



Studies in the Book of Exodus

Text

Exodus 27:1-19 & 30:17-21

Topic

Moses describes the fence that creates
the enclosure called the Court of the Tabernacle

Title

"The Chosen People's Court"

Keith Moon, the late drummer for *The Who*, made a sarcastic remark when he heard Jimmy Page had formed a band after the demise of the *Yardbirds*. Moon said it would "sink like a lead balloon." Inspired by Moon, Page and company dropped the 'a' in "lead" in order to avoid confusion with the pronunciation, and switched "balloon" for "zeppelin" - probably because it had a more exotic sound to it. Hence, *Led Zeppelin*.

It was the bad guy who named the heroes in the recent Marvel Studios film, when Ronin the Accuser sarcastically said, "Behold your Guardians of the Galaxy." The name stuck.

Do you realize that the first Christians did not name themselves, but were named by others? We're told in the New Testament Book of Acts, "And the disciples were first called Christians in Antioch" (11:26).

Renowned Greek scholar Kenneth Wuest says that the name was given to them by the nonbelieving citizens of Antioch, to ridicule the believers for refusing to acknowledge Caesar as Lord.

There's nothing wrong with the term "Christian," regardless its source. It means "Christ-like," and that's a good thing to be.

However, the word "Christian" occurs *only* three times in the New Testament - used twice by nonbelievers, and once by the apostle Peter.

The apostle Paul never used it. He preferred another expression that occurs 164 times in his inspired writings. It is the expression "in Christ" (or "in the Lord" or "in Him").

I find it an awkward expression. It almost sounds mystical, though I know it is not.

I think a Jew, hearing Paul or reading him, would not find it awkward at all. They were used to being "in" the Court of the Tabernacle (and, later, the Temple). Since the Tabernacle was intended to picture the Person and work of Jesus, just maybe it perfectly illustrates the idea of being "in Christ."

Along those lines, I'll organize my comments around two points:
#1 The Court Of The Tabernacle Illustrates What It Means To Be
"In Christ," and #2 The Altar And The Laver Illustrate How You Get
To Be "In Christ."

(We're going to first look at the Court of the Tabernacle, then look
at the two articles of furniture that were in the Court of the
Tabernacle - the Altar of Sacrifice, and the Laver. It makes for a
more logical order for us).

#1 The Court Of The Tabernacle Illustrates What It Means To Be "In Christ"

(27:9-19)

If you read or listen to a lot of contemporary Christian teachers,
you've probably noticed that it is considered cool to refer to
believers not as "Christians," but as "Christ followers."

I guess I get it; after all, Jesus did say, "Follow Me." If that's your
argument, it would seem more biblical to call believers, "Follow
Me-ers." Definitely not cool, however.

"In Christ" is perhaps the most biblical name for us. It'll never
catch on, but it's solid. Here are three prominent examples:

2Co 5:17 Therefore, if anyone is **in Christ**, he is a new creation;
old things have passed away; behold, all things have become
new.

Col 3:3 For you died, and your life is hidden **with Christ** in God.

Php 1:1 Paul and Timothy, bondservants of Jesus Christ, To all the saints **in Christ Jesus** who are in Philippi...

What does it mean, to be “in Christ?” I’m sure there are many good definitions. But there is no better illustration than the Old Testament Court of the Tabernacle.

We’re in the section of Exodus where God was giving Moses the plans for the Tabernacle. We’ve seen that the Tabernacle was a 15’x45’ tent, 15’ high. It was entered through a veil, and the first chamber, the Holy Place, 15’x30’, was furnished with the Table of Showbread, the Menorah, and the Altar of Incense.

Through a second veil was the Holy of Holies, 15’x15’x15’. In it was the Ark of the Covenant that would contain the tablets of the Ten Commandments, covered by a lid called the Mercy Seat. God manifested His presence behind that second veil, in the Holy of Holies, above the Ark of the Covenant.

