

Exodus 25:23-40 and 37:10-24

Introduction

This morning, we continue with “the plan of the tabernacle described in detail,” and then “the plan of the tabernacle followed exactly.” And we remember that the meaning and the goal of all this is the presence of Yahweh in the midst of His people – living with them and among them as family.

We started last week with the Ark of the Covenant, standing at the very center—at the very heart—of God’s presence with His people. There was the chest containing the Ten Commandments, and then on top of that the place for atonement (the atonement plate) with the two cherubim standing on either end, their wings stretched out above them and overshadowing the place of atonement, and their faces turned downward to the ground. Here we have the grounds for fellowship with God, and the revelation of His invisible, almighty presence.

From the Ark of the Covenant, we now move to two other pieces of furniture that were to be located in the tabernacle, **nearest and closest** to the presence of God – a **table** and a **lamp**. We read in verses 23-28:

I. Exodus 25:23–28 — You shall make a table of acacia wood. Two cubits shall be its length [app. 3 ft.; 9 in. shorter than the Ark of the Covenant], a cubit its breadth [app. 18 in.; 9 in. narrower than the Ark of the Covenant], and a cubit and a half its height [app. 27 in.; same height as the Ark of the Covenant]. You shall overlay it with pure gold and make a molding of gold around it [decorative trim?]. And you shall make a rim around it a handbreadth wide [app. 3½-4 in.], and a molding of gold around the rim. And you shall make for it four rings of gold, and fasten the rings to the four corners at its four legs. Close to the frame the rings shall lie, as holders for the poles to carry the table. You shall make the poles of acacia wood, and overlay them with gold, and the table shall be carried with these.

There are a lot of similarities between this table and the Ark of the Covenant. Both are made of acacia wood, overlaid with pure gold. Both include a molding of gold. The height of the table and the Ark of the Covenant is exactly the same, while the depth and width of the table are each shorter than the Ark of the Covenant by nine inches. But for all these similarities, of course, there’s a major difference. The Ark of the Covenant was a box or a chest meant to hold something inside of it. But what we have this morning is simply a table to put things on top of.

There are different kinds of tables, meant for different things and intended for different purposes. So, what “kind” of table will this be, and *why* should it be so closely connected with the presence of God above the Ark of the Covenant? We go on to read in verse twenty:

II. Exodus 25:29 — And you shall make its plates and dishes,* and its pitchers [or jugs] and bowls with which to pour drink offerings; you shall make them of pure gold.

* ESV: “dishes for incense” It may very well be that the “dishes” were used for the placing of incense (cf. Lev. 24:5-9); however, this is not stated in the Hebrew text.

Plates, dishes, pitchers, and bowls. So, what kind of table is this? It appears to be a **meal** table – a table for holding *food* and *drink*. And yet, still, this is clearly no ordinary kitchen table, or even dining room table. There are other, more common, “everyday” words that could have been used for “plates, dishes, pitchers, and bowls,” but the Hebrew words used here all refer specifically to holy and sacred vessels for holy and sacred use.

So, associated with this table we have pitchers and bowls with which to pour “drink offerings.” Apparently, wine or strong drink would be brought into the Tabernacle using the golden pitchers, and then offered to the Lord by pouring the wine into the bowls that we assume were on the table.

- Numbers 28:7 — In the Holy Place you shall pour out a drink offering of strong drink to the LORD.

Of course, the obvious question we have is this: “What does the invisible, transcendent God want with wine and strong drink? Are we to think that this table is for the “feeding” of God, as it certainly would have been in other pagan temples and rituals? Is the purpose of this table so that we can grow food, and then set it out for the “maintenance” of God? And the immediate, most emphatic answer to these questions must be obviously not! The strong drink is poured out *to* God as a way of acknowledging that *He* is the **Giver** of all the fruit of the vine; *He* is the **source** of all the merriment and joy that accompanies the harvest of the vineyard and the drinking of the wine. The only ones who need, and can use, drink are *us*. And so even as the wine is poured into the bowls as a humble offering *to God*, the bowls on the table ultimately become a symbol of God’s gift of the fruit of the vine *to His people*. The bowls of wine on the table become this beautiful, holy symbol of God’s gift of merriment and joy and the sustaining of the life of His people with drink. (cf. Deut. 14:23-26) Indeed, where do these gifts flow from? They flow directly from the reality of His **presence** in our midst.

