



The Tabernacle

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You may have noticed that my voice does not sound great today. I don't like my voice in general, but now it's even worse. It truly does make me thankful that the effectiveness of God's Word is not dependent upon the instrument used to deliver it.

Isn't it striking that Moses, the greatest preacher of the Old Testament, told Yahweh the reason he didn't want to be the voice of God to the people is because he was "*slow of speech*" (Exodus 4:10). He was not an eloquent, gifted speaker. We have this image in our minds of Charlton Heston being Moses. A friend of mine said recently that Woody Allen might have been a more appropriate character to play that part.

Then you move to the New Testament and very interesting things happen when Paul is writing his various letters. Everybody knew he was a very eloquent man with the pen. His letters were strong and powerful. But there was a disconnect when they actually met him in person, because he was weak and frail and not as impressive. So perhaps I'll be modeling that weakness before you today.

But I truly am thankful for promises like Isaiah 55:11, where God says, "*So shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it.*"

So let's pause now and pray.

Lord, I do thank You for Your powerful, unstoppable, glorious Word which runs and expands and convicts and comforts and guides and instructs. We pray, Lord, that You would bless the opening of Your Word and that You would make the meditation of my heart and mouth pleasing in Your sight. I pray that You would give ears to listen to anything I say that is faithful to Your infallible, inerrant Word.

Lord, we pray for our dear friend and pastor, David Sunday, as he's home now. We thank You that he's able to rest and pray that You would give the doctors wisdom. Heal his body and may he experience the encouragement of the body of Christ during these days. We pray all of this in the powerful, mighty, glorious and true name of Your Son Jesus Christ. Amen.

We left off with the birth of Isaac to Abraham and Sarah after many years. They're advanced in age, and finally the promised heir and son of promise has come. Starting in the middle of the 50 chapters of Genesis and doing a "fly-by" overview to the end, Abraham and Sarah have Isaac, then Isaac grows up and marries Rebekah. They have twin boys, Jacob and Esau. There's a dispute over the birthright, but Jacob gets it.

Through four different relationships—including Rachel and Leah—Jacob has 12 sons, the 12 "sons of Israel." Later there's a 13th added, but the most important point in the story is the 12 boys. The youngest son is Joseph, who is the favored one in his father's sight. He gets the special multi-colored robe, which he proudly wears.

Joseph has dreams about how great he is and how his whole family bows down, worships and honors him. Every time he has these dreams, he thinks it's a great idea to tell his brothers about them. "Guess what, guys? I had another dream. You're all surrounding me in a circle and you're all on your knees. I'm standing in the middle and it's great."

Finally the brothers decide to beat Joseph up, leave him for dead, sell him into slavery, telling their father Jacob that, sadly, an animal attacked Joseph. If you've grown up in church you know these stories. Joseph is taken to Egypt, thrown in prison and is basically at the bottom of the totem pole.

But through God's miraculous intervention—partly through his dreams but certainly through God's sovereignty—Joseph becomes a ruler, second only to Pharaoh, and the most trusted man in Egypt. There's a great role reversal with his family, who have come to Egypt because they need provisions during a famine. Joseph is the one who grants them food, and later they realize who he is. The 50 chapters of Genesis end with Joseph being 110 years old and dying.

Moses, inspired by God, puts together five books. In the first chapter of the second book, Exodus, we read that Joseph's family is multiplying. Exodus 1:7 gives this encouraging update: "*The people of Israel were fruitful and increased greatly; they multiplied and grew exceedingly strong, so that the land was filled with them.*" Egypt is now filled with Israelites.

But then, with what literary scholars call "foreshadowing," there is an ominous note. The music changes in verse eight: "*Now there arose a new king over Egypt, who did not know Joseph.*" So Joseph is gone, the previous Pharaoh is gone, and a new Pharaoh is in place who doesn't know the history of Joseph. He doesn't respect Joseph and doesn't care about his descendants. Therefore things go from really good to really bad for the Israelites, who are oppressively enslaved under the new Pharaoh.

Most of us are familiar with the early stories in Exodus. We know about baby Moses, who is put into the Nile River so his life could be saved from the murderous hands of Pharaoh and his regime. We know that Pharaoh's daughter finds Moses and raises him under Pharaoh's oversight, but that Moses' mother is still in his life as well.