The Jewish priests daily entered the Holy Place to perform various functions. The High Priest entered the Holy of Holies annually on the Day of Atonement.

This relatively small Tabernacle was surrounded by a structure of linen fence, forming within it the Court of the Tabernacle. It’s called a “court,” but think of it as a *courtyard* created by a fence surrounding the Tabernacle.

Let’s read its description in 29:9-19.

Exo 27:9 "You shall also make the court of the tabernacle. For the south side *there shall be* hangings for the court *made of* fine woven linen, one hundred cubits long for one side.

Exo 27:10 And its twenty pillars and their twenty sockets *shall be* bronze. The hooks of the pillars and their bands *shall be* silver.

Exo 27:11 Likewise along the length of the north side *there shall be* hangings one hundred *cubits* long, with its twenty pillars and their twenty sockets of bronze, and the hooks of the pillars and their bands of silver.

Exo 27:12 "And along the width of the court on the west side *shall be* hangings of fifty cubits, with their ten pillars and their ten sockets.

Exo 27:13 The width of the court on the east side *shall be* fifty cubits.

Exo 27:14 The hangings on *one side of the gate shall be* fifteen cubits, *with* their three pillars and their three sockets.

Exo 27:15 And on the other side *shall be* hangings of fifteen *cubits*, *with* their three pillars and their three sockets.

Exo 27:16 "For the gate of the court *there shall be* a screen twenty cubits long, *woven of* blue, purple, and scarlet *thread*, and fine woven linen, made by a weaver. It *shall have* four pillars and four sockets.

Exo 27:17 All the pillars around the court shall have bands of silver; their hooks *shall be* of silver and their sockets of bronze.

Exo 27:18 The length of the court *shall be* one hundred cubits, the width fifty throughout, and the height five cubits, *made of* fine woven linen, and its sockets of bronze.

Exo 27:19 All the utensils of the tabernacle for all its service, all its pegs, and all the pegs of the court, *shall be* of bronze.

The Tabernacle was surrounded by curtains which were about 8' high and 150' long on the north and south sides.

They were 75' long on the west, but only 45' long on the east, leaving room for a 30' gate. The curtains were woven from fine white linen and suspended from pillars that were staked to the ground.

It was an enclosure of white linen, with only one entrance, within which you could approach and worship the one, true God in His earthly Tabernacle.

Let's talk about the curtains themselves. Fine white linen in the Bible is often an illustration of the righteousness of God that is a free gift when a sinner trusts Jesus for salvation.

To help us understand our need for salvation, God describes us in terms of clothing. In our natural state, born in trespasses and sin, the Bible, in Isaiah 64:6, describes us as wearing "filthy rags."

Why is that a problem? Think of it this way: Heaven has a dress code, and folks in filthy rags are turned away.

We need a new spiritual wardrobe. Specifically, we need a robe of righteousness. In Isaiah 61:10 we read,

Isa 61:10 I will greatly rejoice in the LORD, My soul shall be joyful in my God; For He has clothed me with the **garments of salvation**, He has covered me with **the robe of righteousness**, As a bridegroom decks himself with ornaments, And as a **bride** adorns herself with her jewels.

Isaiah says we need "garments of salvation," introduces the "robe of righteousness," then immediately compares it to wedding garments. We need to be decked out like a bride.

We get a glimpse at the bride in the last book of the Bible. In the Revelation, at the Second Coming of Jesus, believers of the church age are coming back with Him. Listen to our description:

Rev 19:7 Let us be glad and rejoice and give Him glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and His wife has made herself ready."

Rev 19:8 And to her it was **granted** to be arrayed in **fine linen**, clean and bright, for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints.

This "fine linen" robe, the garment we need to enter Heaven, is "granted." It is a gift. It can't be earned or deserved. It's available to everyone; but like any gift, you must receive it.

To illustrate that it is a free gift you must receive, Jesus told a story about a Jewish wedding. The part we're interested involves a guest without the proper wedding robe:

Mat 22:2 "The kingdom of heaven is like a certain king who arranged a marriage for his son...