Now, in the experience of Israel, connected with drink offerings, there were also **grain** offerings. (cf. Num. 15:1-10) Why? Because food and drink, bread and wine, go together. (cf. Ruth 2:14; 1 Samuel 10:3; 16:20; 2 Kings 18:32; Prov. 9:5-6) The Psalmist writes in Psalm 104:

- Psalm 104:14-15 (cf. Eccl. 9:7) — You cause the grass to grow for the livestock and plants for man to cultivate, that he may bring forth food from the earth and wine to gladden the heart of man.

And so, associated with the **wine** in the **bowls** on the table, there was also the **bread** on the **plates**. The Lord says to Moses, in verse thirty:

III. Exodus 25:30 — And you shall set the bread of the Presence on the table before me regularly.

Leviticus fills us in on some of the details:

- Leviticus 24:5-8 — You shall take fine flour and bake twelve loaves from it; two tenths of an ephah shall be in each loaf. And you shall set them in two piles, six in a pile, on the table

of pure gold before the LORD... Every Sabbath day Aaron shall arrange it before the LORD regularly...

Once again, the point of this bread on the table can't be to satisfy the hunger of a God who is invisible, and who exists in no shape, or form, or body. God doesn't eat our bread! Instead, the twelve loaves of bread are offered to God on the table by the twelve tribes of God's people as a way of acknowledging that *He* is ultimately the **source** and the **Giver** of all their bread. The only ones who could ever actually "eat" the bread – the only ones who could ever actually partake at this table – are *us*. And so even as the bread is set out as a grateful offering *to God*, that same bread on the table then becomes the symbol of God's gift *to His people* of food for the sustaining and the enjoyment of life. To be clear, where does this gift of food and sustenance flow from? It flows directly from the reality of His presence in our midst. Can we see, now, the beautiful imagery of a **table** set with bread and wine in such close proximity to the presence of God above the Ark of the Covenant – the bread even being called by God the "bread of the Presence"?

What ultimately happens to this bread that's set out on the table every Sabbath? We read in Leviticus:

- Leviticus 24:9 — And it shall be for Aaron and his sons, and they shall eat it in a holy place, since it is for him a most holy portion out of the LORD's food offerings, a perpetual due.

On the one hand, the priests eat the bread (and presumably drink the wine) **as servants in the Lord's house**, and so by *their* eating of the meal God symbolizes *His* acceptance of Israel's offering. On the other hand, the priests eat the bread (and, we assume, drink the wine) **as representatives of the twelve tribes**, and so we also see symbolized by their eating of this meal God's perpetual, faithful feeding, and sustaining, and nourishing of the **life** of His people. That single meal that the seventy elders enjoyed in God's presence on Mount Sinai (Exod. 24:9-11) has now become a perpetual, constantly renewed meal in the tabernacle, *enjoyed as the gift of Yahweh's presence*. (cf. Psalm 23:5; Isa. 25:6; Jer. 31:12-14) From the table, then, we move now to the lamp.

IV. Exodus 25:31–39 — You shall make a lampstand of pure gold. The lampstand shall be made of hammered work: its base, its stem, its cups, its calyxes [or: buds], and its flowers [or: blossoms/petals] shall be of one piece with it. And there shall be six branches going out of its sides, three branches of the lampstand out of one side of it and three branches of the lampstand out of the other side of it; three cups made like almond blossoms, each with [bud] and [petals], on one branch, and three cups made like almond blossoms, each with [bud] and [petals], on the other branch—so for the six branches going out of the lampstand. And on the lampstand itself there shall be four cups made like almond blossoms, with their [buds] and [petals], and a [bud] of one piece with it under each pair of the six branches going out from the lampstand. Their [buds] and their branches shall be of one piece with it, the whole of it a single piece of hammered work of pure gold. You shall make seven lamps for it. And the lamps shall be set up so as to give light on the space in front of it. Its tongs and their trays shall be of pure gold. It shall be made, with all these utensils, out of a talent of pure gold.