We know about Moses, at age 40, killing an Egyptian and then escaping to Midian. Another 40 years passes and Yahweh appears to him in a burning bush, calling Moses back to Egypt to be the prophet/deliverer of His people. So Moses comes before Pharaoh and commands that Pharaoh let Yahweh's people go. We know the stories of how Pharaoh seems to relent and then doesn't relent, softens his heart and then hardens his heart.

Through Moses, the Lord delivers plague after plague after plague, each intensifying until finally it's not just the cattle and the land that are being affected, Pharaoh's own beloved firstborn son and the other firstborn sons of Egypt all die. Finally Pharaoh says, "You can go. Get out of here. Go and worship your God."

We know the story then of the Israelites coming to the Red Sea. As they turn and see the Egyptians hot on their tail, the Lord parts the waters to make a dry escape path—an incredible act of redemption and salvation and mercy. The Israelites then watch as the Lord makes that same escape path a watery grave for their enemies.

Then we see freedom, as Moses and the Israelites are now on the other side of the Red Sea. We watch as Moses climbs Mt. Sinai empty-handed and comes down with two tablets, written by the finger of God as He delivers the Ten Commandments. We are on the edge of a happy story, but first there's a period of wandering for the Israelites.

If I were to ask you to tell me what you remember about the book of Exodus, those are probably the stories that would come to mind. They're the familiar stories that make their way into almost all the Bible storybooks. If you watch a Bible miniseries, those are the stories that end up in there.

But the thing that isn't in the children's storybooks or most of the movies is the tabernacle, the traveling tent God had the Israelites make. In just the Pentateuch—the first five books of the Old Testament—how much space does God devote to creation of the universe? He creates the sun, the moon, the stars, the galaxies, mountains, oceans, birds, fish, Adam and Eve, and the whole thing takes the space of two chapters. And then creation is done, and we get right into the Fall.

By comparison, how much space does the Lord devote to the tabernacle? Eleven chapters of the book of Exodus are devoted to the construction of the tabernacle, the furniture in the

tabernacle, the length of the tabernacle, how to put the tabernacle together, how to worship in the tabernacle. God decided, through Moses, to devote 456 verses to the tabernacle.

So if you're discouraged, needing hope, desiring to learn about living the Christian life, or perplexed about the Islamic terrorist attacks in Paris, and you want a word from the Lord—why would you spend 45 minutes learning about the tabernacle? The Bible tells us why. Paul writes in the New Testament, referring to the Old Testament, "*Whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, that through endurance and through the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope*" (Romans 15:4).

So if you read the Old Testament and don't see any reason for hope or encouragement, if you don't get anything out of it, then you're not reading it the right way. How then should we read the Old Testament account of something like the tabernacle? For a clue, go to the greatest Bible study that ever took place by the greatest Bible Teacher that ever lived: Jesus, on the Emmaus Road, the risen Christ, unrecognizable to these two men who think they're just walking along with a stranger.

Luke 24:27 says that Jesus, "*beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself.*" So if you read the Old Testament and you don't ask yourself, "How does this relate to Jesus? What does this have to do with fulfillment in Christ?" then you're not understanding the ultimate purpose of it. You won't have the encouragement and the hope for your faith that God designed in these true stories.

Even though these stories were not written to us *per se*—we weren't the original audience—they were written for us. I hope you will find some encouragement as you consider what the tabernacle looked like, what its importance was and what it was pointing to.

As we read the Old Testament, one thing that can be tricky is that there aren't time markers. It can be hard to figure out exactly when things took place. But to give you a little perspective, there were 500 years between the birth of Isaac and the birth of Moses. What may just be a few pages in the Bible can represent a 500-year gap. Basically, the same span of time between Martin Luther's birth in Germany and the birth of my kids is the distance between Genesis 22 and Exodus.

