

God With Us | The Tabernacle and the Advent

Water to Wine, Bread to Flesh

Exodus 25.23-30, 30.18-21; John 2.1-11 and 6.47-52

12.6.15, Week TWO

(Exodus 25) *"You shall make a table of acacia wood, two cubits long and one cubit wide and one and a half cubits high. ²⁴ "You shall overlay it with pure gold and make a gold border around it. ²⁵ "You shall make for it a rim of a handbreadth around it; and you shall make a gold border for the rim around it. ²⁶ "You shall make four gold rings for it and put rings on the four corners which are on its four feet. ²⁷ "The rings shall be close to the rim as holders for the poles to carry the table. ²⁸ "You shall make the poles of acacia wood and overlay them with gold, so that with them the table may be carried. ²⁹ "You shall make its dishes and its pans and its jars and its bowls with which to pour drink offerings; you shall make them of pure gold. ³⁰ "You shall set the bread of the Presence on the table before Me at all times.*

(Exodus 30) *"You shall also make a laver of bronze, with its base of bronze, for washing; and you shall put it between the tent of meeting and the altar, and you shall put water in it. ¹⁹ "Aaron and his sons shall wash their hands and their feet from it; ²⁰ when they enter the tent of meeting, they shall wash with water, so that they will not die; or when they approach the altar to minister, by offering up in smoke a fire sacrifice to the LORD. ²¹ "So they shall wash their hands and their feet, so that they will not die; and it shall be a perpetual statute for them, for Aaron and his descendants throughout their generations."*

(John 2) *On the third day there was a wedding in Cana of Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there; ² and both Jesus and His disciples were invited to the wedding. ³ When the wine ran out, the mother of Jesus said to Him, "They have no wine." ⁴ And Jesus said to her, "Woman, what does that have to do with us? My hour has not yet come." ⁵ His mother said to the servants, "Whatever He says to you, do it." ⁶ Now there were six stone waterpots set there for the Jewish custom of purification, containing twenty or thirty gallons each. ⁷ Jesus said to them, "Fill the waterpots with water." So they filled them up to the brim. ⁸ And He said to them, "Draw some out now and take it to the headwaiter." So they took it to him. ⁹ When the headwaiter tasted the water which had become wine, and did not know where it came from (but the servants who had drawn the water knew), the headwaiter called the bridegroom, ¹⁰ and said to him, "Every man serves the good wine first, and when the people have drunk freely, then he serves the poorer wine; but you have kept the good wine until now." ¹¹ This beginning of His signs Jesus did in Cana of Galilee, and manifested His glory, and His disciples believed in Him.*

(John 6) *"Truly, truly, I say to you, he who believes has eternal life. ⁴⁸ "I am the bread of life. ⁴⁹ "Your fathers ate the manna in the wilderness, and they died. ⁵⁰ "This is the bread which comes down out of heaven, so that one may eat of it and not die. ⁵¹ "I am the living bread that came down out of heaven; if anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever; and the bread also which I will give for the life of the world is My flesh." ⁵² Then the Jews began to argue with one another, saying, "How can this man give us His flesh to eat?"*

Today, is the second Sunday in the Season of Advent...which IS a season of reflection and celebration and preparation for Advent or the Arrival of God in the flesh... The Bible teaches and Christians have always believed that the Baby born in Bethlehem is God in the flesh, God incarnate. SO Advent is meant to prepare us to receive Him..."Let every heart prepare Him room."

This year to HELP us see the Christmas-event with new and child-like eyes, we're looking at the Tabernacle in Exodus (1500 BC) and how that portable sanctuary where God would dwell among His people and MEET with them, how that structure points to the ultimate and final Dwelling of God, God with Us, when God was born a Baby and came WITH US in Jesus Christ.

St. John saw the connection and in his account of the life of Jesus Christ and John seems to USE the Exodus Tabernacle as a kind of framework for his description of who Jesus Christ IS and what Jesus Christ has done.

The Exodus Tabernacle sort of TOLD the story long before it actually happened and JOHN saw it.

Today we look at TWO pieces of furniture IN the Bridal Suite where the Israelites would meet with YHWH, their God and Husband. In God's house there would be a symbolic DINING ROOM and a symbolic WASH ROOM...and the question IS: what do these symbolic rooms SYMBOLIZE or represent?

So let's look at the Symbol/Encrypted Message and THEN the De-CODER that makes sense of the encrypted message and THIRD: what IS the message once it's decoded – i.e. how do we respond to the message once we see what it means?

