁴ And you shall make loops of blue *yarn* on the edge of the curtain on the selvedge of *one* set, and likewise you shall do on the outer edge of *the other* curtain of the second set. ⁵ Fifty loops

you shall make in the one curtain, and fifty loops you shall make on the edge of the curtain that *is* on the end of the second set, that the loops may be clasped to one another. ⁶ And you shall make fifty clasps of gold, and couple the curtains together with the clasps, so that it may be one tabernacle.

⁷ “You shall also make curtains of goats’ *hair*, to be a tent over the tabernacle. You shall make eleven curtains. ⁸ The length of each curtain *shall be* thirty cubits, and the width of each curtain four cubits; and the eleven curtains shall all have the same measurements. ⁹ And you shall couple five curtains by themselves and six curtains by themselves, and you shall double over the sixth curtain at the forefront of the tent. ¹⁰ You shall make fifty loops on the edge of the curtain that is outermost in *one* set, and fifty loops on the edge of the curtain of the second set. ¹¹ And you shall make fifty bronze clasps, put the clasps into the loops, and couple the tent together, that it may be one. ¹² The remnant that remains of the curtains of the tent, the half curtain that remains, shall hang over the back of the tabernacle. ¹³ And a cubit on one side and a cubit on the other side, of what remains of the length of the curtains of the tent, shall hang over the sides of the tabernacle, on this side and on that side, to cover it.

¹⁴ “You shall also make a covering of ram skins dyed red for the tent, and a covering of badger skins above that.

I don’t know about you, but sometimes all the cubits and clasps are hard for me to visualize. When all was said and done, the Tabernacle tent was really quite small. It was about the same length as the room we’re in right now, but only half as wide (45 feet by 15 feet). The roof was flat, not vaulted, at about 15 feet high.

Now, out of this first section we want to focus on the curtains that covered the top and sides of the Tabernacle. There were several layers: One of linen, one of goats’ hair, one of ram skins dyed red and one of badger skins on top of them all. Fun fact: that word for badger is a bit tricky. It may actually mean seal, dolphin or even manatee (*which would make me terribly sad!*).

But here are two thoughts for us to consider about the skin of this tent: First, as we look at these curtains, we see a *consistent covering*. The whole top, all the sides, sewn together, overlapped, thick and heavy. It had a layer for the sun, a layer for rain, a layer for beauty. This Tabernacle would be warm in cold weather and provide a cool escape from the desert heat. That consistent curtain reminds us that Christ is a consistent and comprehensive Savior. He’s a Messiah who doesn’t leak. Sometimes we evaluate a presidential candidate and weigh their strengths against their weaknesses. Often you’ll hear things like, “Well, his economic credentials are great, but he’s got no foreign policy experience.” That’s not the kind of Savior we find in Jesus. He’s got every section, every corner, every joint and layer covered. His rule and His ways are applicable for *every* area of our lives. That means there is nothing in our lives that God’s word cannot inform and His Spirit not empower. Christ has it covered. He is sufficient to shelter each of us in any circumstance or concern.

But how does this skin speak to us? For *our* part, as we tabernacle with God, we want to inspect our lives for any areas where there might be a gap. Some corner or some layer where we haven’t applied the covering of Christ. Some area where there might be a spiritual leak. Being out in the wilderness for decades, under the scorching sun, being moved around, eventually one of these curtains may need a repair. While that is never true of Christ, it *is* true for us. So as we search through our hearts, if we find some gap or some exposure to temptation or discouragement or fear, we can have that mended by the Lord.

Second here, we notice that the Tabernacle was all about *interior design*. If you go through these chapters you see beautiful pieces of furniture and the Ark of the covenant with the mercy seat being put inside the Tabernacle. In our verses we notice the incredible embroidery and intricate sewing work that would adorn the walls of this tent. But, from the *outside* you would just see a plain rectangle of animal skins.

How does this speak to us of Jesus? Well, Isaiah described the Messiah this way:

Isaiah 53:2 - He has no form or comeliness; and when we see Him, there is no beauty that we should desire Him.