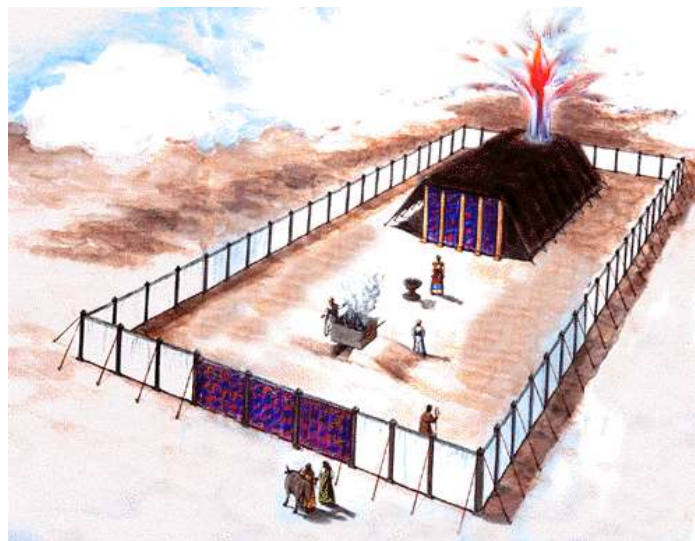
So the Israelites, who have been redeemed, don't have a home or even a homeland—unless you consider a tent a home. They lived a life of travel, wandering in the desert, moving toward the Promised Land. They would pitch their tents, but there was no permanent place to call home. Each night they would camp with their family, grouped by the 12 tribes. When Moses and Aaron said, "We're moving on," they'd pack up their few belongings—just what was essential to survive—and they would continue wandering.

Having left their home, they were traveling toward what they hoped would be a new permanent home, the dwelling place that had been promised to them, a beautiful and plentiful land, *“flowing with milk and honey”* (Exodus 3:8). But they weren’t there yet. They were “in between” people, sojourners and pilgrims and wanderers. They did not have a permanent home.

But when Moses came down from Sinai, he not only came down with the Ten Commandments—which many of us know—he also came down with specific instructions, detailed laws about how to live in light of those Ten Commandments. And God also gave him instructions on how to build a temporary temple. The people had temporary dwelling places, but now God says, “I want you to build a temporary dwelling place for me.”

In Exodus 25:8-9, Moses tells the people what Yahweh said to him: *“And let them make me a sanctuary, that I may dwell in their midst. Exactly as I show you concerning the pattern of the tabernacle, and of all its furniture, so you shall make it.”* God is telling them, “I have a pattern, a blueprint, that I want you to follow exactly, putting it into practice and making it happen. I also want you to fill it with furniture.” It was to be a little home for the Lord.

I want you to use your imagination to take a quick tour of what the Lord told them to build. The first thing He told them to do was to build a courtyard. If you were going to build a permanent courtyard, you would probably first lay a nice foundation of tile or marble or brick to walk on. But when it’s a portable courtyard that must be carried, you don’t build a foundation. As you walk through the courtyard, you basically are just walking on dirt and sticks and whatever plants were growing there in the desert—maybe even cacti and bugs. It was just the earthen ground.



If you were going to build a permanent courtyard, you’d probably want to have walls to protect it from enemy attack and to keep people from coming in uninvited. Again, because it was portable, they used wooden rods covered with bronze that went around the outside and then hung linen cloth between them. So on the two long ends there were about 20 poles, and on the two shorter ends about ten of those poles.

The walls were essentially seven and a half feet tall. Archeologists tell us that the Israelites, on average, were between five foot and five foot three inches tall, so nobody's going to be peering over the walls. (I always think it's a weird image to think that Jesus only came up to my chest.)

The courtyard was a rectangular design, about 75 feet wide and 150 feet long. If you were to impose that on a contemporary football field, mentally measure from the beginning of the end zone up to the 50 yard line, and then about halfway across the field. That's about the size of this courtyard: 75 by 150 feet.

You would enter only one side, the east side. We'll come back to why that's important. Any time you see a tabernacle or a temple in the Bible—whether in the Old Testament or the New—it's always facing east, and you go west to go toward it. You then go through those brightly colored curtains—kind of a cloth gate—to enter.

If you were the average Israelite, you wouldn't just wander in there to hang out and fellowship. You would be going into the courtyard for one specific purpose: to worship the Lord. You're not there for Awana or to play games or sing songs. You're coming in to offer your sacrifice before the Lord. The first thing you would encounter as you enter on the east end would be the **bronze altar for burnt offerings**.

This bronze altar was four and a half feet tall—so maybe from the ground up to my chest—seven and a half feet long, and seven and a half feet wide. It's a hollow wooden box that is



overlaid with bronze, with a grate that goes all around it and across the top. All of this is described in detail in Scripture. It isn't just a reconstruction from archeology or Bible scholars' best guess. You can go back to Scripture to read about the bronze altar and the dimensions—listed in cubits.

