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Searching for Salvation

introduction

We're continuing our *Searching for Salvation* series through Exodus, and we come to a surprising part of the story. After delivering Israel from Egypt and giving them his law at Mount Sinai, God devotes much of the remaining book to detailed instructions for building a tabernacle — a portable sanctuary where he will dwell among his people. It's curious that so much attention is given to the tabernacle. And so, we can consider what this might tell us about the purpose of salvation.

This week, we'll explore what it means for a holy God to dwell among his people, and how the tabernacle points us toward the greater promise of God's presence through Jesus Christ.



Think of a time when someone's presence meant more to you than anything they could say or do for you. What made their presence meaningful?

context

In our previous discussion, we considered how God rescued the Israelites from slavery in Egypt, led them through the Red Sea, and established a covenant relationship with them at Mount Sinai. Now God instructs Moses to build a tabernacle that will stand at the center of Israel's camp as they journey through the wilderness.

Exodus devotes a good amount of attention to the building of the tabernacle. Chapters 25-31 describe God's instructions for its construction, while chapter 35-40 recount how the Israelites carry them out. Between these accounts, however, Israel breaks its covenant with God by worshiping a golden calf (cf. Exodus 32). Their rebellion raises a serious question about whether God will continue to dwell among them. Through Moses' intercession, God renews his covenant with Israel, and the work of building the tabernacle continues.

When the tabernacle is finally completed, God's glory descends to fill it. This moment marks the culmination of God's work of deliverance: the God who rescued Israel has now come to dwell among them.

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read Exodus 25:8-9, 40:33-35 (NIV)

25:8 "Then have them make a sanctuary for me, and I will dwell among them. 9 Make this tabernacle and all its furnishings exactly like the pattern I will show you.

40:33 Then Moses set up the courtyard around the tabernacle and altar and put up the curtain at the entrance to the courtyard. And so Moses finished the work.

34 Then the cloud covered the tent of meeting, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle. 35 Moses could not enter the tent of meeting because the cloud had settled on it, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle.

Take a few moments to reflect on the Scripture. Share some insights, questions, or points that strike you. Then read what follows.

the God who desires to dwell among us

God's instructions for the tabernacle begin with a remarkable statement: "...*have them make a sanctuary for me, and I will dwell among them*" (v. 8). The purpose of the tabernacle was not just to provide Israel with a place for religious activities to take place. God himself would come to dwell among them. The word *tabernacle* refers to a "dwelling" or "tent," something familiar to the Israelites, who were themselves living in tents as they traveled through the wilderness. In this way, God's dwelling would be among the dwellings of his people.[1]

This reveals something important about the purpose of the exodus: God had not rescued Israel merely to free them from slavery or bring them into a better land. He was bringing them into a relationship with himself. In Exodus 29:46, God explains that he brought Israel out of Egypt so that he might dwell among them. Their deliverance was part of a larger purpose — that they would know him as their God and live in his presence.

[1] Motyer, Alec, *The Message of Exodus*, BST, Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2005.

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The tabernacle also recalls the beginning of the biblical story, when humanity enjoyed fellowship with God in the Garden of Eden. That fellowship was disrupted by human rebellion, but God's desire to dwell with his people remained. The tabernacle represents an important step in this unfolding story of God restoring his presence among humanity.[2]

discuss

1. **Israel has already experienced God's deliverance, protection, and provision. What is different about God's promise to dwell among them? Why is this significant?**

2. **What does it mean to desire God's presence rather than merely what he can provide? Where do you see this distinction playing out in the way you (or people) think about or relate to God?**

the holy God who draws near

After the tabernacle is completed, God's glory descends upon it. The cloud that had previously marked God's presence at Mount Sinai now covers the tent of meeting, and his glory fills the tabernacle. The God who revealed himself on the mountain has come to dwell in the midst of Israel's camp. This is a remarkable moment of grace, particularly in light of Israel's recent rebellion with the golden calf (cf. Exodus 32). Despite their unfaithfulness, God has not abandoned his people.

Yet there is something surprising about what happens next: Moses cannot enter the tabernacle because God's glory fills it (v. 35). Even Moses, who had spoken with God and mediated on behalf of Israel, isn't able to just walk into his presence. The tabernacle brings God near, but it also reveals the distance that remains between a holy God and a sinful people.