God tells Moses to build a lamp, but then what He actually goes on to describe is a **tree in flower!** This “tree” has one central trunk, or stem, with three branches coming out of each side, for a total of six branches. Spaced along each of these six branches, there are three flowers (with the third flower being at the tip of each branch). On the central “stem” of the tree there are four flowers – one flower beneath each of the three pairs of branches, and then one flower at the tip. The flowers are all cup-shaped with the bud at the bottom and the petals turned upward. So on this “tree,” with its six branches and central stem, there are a total of twenty-two flowers – or “cups” shaped like almond blossoms – with seven of these blossoms sprouting out of the end of each branch. And it’s inside of *these seven* cup-shaped flowers that seven lamps were to be set and cradled. As one commentator writes: “In this way the oil **lamps** would sit artistically in a gold **flower** on a gold **tree.**” (Stuart) A lamp was a shallow kind of a bowl or saucer with one end pinched out to form a kind of mouth or spout. The saucer was then filled with oil, and a wick was draped over the spout with one end in the oil and the other end burning for light. The purpose of the “tongs” and “trays” that we read about would have been for trimming and replacing the wicks.

And so the end result of all this is simply amazing and beautiful. Can you see what this is? It’s a light-giving, light-producing tree — a flowering tree whose fruit is **light**. Does this make you think of another tree that we learn about all the way back in Genesis chapters 2 and 3?

Light, in the Bible, is a metaphor for **life** — for life *abundant, joy-filled, and free*.

- Job 33:29–30 — God does all these things... with a man, to bring back his soul from the pit, that he may be **lighted** with the **light of life**.
- Psalms 56:13 — You have delivered my soul from death, yes, my feet from falling, that I may walk before God in the **light of life**.
- Proverbs 6:23 — The commandment is a **lamp** and the teaching a **light**, and the reproofs of discipline are the way of **life**.
- Proverbs 16:15 — In the **light** of a king’s face there is **life**, and his favor is like the clouds that bring the spring rain.

To be alive is to walk in the light, rather than descend into the darkness. Light is pictured not only as that which *gives* life, but also that which *enables us to* **enjoy** life – to rejoice and be merry.

So when we see, in the Tabernacle, a **light**-producing **tree** — a flowering tree whose fruit is light — how can we not think of the **tree of life** that grew in the Garden of Eden? In the garden, **life** was the fruit of God’s presence with His people. That was what the tree of life represented. And so here again, in the tabernacle, we have to ask, “What is the source of this tree’s fruit? Where does this light of this tree flow from?” Can we see, now, the meaning of this imagery – of a light-producing, light-giving tree *so closely connected* with the **presence** of God above the Ark of the Covenant?

Light, life, joy... these are all the fruit of the nearness of God – of His presence with us. Therefore, in the tabernacle where the presence of God was, there was **always** to be light; constantly, ceaselessly, uninterrupted light. Later on in Exodus we learn that the priests were to

keep the lamps burning all night long, setting up the lamps at twilight, and then dressing the lamps in the morning. (Exod. 27:20-21; 30:7-8) The darkness of night was never, ever to be in the tabernacle, but **only, always light**. (cf. Rev. 21:22–23; 22:1-5) At a time when light was a far more uncommon and precious thing than it is today, that constant light in the tabernacle would have spoken even more powerfully than ever.

There's one more thing we can notice here. Yahweh gives specific instructions that all seven of the lamps are to be set up "so as to give light on the space **in front** of [the lampstand]." In other words, the burning wicks in the pinched ends of the saucers were all to be facing in the direction of the **table** – the table upon which the meal—the bread and the wine—was all laid out.

Conclusion

What is the meaning of the table and the lampstand, the meal and the fruit of the tree? What is the meaning of the bread and the wine, and the light? The meaning is, I think, simple – summed up by the Psalmist: In the presence of God, there is fullness of joy.

- Psalm 16:11 (cf. 21:6) — You make known to me the path of **life**; in your **presence** there is fullness of joy; at your right hand are pleasures forevermore.

Where did the Psalmist learn this? Where did he see it pictured and represented? In the Tabernacle, where the presence of God was; in the Tabernacle, where the tree and the table stood – where the meal was perpetually prepared, and the light was perpetually shining. So the Psalmist can write in another place:

- Psalm 36:7–9 — How precious is your steadfast love, O God! The children of mankind take refuge in the shadow of your wings. They **feast** on the abundance of **your house**, and you give them **drink** from the river of your delights. For with you is the fountain of **life**; in your **light** do we see **light**.
- Psalm 65:4 — Blessed is the one you choose and bring near, to dwell in your courts! We shall be satisfied with the goodness of your house, the holiness of your temple!