Mat 22:11 "But when the king came in to see the guests, he saw a man there who did not have on a **wedding garment**.

Mat 22:12 So he said to him, 'Friend, how did you come in here without a **wedding garment?**' And he was speechless.

Mat 22:13 Then the king said to the servants, 'Bind him hand and foot, take him away, and cast *him* into outer darkness; there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.'

Mat 22:14 "For many are called, but few *are* chosen."

In that culture, the wedding garment was provided for you. It wasn't that this guest could not afford one; or that they ran out.

No, he refused to receive it, and in his regular clothes, he was not fit to celebrate the wedding feast.

You are dressed in filthy rags. God has invited you to the wedding of His Son - to eternal life - and He has provided a fine linen robe for you. You can either reject it and be “cast... into outer darkness,” or you can receive it and celebrate for eternity in Heaven.

In the Court of the Tabernacle, you were surrounded by fine, white linen. True, it wasn't a robe, per se. But it symbolized the spiritual 'robing' that protected the entire nation.

When you were “in” the Court of the Tabernacle, you were surrounded by the righteousness of God, symbolized by the fine white linen fence. When God saw you, He saw you **in** a place He had graciously provided for your salvation.

And since the Tabernacle and its courtyard all prefigure Jesus, being “in” the Court of the Tabernacle was like being “in” Jesus.

In a sense, when God sees you, He sees Jesus. And that's at least some of what it means to be “in Christ.”

Although it was a fence made of fabric, it was a stronghold - a spiritual stronghold. That fabric, representing God's righteousness being provided as a gift for your salvation, was stronger than adamantium; stronger than vibranium. No power, no principality, no ruler of the darkness of this world, could touch you.

So, too, with us. Once you've been declared righteous by God, you are kept by His power unto the day of your final salvation.

The linen fence is not the only thing described in the verses about the Court of the Tabernacle. There was also an entrance, and there were two things especially notable about it.

The first thing we note is that it was an exclusive entrance. There were not any other ways in. We might therefore say there were not many ways to God, but only one way.

Who remembers the "One Way!" craze? When I was first a believer, in the 1970's, Christian bumper stickers and posters and literature often featured a hand with the forefinger pointing straight up, with the words, "One Way!" It was the WWJD of its time.

The one way into the Court of the Tabernacle is, of course, telling us that Jesus is the exclusive means for salvation. There is power in His name, and in no other. He is "the way, the truth, and the life; no one comes to salvation except through Him (John 14:6).

It bothers some people that Jesus is the only way to God. They think there should be multiple ways. What they really mean is that they want to be able to work their way to Heaven; to contribute their good works to get there.

Jesus is the exclusive means of grace. He is God's free gift. Everything else is a religion of works that ignores the depth of the problem. Only Jesus can overcome your sin by dying in your stead and offering you eternal life.

The second thing we note is that the gate was inviting and it was plenty big:

1. The fence was white linen; the gate was multicolored. There was no mistaking it.
2. It was 30' wide. It wasn't like the queue for the Peter Pan ride at Disneyland. It's width was an invitation to all to enter in.

A Christian is a person who has been granted a fine linen garment of salvation. At the Cross, Jesus took your filthy rags upon Himself, and He gave you the robe. You're dressed for Heaven, and that is how God now sees you "in Christ."

#2 The Altar And The Laver Illustrate How You Get To Be "In Christ"

(27:1-8 & 30:17-21)

You've heard it said that while salvation in Jesus is free, it is costly. It cost Jesus His life, exchanged on the Cross for ours. That exchange is represented in the Court of the Tabernacle by the sacrifices that took place at the Altar.

Return to verse one of chapter twenty-seven.

Exo 27:1 "You shall make an altar of acacia wood, five cubits long and five cubits wide - the altar shall be square - and its height *shall be* three cubits.

Exo 27:2 You shall make its horns on its four corners; its horns shall be of one piece with it. And you shall overlay it with bronze.