Notice what is on the four corners of the bronze altar. There are horns made from bronze, which are there to tie down the animal you're bringing in—a bull or a goat or sheep or birds. You are to tie your animal while it's alive. You don't kill the animal outside and bring in a carcass to put on the altar. You bring in a live bull or goat or sheep, you tie it down while it's still alive, then you burn it to death.

This is where the burnt offering from Leviticus 1 takes place. It's where the sin offering from Leviticus 4 takes place. And you are to have specific and unblemished animals, because they are to act as your substitute. As an Israelite, you know your sin. You know you deserve to die, and you're having this animal die in your place.

We sometimes read through this rather quickly when we get here in our quiet times. We read the descriptions of animal sacrifices and sort of forget what it would be like to actually be there. There's probably dung all over the place. These animals are not housebroken, so you have to watch where you're walking. These animals are not happy about being taken to their death, so they are loud and smelly; there is a lot of noise. This is how you worship the Lord, as you hear and smell the animals.

At the same time, amidst all of the stench and the noise, you smell something that smells really good. Fire is a strange thing. If you get too much of it or get too close—for example if you're inside a house that's on fire—it's a horrible smell. But if the fire is contained and you're outside and there's a wind there's a pleasing aroma as these animals are on the fire, like when you walk by a park where somebody is grilling, or smell burning leaves, or go into a barbecue restaurant where there's an open pit.

As a sinful Israelite, you're hoping that this is not only a pleasing aroma in your own nostrils, but that it is also a pleasing aroma to the Lord. As you bring your sin and animal, as an average Israelite, this is about as far as you go in terms of worship. You need to be worshipping from the heart, but you don't keep walking. You've done your sacrifice and now you turn around and go out, eastward, as the other worshippers are coming westward, streaming in to offer their sacrifices before the Lord. That's as far as you go.

But the priests can go one step farther, to the next level. Between the bronze altar and the tabernacle tent, there's a **basin for washing**. Before the priests go farther, they need to wash their hands and feet. Exodus 30:20 says, *“When they go into the tent of meeting, or when they come near the altar to minister...they shall wash their hands and their feet, so that they may not die.”* Not only are they physically dirty, but this symbolizes the need for spiritual washing as well.



Once the priest has done that, he's finally able to go into the tabernacle tent. The tent of meeting was about 15 feet across and 45 feet long, a large shoebox-shaped rectangle. It was also about 15 feet tall. Again unlike a permanent structure, the tabernacle had no roof, nor did it have any doors. At the entrance were pillars and a colorful curtain.

As is described in excruciating detail in the Bible, God had them build a wooden skeletal structure: 15 feet tall, 15 feet across the back, and 45 feet long. It was a square-shaped, upside-down “U,” over the top of which were layers of skins. And the wooden structure was completely overlaid with gold. Everything outside the tabernacle was bronze. Everything inside the tabernacle was gold.

So let's take a quick tour of what it would be like if you were a priest and you got to go inside the tabernacle. The vast majority of Israelites would never get to go in but could only see the skins covering the structure and the outside curtain. The tabernacle was divided into two rooms. The first area, about two-thirds of the tabernacle, was called the holy place, and the back part, 15 feet by 15 feet, is called the Most Holy Place or the Holy of Holies.

So if you were a priest, you could go around the curtain and walk in, and you would see in the holy place three pieces of furniture. On the right hand side, which would be the north side of the holy place, you would see **the table for the bread of the presence**. There are 12 flat bread loaves symbolizing the bread eaten before the exodus by the 12 tribes of Israel. Again, this wasn't for the average Israelite to munch on. You could only eat the bread on this golden table if you were a priest.



On the south side, across from the table of the bread of the presence, was a **lampstand**. While Scripture gives specific dimensions for how big the table and the altar are, for whatever reason it does not tell us how tall the lampstand is. I imagine it might have been five or six feet tall. But it does describe how it's laid out. It's patterned after a flowering almond tree with seven cups. Imagine going into a tent with all of these skins covering it. It would be pitch black in there. But once the lamps are lit, the whole room lights up from the fire illuminating everything and shimmering off the gold. So that's the golden lampstand on the left hand, south side.