The first piece of furniture we consider is the dining room table. It is, as we saw last week, it is meticulously described in a very detailed design to be carried out scrupulously. It includes dimensions and materials and utensils and instructions for carrying the table...because, the whole Tabernacle was a portable sanctuary for a nomadic people.

The materials are getting more valuable as we move from the outside of the Tent, to the inside ("Holy Place") and finally to the Most Holy Place where the presence of God is symbolized on the chest or box called the Ark of the Covenant...gradations of holiness.

In Leviticus CH. 24 you can read about the function of the Table... it was to always stocked with bread, 12 loaves ALWAYS ON THE TABLE...and sprinkled around the bread with Frankincense. The bread is the "lechem pannim" meaning "Bread of Presence."

It may mean "bread that is IN the presence of God" or the Bread that demonstrates or represents the presence of God. It can be eaten ONLY by the priests and has to be immediately replenished with fresh bread every Sabbath...huge emphasis on the ALWAYS...perpetual presence of the bread – NEVER is the Table to be empty...always stocked with Bread.

What IS the MAIN IDEA in this symbolic Table?

Well, I think, taken all together, the Table says that God is hospitable. He is always ready to feed His family, represented by the priests. TWELVE LOAVES for each of the Tribes...Nourishment is always there and that nourishment is SOMEHOW connected to God's very presence.

It's like *My Big Fat Greek Wedding* (great movie) where the son comes in....and mom says, "Sit! I feed you!"

He says: "No thanks Mom, I just ate!"

She says, "No problem, I give you something!" – lavish and ever-ready hospitality because breaking bread WITH someone is a necessary component in fellowship – "com-pan-ion" literally a "with bread" person, a person with whom I share bread.

And there's also a wash-room in God's house, a "laver" (from which we get our word lavatory). It's less elaborately described...and of materials less valuable AND there will be a larger one in the Temple (called the Molten Sea with thousands of gallons) THIS one was apparently large but we're not told HOW large... and again, it had to be portable.

What IS the big idea in this laver or wash-room?

Well, the idea that gets repeated most is: wash or die! The truth is: to move further IN to the meeting place, into the Holy Place and the HoliEST Place is extremely serious...it calls for purity and for clean hands. Psalm 24: "Who may ascend into the hill of the LORD? And who may stand in His holy place? He who has clean hands and a pure heart."(3-4).

It's a permanent and perpetual requirement: always return to cleanliness and moral innocence before coming into God's presence. HE IS HOSPITABLE but He is not casual...or flippant ...or trite. Every approach to Him must be accompanied by a new cleansing...of hands and feet... "so that the priest will not die".

The dining room and the wash room...it's pretty straight-forward...symbols of God's welcome and hospitable offer of nourishment and companionship with His people (He is always perpetually ready to welcome the priests to the table...on behalf of the people)...and He requires that the priests wash their hands and feet...take Him seriously...VERY seriously ... seriously IN THE EXTREME... "lest they DIE!"

But IN these rooms there are questions...problems... there are indicators that these rooms are really NOT suited for human occupancy.

For ONE thing...the priests have to provide the bread and it has to be re-supplied each week...it's NOT really God feeding us...IT'S definitely NOT US FEEDING HIM (like in the pagan temples where the deities are hungry – this God needs nothing and does not get hungry or sleepy (Ps

50.12; Isa 40.28ff). But, here human beings are providing the food/bread - it's obviously a symbol.

And human beings are washing themselves... outwardly and repeatedly...perpetually and ...symbolically. Because washing our hands really can't do anything for our souls? If we are liars or thieves or lusty or mean or greedy...washing our hands can't really fix that...it must be only a symbol.

AND it is...they both are...the whole Tabernacle is. It's like an encrypted message... pointing to something that can really give us true soul-nourishment and real cleansing of our character and our desires and motives and our GUILT.

So, when Jesus Christ comes...when He is first become a rabbi...an adult teacher...He is invited to a wedding. His mother alerts Him to a dilemma. The hosts have planned poorly and there's a wine-shortage. This is an IMMENSE social blunder taboo and very offensive...It would be like having a house full of guests for a party in July (here in South Florida) and then you just turn off the lights and the Air Conditioner – you're sending a clear message: "Go HOME the party is over!"

And worse! In that culture where everything is a symbol and an omen and where wine was synonymous with JOY (Ps 104.15) and AT THE START of this marriage they run out of this symbol...it can only mean that the marriage was doomed...to be joyless and to fail.

And this is a curse to this family and a shame they would never live down!