Jesus doesn't look like a Disney prince. When He took on flesh He may have been plain and nondescript, but as we get closer to Him and see His life and see His heart revealed and see what He's done for us, nothing could be more lovely or desirable. He *is* the Desire of Nations. And this is the way God loves to work.

If you saw the Tabernacle from outside, it really wouldn't be anything special at all. From the outside, it was just a tent. But if you were to go *inside*, it was quite exquisite. You would see the incredible detail and craftsmanship with all these artistic designs with gold and silver.

Man likes to focus on the outside. Not just when it comes to the physical world, but even sometimes in our religious life as well. On the physical level, it's easy to become overly focused on the outer tent. And, while the Lord is fine with us taking care of our appearance and having a healthy body, He is *much* more interested in the inward health of our spiritual lives. The same goes with our approach to ministry. As Christians or as a church, rather than obsess over achieving some measure of *outward* spiritual success, we should remember that the bearing of fruit is *God's* business as we remain rooted in Him. So, our pursuit should be to stay connected to the Vine so that *He* will accomplish what He desires in us and through us. Spiritual fruit is the natural by-product of a healthy Christian and a healthy church. So, rather than trying to copy *methods* for having a better church or a better marriage or whatever other noble pursuits, we should remember that God works not from the *outside* into the heart, but from the heart out through to the rest of our lives.

Next we want to take a look at the **strength** of this tabernacle.

Exodus 26:15-30 - ¹⁵“And for the tabernacle you shall make the boards of acacia wood, standing upright. ¹⁶Ten cubits shall be the length of a board, and a cubit and a half shall be the width of each board. ¹⁷Two tenons shall be in each board for binding one to another. Thus you shall make for all the boards of the tabernacle. ¹⁸And you shall make the boards for the tabernacle, twenty boards for the south side. ¹⁹You shall make forty sockets of silver under the twenty boards: two sockets under each of the boards for its two tenons. ²⁰And for the second side of the tabernacle, the north side, there shall be twenty boards ²¹and their forty sockets of silver: two sockets under each of the boards. ²²For the far side of the tabernacle, westward, you shall make six boards. ²³And you shall also make two boards for the two back corners of the tabernacle. ²⁴They shall be coupled together at the bottom and they shall be coupled together at the top by one ring. Thus it shall be for both of them. They shall be for the two corners. ²⁵So there shall be eight boards with their sockets of silver—sixteen sockets—two sockets under each of the boards.

²⁶ “And you shall make bars of acacia wood: five for the boards on one side of the tabernacle, ²⁷ five bars for the boards on the other side of the tabernacle, and five bars for the boards of the side of the tabernacle, for the far side westward. ²⁸ The middle bar shall pass through the midst of the boards from end to end. ²⁹ You shall overlay the boards with gold, make their rings of gold as holders for the bars, and overlay the bars with gold. ³⁰ And you shall raise up the tabernacle according to its pattern which you were shown on the mountain.

Three aspects of the strength of this tabernacle. First of all, in verse 15 we see the obvious yet essential command that the boards stand *upright*. David wrote in Psalm 25:

Psalm 25:8 - ⁸Good and upright is the Lord; Therefore He teaches sinners in the way.

Christ was and is *upright* in every way. He is pure and righteous and holy. And He commands us to follow in that holiness. But it's not just about obedience, it's also for our *benefit*. We're told in Proverbs that when we walk uprightly (meaning according to God's commands and with integrity), then the Lord will give us strength and reward and bring us deliverance and a shield. We are to set up our lives *uprightly*, according to the word of God rather than our own whims.

Second here, we see the strength of the Tabernacle because of the precious materials that were used. There's gold and silver and weaved fabric and strong lumber. Each board was put into a base of silver that scholars say weighed more than 260 pounds. Silver in the Scriptures speak to us of redemption. And here we see a great picture of the strength of Christ's redeeming work. Each board placed into a silver base that was as heavy as a person. Christ's redemptive work was strong and able to carry the weight of all the sin of all the world to the cross and deal with it once and for all.

The boards were made of acacia wood. Acacia wood is strong and dense like redwood. The trees were growing all around them right there in the wilderness, showing that Christ is immediately available and that if we are willing to construct our lives with Him, we don't have to search to the ends of the earth for what we need. He's not far from us, but is near and at the door. Acacia wood is resistant to decay or the attack of insects. All of this speaks of the strength we can find in Christ.