Then the final piece of furniture in this sort of mini house of worship is an altar—**the altar of incense**. Again, it has the four horns on the edge. All the poles are for transportation, so the Israelites can easily carry it with them as they wander to the next place. What they sacrifice here is the incense as a pleasing aroma.



This altar stands before the second set of curtains. Even though physically, if you wanted to, you could just pull that curtain aside and walk right in, no priest would have ever done that. Your average priest could go no further than the first room. The curtain was an impenetrable barrier for all of the priests except one: the great high priest. Only he could go behind the second

curtain, which was blue and purple and scarlet, with cherubim woven into it. If you were to look up, you would also see cherubim woven into the inside curtains.

Do you remember hearing in the book of Genesis about cherubim guarding the Tree of Life? You can read about this in Genesis 3. They were God's angelic guardians, fierce creatures that archeology shows as having a lion-like body and a human-like face. Those are etched into the tabernacle curtains, preventing anyone other than the high priest from going behind that curtain.

And even if you were a high priest, 364 days out of the year you would never, ever think of peeking behind that curtain—certainly not going behind it. There was only one day of the year in which you, as the high priest, could go behind the curtain—the Day of Atonement.

So what's back there in this mysterious 15 foot cube-shaped room? There's only one thing physically back there—the **Ark of the Covenant**. It is a hollow wooden box, which according to Scripture is 2.25 feet wide, 2.25 feet high and 3.75 feet long. It is overlaid with gold and has a lid on top of it. On top of the lid are two cherubim facing each other. Their faces are bowed down and their wings go up over them.



Then there are things inside the Ark of the Covenant. First, the stone tablets of testimony from Moses, where God with His very finger wrote the Ten Commandments for all of us. The author of the book of Hebrews adds that there were two other things in the Ark of the Covenant: a golden urn that contained some manna that God had provided to the Israelites and Aaron's staff that budded.

As an Israelite, you would have never, ever seen this Ark. You certainly would never have touched it. In fact, we know of one man who tried to touch it when he was worried that it might tip over. When he reached out his hand merely to balance it, the Lord struck him dead (2 Samuel 6:5-8). There were poles for transferring it, but even then it would be covered so you would never see what the Ark of the Covenant looked like

This is because the Ark is where the holy God Himself dwells. This is where Yahweh chooses to make His presence known. During the daytime the tabernacle is covered with a cloud, and at night time there is a pillar of fire. This is the dwelling place of the holy God, and all Israelites—and except for the high priest once a year—are barred from going into it.

As the biblical story progresses, eventually they do get to the Promised Land and take over Jerusalem. God does have David and then Solomon build a temple, a more permanent

dwelling place. And the same features are in the temple. You've got the bread and the tables and the lampstand and the curtain now in this beautiful golden temple. But the dimensions are similar, just bigger. Now the Holy of Holies is not just 15 foot cubed, but 30 foot cubed. And this continues on to the day of Jesus.

I now want to walk back through what we've just covered, except looking through a different lens, the lens of Christ—because everything changes once Jesus comes. Without the Messiah, you can't understand what the tabernacle was about, what the table was about, why this lampstand was there, why the priest had to eat bread, why there was a curtain in place, why God chose to dwell in this little dusky 15-foot dark cube in the middle of a desert. Why did all of that take place?

Let me make a few observations and applications for us. I've mentioned a couple times that to go toward the tabernacle, to go into the courtyard, you came from the east and you're walking west. Now, is that just an incidental detail in the Bible? No, it has great significance. Going back to the beginning in Genesis, back to the Fall when Adam and Eve rebelled against the Lord, God *"drove out the man, and at the east of the garden of Eden he placed the cherubim and a flaming sword that turned every way to guard the way to the tree of life"* (Genesis 3:24).

The next chapter says, *"Cain went away from the presence of the Lord and settled...east of Eden"* (Genesis 4:16). So as the Israelites make their way toward the altar for burnt sacrifices and behold the tabernacle, and as they see the priests walking toward the tabernacle, they're all walking west. They're walking away from judgment back into the presence of the Lord, where the Lord dwells among His people.

Again, the first thing you see when you come into the courtyard is the altar for burnt offerings. What does that mean? What is the point of a constant repetition of killing animal after animal as their substitute? It's ultimately to point toward the futility of animal sacrifice and the once-for-all fulfillment—the perfect sacrifice of the spotless, unblemished Lamb of God, the sacrifice Jesus made of Himself.