And Jesus Christ says to His mother, "Ma'am...if I respond to this need it will thrust Me into the public eye and I will begin to be taken away from you...are you sure that's what you want?" (He makes a similar address from the Cross...)

But...knowingly...His mother says to the waiters, "Do whatever He tells you to do" (It's ON!)

And He looks to the LAVERS...the water-pots there for ceremonial Jewish washings and says, "Fill them to the brim...their effectiveness is OVER...they were really just a symbol anyway...and NOW they are completed...filled to the brim... fulfilled."

Then He turned the water of symbolic cleansing into the WINE of fulfillment and JOY...lots of joy. A hundred and fifty gallons of joy...of wine...750 bottles and really good wine...maybe the best there ever was or will be. He is fulfilling the laver...turning the futility of our efforts to make and keep ourselves good and pure and clean...but we can only do it on the outside...and even that is temporary and short-lived... then we get dirty again...and NEVER TRULY get clean within... "Who may ascend into the hill of the LORD? And who may stand in His holy place? He who has clean hands and a pure heart (Psa 24.3-4)...BUT who is clean enough...are YOU...am I ?

And Jesus Christ is saying in this first of seven signs in the Gospel According to John – GOOD NEWS, MY HANDS ARE CLEAN ENOUGH...My heart and desires and motives and My hands (My actions) and feet (My comings and goings!) are all pure enough to come INTO the very presence of God...clothed in a human body...carrying humanity (not symbolically) but TRULY into the presence of the Holiness of God!

Receive this as JOY...the wine of the Kingdom has come...and it's NOT meager quantities – BATHTUBS of wine...and the best quality!

Then, in the wilderness where thousands of people are listening to Jesus Christ teach...He stands as the New and Better Moses...He multiplies bread...so that there are, in the end, 12 BASKETS leftover (like the twelve loaves of continuous bread in the Tabernacle) and then He says in similar fashion to the Water turned to Wine... "I AM the Bread of Presence...I am Bread that is infinite, that YOU don't have to replace by your own doing or baking...and the Bread that I give will not only sustain life...IT WILL MAKE YOU ALIVE AND IT WILL MAKE YOU LIVE FOREVER."

The Bread in the Tabernacle was symbolic...it was an encrypted message...but I am the decoder...the encryption key...NOW YOU SEE IT'S TRUE meaning and the substance to which it points... I AM THE BREAD THAT comes down, that is living bread, that conveys/imparts eternal life to the eater...

The old bread was a symbol...I am the substance...the True Food...the True Drink... and the Bread that I give...is My OWN FLESH."

In other words, BY MY BEING put to death, the virtue or benefits of the True Bread can be made available... BY MY DYING, you can partake and be nourished by the Presence of God... by My taking your place as an offender, you can enter the dining room, can sit at God's Table...can be nourished on the Very Presence of God... THAT IS WHAT YOU NEED and WHAT (know it or not – what YOU WANT!) and I am come to deliver it – I am the Bread of Presence... death will not be able to hold Me...and when I have conquered it by rising...I will conquer it for YOU...I will raise YOU UP ON THE LAST DAY!

When we see that Jesus Christ IS the interpretive key and the encryption code...then we can read the Exodus Tabernacle and hear its message accurately.

We can see what is meant by the "perpetual statute" mentioned in Exodus... what's perpetual is that we STILL can only come into the presence of God through washing...not simply washing our hands or changing our behavior or committing to do better and clean up our act...we must come deliberately depending on Jesus Christ – HE IS THE CLEANSER.

We can and we must come repenting – constantly recognizing that in my own doing and efforts

and reputation...I have NOT cleaned up enough! But because Jesus Christ IS My clean-ness I can be very open about my need...can be honest about the dirt in my life...and even ask YOU to help me see it.

And the other perpetual part of the Exodus message, as decoded by Jesus Christ is that HE IS THE NOURISHMENT set always at God's Table...waiting for me to PARTAKE... God is hospitable...His Wine and Bread are always available to those who will eat and drink...and we eat and drink...by repenting and believing.

In repentance, we face our dirt and mourning turns to JOY...water turns to wine and leads to actual change...LOVE, JOY and PEACE. Repentance is how we come to the Laver that washes within!

And in FAITH, we eat! Jesus Christ nourishes us and He becomes our reputation, our identity and our righteousness... He is the substance, the fulfillment of all the types and shadows of the Law and the Tabernacle...the shadows were pointers – HE IS THE REALITY AND THE SUBSTANCE.