[2] Alexander, Desmond T., *Exodus (Teach the Text)*, Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2016.

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This tension is actually reflected in the design of the tabernacle itself. The various spaces in the tabernacle were separated by curtains, and only those priests who were appointed could enter certain areas to carry out their priestly duties. And as part of approaching God, certain sacrifices were required. These arrangements were not simply barriers intended to keep people away. They also provided a way for sinful people to live in the presence of a holy God.[3]

> *"Moses knew God better than any man alive; yet when the glory came down, he was not able to enter. Neither can we penetrate God's infinite glory; we can only stand back and worship with reverence and awe."*
>
> —Philip Ryken, *Exodus: Saved for God's Glory*

discuss

3. **What strikes you about the description of God's glory in vv. 34–35, particularly that even Moses couldn't enter the tabernacle? What does this reveal about who God is?[4]**

4. **God desires to dwell among his people, yet his holiness also sets him apart from them. What do you find comforting or unsettling about these two aspects of God's character?**

God with us: in Christ

As significant as the tabernacle was, it was never intended to be the final expression of God's presence among his people. In the Gospel of John, we read that "the Word became flesh and

[3] Ryken, Philip Graham, *Exodus: Saved for God's Glory*, PTW, Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2005.
[4] **For further discussion**: consider the distinction between God's holiness and his glory. What does each reveal about who God is, and how are both reflected in this passage?

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dwelt among us" (cf. John 1:14). The word translated *dwelt* carries the idea of pitching a tent or tabernacling among us. In Jesus Christ, God comes near to humanity in an even more remarkable way — not through a sanctuary made of fabric and wood, but by becoming human himself. Jesus is the fullest revelation of God's presence among us.

But Jesus does more than reveal God's presence — he also opens the way for people to enter into fellowship with God. The tabernacle's sacrifices, priest, and curtains pointed to the need for mediation between God and humanity. According to the New Testament, Jesus fulfills this need through his death and resurrection. When Jesus died, the curtain of the temple was torn in two (cf. Matthew 27:51), signifying that the barrier separating people from God's holy presence had been overcome. And therefore, the believers can confidently draw near to God through Christ (cf. Hebrews 10:19–22).

The promise of God's presence also extends beyond Jesus' earthly life. Through the Holy Spirit, God dwells among and within his people. (cf. Ephesians 2:21–22). And the Bible ends with a vision of a renewed creation in which God dwells with humanity without the barriers that once separated them (cf. Revelations 21:3). What began in Eden, and was anticipated in the tabernacle, finds its fulfillment in Christ and its ultimate completion in the new creation.[5]

discuss

5. **What connections do you see between the tabernacle in Exodus and the description of Jesus in John 1:14? What is significant about the claim that God came to dwell among humanity in the person of Jesus?**

6. **Hebrews 10:19–22 describes the confidence Christians can have to draw near to God through Jesus. What makes it difficult to approach God with that kind of confidence?**

[5] Chester, Tim, *Exodus for You,* GWFY, Charlotte, NC: The Good Book Company, 2016.

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upcoming

- Sunday, November 15 & 22 | **Spiritual Rhythms (2-part workshop), 1:15-2:30 pm**
  Interested in a new start for 2027? Consider taking time out in the next two Sundays to participate in a 2-part workshop! Led by Pastor Paul, this workshop will equip you to head into a new year with more clarity and a plan for living intentionally, growing in your sense of fulfillment as you grow your ability to love God and others well.
  redeemerws.com/rhythms

- Thursday, November 19 | **Redeemer Network Prayer & Praise Night, 7-9 pm**
  Consider attending this Redeemer Network gathering as a CG! Join in with congregants from the five other Redeemers to worship in songs and spirit and seek God in prayer for the renewal of our city. Time for mingling and refreshments to follow.
  redeemerws.com/prayerandpraise

- Friday-Saturday, January 29-30 | **CFW Conference: Future of F**AI**TH**
  Together, we will ask not only what AI can do, but what it forms, what it costs, who it affects, and how Christians can live with wisdom, love, and hope in an AI-shaped world. Early bird pricing through November 30.
  cfwconference.com

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