[Jesus] entered once for all into the holy places, not by means of the blood of goats and calves but by means of his own blood, thus securing an eternal redemption. For if the sprinkling of defiled persons with the blood of goats and bulls and with the ashes of a heifer sanctifies for the purification of the flesh, how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God, purify our conscience from dead works to serve the living God. (Hebrews 9:12-14)

For those of us who have thankfully never done an animal sacrifice, I wonder if we don't quite feel the weight of that like an Israelite would—who would go day after day after day, still sinning, still sinning, still sacrificing, still sinning, still sacrificing—to hear the good news: it's over! No more sacrifices. Because Christ has come, He is our sacrifice.

And because we're covered by the sacrifice of Christ, we can become living sacrifices. Not that we're atoning for our sins, not that we're atoning for anybody else's sins, but in some measure we are reenacting that by setting ourselves up before the Lord, saying, "Lord, use me in whatever way You please. I am not the captain of my own ship. You are the Lord of my life."

Paul tells us in Romans 12:1, "*I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.*" So we have this once-for-all sacrifice for our sins—which is what Jesus accomplished for us—and then we have this ongoing offering of ourselves, day by day, as a living sacrifice, saying, "Lord, I am Yours. Use me as You will."

The next thing the Israelites would see would be that basin for washing. But why do you need to wash? It's because you're dirty. They felt this physically in the desert. Even if you had good hygiene you were filthy by the end of the day, and they needed to physically wash themselves clean. But it points toward a deeper spiritual meaning, that we all need spiritual cleansing. Hebrews 10:22 says, "*Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water.*" David prayed, "*Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin!*" (Psalm 51:2).

Over and over again in the New Testament you have this language of regeneration, of sanctification, of washing, of the Spirit being poured out. First John 1:9 says, "*If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.*" No matter who we are, no matter where we came from, no matter what we have done, we are all spiritually unclean and need to be washed with the perfect water, the living water of Christ.

So again, as you go into the tabernacle itself you see the table with bread on it on the right hand side. What is the bread pointing to? Is it just so the priests wouldn't go hungry, that they would have something to fill their bellies? That was certainly one small purpose of it. But it was like a big neon sign pointing forward in redemptive history, saying, "There's more to come. This physical bread that you taste is pointing toward an eternal Living Bread, a bread that will truly provide nourishment."

When Jesus says to the Jews in John 6:35, "*I am the bread of life,*" they're not just thinking about bread in terms of being an average meal, but rather the bread on the table of the

presence of God. Jesus is the bread. We're Protestants here, not Catholics. Catholics understand there to be priests within the church who stand between them and God. As Protestants we say, "Yes and amen. There are priests in the church. In fact, there's no Christian who is not a priest. We're all priests of the living God."

As the priests in the Old Testament would partake of that bread, so now each of you—if you have been adopted by the Father and united to Christ, the true Bread of Life—are a priest in the household of God. First Peter 2:5 says, "*You yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood.*"

And you don't just get to partake of the bread inside the tabernacle once a week, but you get to partake of the Living Bread every day as you meet the Lord by His Spirit in the Word. As we come later to the Lord's Table here, we will be refreshed. Not physically refreshed—those little wafers don't satisfy anybody—but spiritually refreshed as we point to the broken body of Christ, the Living Bread.

As you look on the other side of the tabernacle, you see the lampstand. You need a basin for cleansing because you're dirty. You need bread because you're hungry. What do you need a lampstand for? You need a lampstand to see—because it's so dark. It's a reminder that without light we would be as good as blind. Second Corinthians 4 refers to unbelievers—those who are perishing—as having a veil over their eyes, being blinded by the god of this world, the evil one, so their minds can't see the gospel of the glory of Christ.

But God Who said, "Let light shine out of darkness" (2 Corinthians 4:6) has shown in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. What did Jesus say in John 8:12? "*I am the light of the world.*" He tells us that He's the bread that this was pointing towards and He tells us that He's the light toward which this was pointing.