The Tabernacle pointed people to the reality that life, and light, and joy, and true fulfillment are **only** to be found *in the presence of God*; more than that, they are **always** to be found in the presence of God. We have to be careful not to separate the table and the lampstand from the Ark containing the Ten Commandments, and the atonement plate for the sprinkling of blood. Light, and life, and joy, cannot be had apart from wholehearted obedience and wholehearted trust in God's provision for forgiveness. And we must also be careful not to separate the table and the lampstand from the presence of the God who is enthroned above the Cherubim. We must never forget that the meal on the table and the light from the tree both find their source in God Himself. The Psalmist shows that he understands this when he prays:

- Psalm 27:4 [NLT/NIV] — The one thing I ask of the LORD— the thing I seek most— is to live in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, delighting in the LORD's perfections and seeking Him in his Temple.

Can *you* say the same thing? Can I? Or, even today, are we looking for joy and fulfillment in the temporary things of this world—even in the sinful pleasures of this world—rather than in the abiding, lasting delights of God’s house? (cf. Psalm 84:1-12; Rev. 3:12; cf. Psalm 16:5–6; 17:13-15; 73:25–26) To truly delight in the Lord, and in His saving presence is the key to putting to death all the sinful cravings of the flesh. To truly delight in the Lord, and in His life-giving presence is the key to demolishing every idol in our lives – all the things we so easily set up as objects of worship in the place of God.

Now, after all that we’ve seen this morning, maybe we’re thinking to ourselves: “I wish the Tabernacle was still here. Wouldn’t it be wonderful if we could still make a joyful pilgrimage to see this house of the Lord? Well, of course, it *would* be *if* something far, far, far **better** had not already come. We come, now, to the last verse in our text for this morning. The Lord said to Moses:

V. Exodus 25:40 — And see that you make them [all these things] after the pattern for them, which is being shown you on the mountain.

Built into the very structure of the Tabernacle is the certainty and the guarantee that it will one day be obsolete. How is this? Because from the very beginning God is making it clear that the Tabernacle is simply a copy of the pattern in the heavens – a shadowy copy of the real thing, which has come to us, today, **in Christ**.

- John 6:35 (cf. 6:51) — Jesus said... “**I am** the **bread** of *life*; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst.”
- John 8:12 (cf. 1:4) — [Jesus said,] “**I am** the **light** of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the *light of life*.”

Have you truly **come** to Jesus, in faith? Are you truly **following** Him, and daily **coming** to Him, in faith? Will you diligently purpose to delight yourself above all else **in Him**, *through faith in Him*? In Jesus, the table and the tree are **fulfilled**. In Jesus, the copies are *so far surpassed* as to now be completely obsolete. In Jesus, we find our hunger satisfied, our thirst quenched, all our darkness overcome by light. In Jesus, we find true **life**. (cf. John 17:3)

So, skipping ahead now to Exodus 37, we can read with a growing anticipation and joy:

VI. Exodus 37:10–24 — [Bezalel] also **made** the **TABLE** of acacia wood. Two cubits was its length, a cubit its breadth, and a cubit and a half its height. And he **overlaid** it with pure gold, and **made** a molding of gold around it. And he **made** a rim around it a handbreadth wide, and **made** a molding of gold around the rim. He **cast** for it four rings of gold and **fastened** the rings to the four corners at its four legs. Close to the frame were the rings, as holders for the poles to carry the table. He **made** the poles of acacia wood to carry the table, and **overlaid** them with gold. And he **made** the vessels of pure gold that were to be on the table, its plates and dishes for incense, and its bowls and pitchers with which to pour drink offerings.

He also **made** the **LAMPSTAND** of pure gold. He **made** the lampstand of hammered work. Its base, its stem, its cups, its buds, and its petals were of one piece with it. And there were six

branches going out of its sides, three branches of the lampstand out of one side of it and three branches of the lampstand out of the other side of it; three cups made like almond blossoms, each with bud and petals, on one branch, and three cups made like almond blossoms, each with bud and petals, on the other branch—so for the six branches going out of the lampstand. And on the lampstand itself were four cups made like almond blossoms, with their buds and petals, and a bud of one piece with it under each pair of the six branches going out of it. Their buds and their branches were of one piece with it. The whole of it was a single piece of hammered work of pure gold. And he **made** its seven lamps and its tongs and its trays of pure gold. He **made** it and all its utensils out of a talent of pure gold.