Exo 27:3 Also you shall make its pans to receive its ashes, and its shovels and its basins and its forks and its firepans; you shall make all its utensils of bronze.

Exo 27:4 You shall make a grate for it, a network of bronze; and on the network you shall make four bronze rings at its four corners.

Exo 27:5 You shall put it under the rim of the altar beneath, that the network may be midway up the altar.

Exo 27:6 And you shall make poles for the altar, poles of acacia wood, and overlay them with bronze.

Exo 27:7 The poles shall be put in the rings, and the poles shall be on the two sides of the altar to bear it.

Exo 27:8 You shall make it hollow with boards; as it was shown you on the mountain, so shall they make *it*.

When you entered through the wide gate to the Court of the Tabernacle, you brought with you an animal to sacrifice. The common animals were a bull, a goat, a sheep, or a dove.

You'd approach the Altar and there would be a priest standing by it, to assist you. He would inspect your animal for blemishes and disabilities; it had to be a valuable sacrifice.

If your bull, let's say, passed inspection, the priest would tie it down on the horns of the altar. Then **you** - not the priest - would slit the lamb's throat and butcher it.

Lev 1:2 "Speak to the children of Israel, and say to them: 'When any one of you brings an offering to the LORD, you shall bring your offering of the livestock - of the herd and of the flock.

Lev 1:3 'If his offering *is* a burnt sacrifice of the herd, let him offer a male without blemish; he shall offer it of his own free will at the door of the tabernacle of meeting before the LORD.

Lev 1:4 Then he shall put his hand on the head of the burnt offering, and it will be accepted on his behalf to make atonement for him.

Lev 1:5 He shall kill the bull before the LORD; and the priests, Aaron's sons, shall bring the blood and sprinkle the blood all around on the altar that *is by* the door of the tabernacle of meeting.

Lev 1:6 And he shall skin the burnt offering and cut it into its pieces.

The righteousness surrounding them by the grace of God was made possible by the shedding of blood. God explained to Adam and Eve that their sin would bring death. Someone had to die. If it wasn't them, it would have to be a suitable substitute.

No mere human could be that substitute. So God began to explain that He must come in a body - as the Person He called the "Seed of the woman" - to die in our place to once-for-all to pay the penalty mankind owed.

In the mean time, He would accept the sacrifice of innocent animal substitutes in His place. You placed your hand on the sacrifice symbolizing that the innocent animal was taking upon it your sin.

Animal sacrifices were never intended to solve the sin problem, but rather to keep you focused on the fact that one day God was coming in human flesh as the final sacrifice that would solve sin and restore all things.

Can you imagine the amount of blood spilled over the centuries? Let's zero in on just one Passover feast.

A passage from Josephus says that at least 256,500 lambs were killed in the Temple for a Passover **in one year** between 66-70AD (*Jewish Wars 6.9.3*).

Is that even possible? One source said this:

Assuming that the only requirement for ritually killing a lamb for Passover was to... slice through the lamb's throat with a ritually clean knife and collect a small amount of blood to be thrown on the high altar... then 144 priests [overseeing the] killing [of] six lambs a minute (10 seconds per lamb, assuming the men were lined up in a moving line holding their lamb) would have taken only about 5 hours to kill 256,500 lambs.

Assuming that the ritual killing started at 1pm, then everything would have been finished by 6pm, well before sunset. So, the number of lambs killed for Passover recorded by Josephus is certainly within the realm of possibility.

Millions of animals, literally, were sacrificed on that Altar. There was an almost constant flow of blood. Yet all of it combined could not take away sin. It could only prefigure the One God had promised to send.

John the Baptist was tasked with introducing Jesus at the start of the Lord's ministry on earth. Do you know how many names or titles there are for Jesus in the Bible? I found one list of over 100 names; I'm sure there are more.

John settled on one, exclaiming to the crowds, "Behold the **Lamb of God** Who takes away the sin of the world" (John 1:29).