As you look toward the altar of incense, keep in mind that in the book of Revelation the altar of incense contains the prayers of the saints (Revelation 5:8, 8:3-4). In Psalm 141:1-2, David cries to the Lord, "*Let my prayer be counted as incense before you, and the lifting up of my hands as the evening sacrifice!*" So as we live in light of the Light of the World, as we partake of the Living Bread of Christ, we want to offer our prayers up before the throne of grace.

But there's still this problem, this barrier, this impenetrable wall, this curtain etched with cherubim preventing us from going behind the curtain to be in the presence of God Himself. How can we as sinners be in the presence of a holy God? If you've never wrestled with that, if you've thought, "Well, of course I can be in God's presence, of course I can talk to God, of course God dwells with me," then you don't understand the depth of your own sin and you don't understand the height and beauty of His holiness.

The greatest news in the entire world is that on the lonely hill of Calvary in April of A.D. 33, as a 30-something Man with two criminals on either side of Him, Jesus was breathing His last breath. He could have turned His head to the left and seen the temple in Jerusalem. As He turned, He would have been looking east toward the place of judgment. And as His body was broken in two, so was the curtain. As His body was ripped in half, so the curtain was ripped in half as well.

Listen to how Hebrews 10:19-20 describes it. *“Therefore, brothers”—that’s brothers and sisters, any of you who know Christ and have come to Christ—“since we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus, by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain, that is, through his flesh.”*

So as you look at that curtain, it represents the flesh of Jesus Christ—and that curtain was torn in two. Hebrews 6:19-20, a few chapters earlier, says, *“We have this as a sure and steadfast anchor of the soul, a hope that enters into the inner place behind the curtain, where Jesus has gone as a forerunner on our behalf, having become a high priest forever after the order of Melchizedek.”*

I don’t know what things you’re struggling with, what losses you’ve experienced, what fears lie before you—the greatest news in all the world is that God is real. Actually, that in itself is not the good news, because it could be the most terrifying news in the world. But He is a real God Who has opened up the dwelling place for each one of us to enter in.

He did it at enormous cost to Himself. It took the very life of His only beloved Son, torn in half for us—our ultimate sacrifice. Christ was sacrificed so that we wouldn’t need to be punished forever. He became the light of the world so that we could see in the darkness. He became the Bread of Life so that we could be nourished. Then He let His own self be torn asunder to open the way to the living, holy God. It’s not just some special representative who gets to go to God and talk to Him on our behalf, then come back and report to us.

Each one of us—no matter who we are, no matter where we come from, whether we’re rich or poor, smart or not, whether we’re religious or have run from God our whole lives—each one of us can be on equal ground at the cross of Jesus Christ, and we can enter into the very presence of a holy God by His grace and by His mercy.

This is the only source of hope. The world has all these other alternatives, all this other advice. Right now, many are grieving over what just happened in Paris, but they’re grieving as those who have no hope. We have hope. As we go out from this place, we don’t need to book a ticket to try to go visit a temple or a tabernacle. We are the temple of God, and we take the Holy Spirit with us wherever we go. No matter what dark corner of the world we walk into, we can

take the light of Christ. We can take hope where there is no hope, and we can proclaim the good news of the gospel and the peace of Jesus Christ.

Let's pray together.

Holy Father, I pray that all of us would reverence Your holiness. It's so tempting, Lord, to create You in our own image, to make You just a buddy, kind of a doting Santa Claus figure. But You are a holy God Who dwells in unapproachable light—yet You have made a way through Your Son Jesus so that each one of us can come and stand before You.

Even now as we make these requests known to You, standing before the throne of grace, we know that Your Son Jesus—risen from the dead—is standing at Your right side advocating for us. We know that Your Holy Spirit is interpreting our groaning, our inarticulate desires, before Your throne of grace. Lord, I pray for every person in this room, that they would experience hope, that they would experience encouragement, that no matter what's going on they can know they can be in the presence of the living God.

I pray especially for any who might be here who are on the outside looking in—who perhaps have gone to church their whole life, who can say all the right things, who can sing the hymns as loud as the next guy, but who have never truly come into Your presence. I pray that they would see the beauty and the wonder of Jesus and what He has done for each of us.

Lord, as we turn to sing and as we partake of Your Supper at the Communion Table, we pray that You would cause each one of us to draw closer to You through Your Son Jesus, by Your grace and by Your Spirit. We pray all this in Jesus' name. Amen.

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All Scriptures quoted directly from the English Standard Version unless otherwise noted.

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