These precious elements also remind us to construct our lives with those things which will last, not the proverbial wood, hay and stubble Paul spoke about which will be burned up in the last day.

Third we notice in verse 30 how they were to *raise up* the tabernacle. It may have been a movable tent, but when it was lifted up it was unmoving. The name of Jesus is elevated above every other name. His is the Kingdom and the power and the glory forever and ever. Therefore, His name should be the highest and most elevated in our hearts and our churches as well.

Now, we are also able to be *raised up* in the sense that our Christianity is to be sturdy and strong. Here's what I mean by that: When we read how God describes what a Christian is in the Bible, there's a strength and a sturdiness to it. Not just in the promises that the Lord makes to us, but in the analogies He uses as well. He refers to us as trees that are firm and planted, or a house that is built securely on a rock. He calls us living stones that join together in the Church. There's always power and stability and fortitude in how God talks about us. Quoting Psalm chapter 16, Peter said in the book of Acts:

Acts 2.25 - [The Lord] is at my right hand, that I may not be shaken.

That's the way we see the Christian life portrayed in the Word. Not perfect, not easy, not without trouble, but it's strong and resolute and empowered. Lifted up and set securely to withstand the storms of life.

But when we look at the Christian *culture* today, it doesn't seem like that's what we see. As a group we seem to be more defined by doubt and inadequacy and defeat. Maybe that's unfair, but I guess when I turn on Christian radio, more often than not, that's the message I'm getting. That we're defined by doubt and defined by failure and just *hoping* we can make it to tomorrow.

Though we want to make allowances for our humanity, and, of course, we definitely *feel* inadequate or defeated from time to time, that's not how we're to be *defined* according to the Word of God.

Imagine, if you will, that the Tabernacle was in the state of disrepair that a lot of Christian songs describe the Christian life. Worn out. About to collapse under the weight of life. It's not really standing upright, it's just kind of a broken heap of material. I don't want to go into a building like that! And God doesn't want us to go through *life* like that. His desire for us is that we be firmly established in *His* power and fullness.

So, the message for us is: If you need some repairs, get repaired! The Lord wants to stabilize us and strengthen us and keep us from being shaken.

If we find ourselves in perpetual cycles of doubt or sin or spiritual weakness, let's do what Godly men in the Bible did when they found themselves there and ask, "Why *are* you down cast oh my soul?" We should get to the bottom of it and then strengthen ourselves in the Lord! The Bible says that God comforts the downcast. He wants to lift us up and strengthen us and develop us as people who not only believe in His power, but *represent* it to the world. Paul wrote to the Ephesians:

Ephesians 6:10 - A final word: Be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power.

The Tabernacle was an amazing structure. It was a special place, not just because of all the beauty inside, but most of all because in it God placed His glory. And it was amazing because of how it previewed the Person and work of Christ to us. With all of that, we realize that many of these principles also apply to *us* as we walk with the Lord and He does His work in our lives.

As we think through the skins and the strength, we should remember that the Tabernacle was a mobile building. The Children of Israel would have to pack it up, carry it out as they followed the Lord and then set it up again. Sometimes the terrain might change. The pressures would change. The horizon would change. But no matter where the people found themselves, the Tabernacle was still sturdy, still consistent, still beautiful and still housing the presence and the glory of God. And I think that is a good reminder as we move through life. Life doesn't stay in one place. It's always moving. The weather is always changing. The terrain keeps changing. But even in the bleak wilderness, God's people could be confident that the Lord was with them. His desire was to dwell in their midst and conform them according to His will and His desires. Today Christ dwells with us and works to transform us from the inside out. And He doesn't just slap on a coat of paint, He does a powerful, redemptive work to make us into His likeness. To make us like Him. People of inner strength and inner beauty. People defined by mercy. People close to God and focused on worship. People who go to the Lord for guidance and direction and provision. People who can withstand storms and bring hope. People who are set apart to do eternal work and are lifted up by God to show the world what it means to be a Christian and what Christ can do for them.