If you were a Jew familiar with the constant animal sacrifices, you'd know that John was identifying Jesus as the One promised in the Garden of Eden as our Substitute.

In the book whose very title indicates it is meant to reveal Jesus, the Revelation, over thirty names describe Him; but the one used most, some twenty-eight at least, is the "Lamb."

Rev 5:12 ... "Worthy is the **Lamb** who was slain To receive power and riches and wisdom, And strength and honor and glory and blessing!"

Your fine linen robe of righteousness was washed in His blood. You get to be "in Christ" by the shedding of His blood for the sins of the world.

There was one other piece of furniture in the Court of the Tabernacle. It was a wash basin called the Laver. Jump ahead to verse seventeen of chapter thirty.

Exo 30:17 Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying:

Exo 30:18 "You shall also make a laver of bronze, with its base also of bronze, for washing. You shall put it between the tabernacle of meeting and the altar. And you shall put water in it,

Exo 30:19 for Aaron and his sons shall wash their hands and their feet in water from it.

Exo 30:20 When they go into the tabernacle of meeting, or when they come near the altar to minister, to burn an offering made by fire to the LORD, they shall wash with water, lest they die.

Exo 30:21 So they shall wash their hands and their feet, lest they die. And it shall be a statute forever to them - to him and his descendants throughout their generations."

Dirt floor; lots and lots of blood. The priests - who went barefoot, BTW - got plenty dirty. Think about how often during the day they'd have to wash their hands and feet.

They were surrounded by the righteousness of God; but even in that courtyard, serving the Lord, they picked-up defilement and needed constant washing.

That sounds a great deal like something Jesus explained to His disciples at their final Passover, on the night before He was crucified. You remember what happened. None of the disciples would stoop to being the servant who washed the other's feet before the meal. Then something dramatic occurred.

Joh 13:4 [Jesus] rose from supper and laid aside His garments, took a towel and girded Himself.

Joh 13:5 After that, He poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet, and to wipe *them* with the towel with which He was girded.

Joh 13:6 Then He came to Simon Peter. And *Peter* said to Him, "Lord, are You washing my feet?"

Joh 13:7 Jesus answered and said to him, "What I am doing you do not understand now, but you will know after this."

Joh 13:8 Peter said to Him, "You shall never wash my feet!"

Jesus answered him, "If I do not wash you, you have no part with Me."

Joh 13:9 Simon Peter said to Him, "Lord, not my feet only, but also *my* hands and *my* head!"

Joh 13:10 Jesus said to him, "He who is bathed needs only to wash *his* feet, but is completely clean; and you are clean, but not all of you."

Evangelical commentators almost universally agree that Jesus was explaining that when you get saved, it's like being "bathed" all over. It is a one-time event as God declares you righteous and clothes you for Heaven with Christ's robe.

But as we continue to live in this world, we tend to pick up defilement. For that, we need a constant cleansing, which we get from Jesus as we let His Word wash over us.

Here is how the apostle Paul explained it:

Eph 5:25 ... Christ... loved the church and gave Himself for her,
Eph 5:26 that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word,
Eph 5:27 that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish.

I'll let William MacDonald explain it:

Positionally the church is already [saved]; practically she is being set apart day by day. She is going through a process of moral and spiritual preparation... The process, [called] sanctification, is carried on by **the washing of water by the word**. In simple terms this means that the lives of believers are cleansed as they hear the words of Christ and obey them... Just as the blood of Christ cleanses once-for-all from the guilt and penalty of sin, so the Word of God cleanses continually from the defilement and pollution of sin. This passage teaches that the church is being bathed at the present time, not with literal water, but with the cleansing agent of the word of God.

Whether you identify as a Christian... Or as a Christ follower... Or as a Follow Me-er... If you're saved, **you are "in Christ."**

I'll leave you with one more of the apostle Paul's 164 "in Christ" statements:

2Ti 1:9 who has saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace which was given to us **in Christ** Jesus before time began.