

Revelation

Part Fifty-Five
The Tabernacle with Men
(*Revelation 21:3, 4*)

With Study Questions

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The Tabernacle with Men

(Revelation 21:3, 4)

And I heard a loud voice from heaven saying, “Behold, the tabernacle of God *is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people. God Himself will be with them and be their God.* ⁴ And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away” (Revelation 21:3, 4).

Introduction

On an almost daily basis, I find myself challenged with the beautiful, yet difficult task of seeking to bring some level of comfort to people in trials of some sort. Sometimes it is relatively simple and easy. There is comfort in just knowing someone else is aware of your difficulty, cares and prays. Other times it is not so easy. Sometimes the trials of people’s lives can be excruciating, and comforting words (and actions) are elusive.

You want others to know the wisdom, peace and power of Christ. You don’t want them to be led astray through pain, difficulty, sorrow, bitterness or the glitter and false promises of the world. Let us remember that this letter is written to churches, people who need strengthening and encouragement to stay the course. So often, the Revelation is approached as a spectacle or a fascination. It should not be read that way.

Review

The recipients of this letter needed reminding of their true home and true identity. Although we should love and care for the current heaven and earth, there is a new heaven and earth that is our true and eternal dwelling. And the heart of this new heaven and earth is a New Jerusalem. The old Jerusalem (the heart of religious truth and culture) had grown corrupt, obsolete and would soon vanish (Hebrews 8:13). The **“Jerusalem above is free, and she is our mother” (Galatians 4:26).**

We are not merely citizens of this New Jerusalem; we are the New Jerusalem. It is both a city and a bride. The bride of Christ is the church. We are the objects of Christ's love and redemption. Our entire life is a walk down the aisle, where He washes us with the word that we might be **"without spot or wrinkle...holy and without blemish"** (Ephesians 5:27).

And I heard a loud voice from heaven saying, "Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people. God Himself will be with them and be their God" (Revelation 21:3).

The Tabernacle with men.

The information we're about to receive is delivered with **"a loud voice from heaven."** Of course, all of Scripture is of value, but from time to time we'll hear Jesus say **"verily, verily"** in order to garner deeper focus in His listeners. John here records a *mega* (in the Greek) voice leading up to the emphatic interjection **"behold."**

What is it we're called to behold? **"The tabernacle of God is with men."** As we have said many times, it is difficult to grasp the Revelation without some working knowledge of the Old Testament. In Exodus 25 through 31 we see detailed instructions on the construction and functions of the tabernacle. It was a huge tent that the Israelites were commanded to assemble and disassemble in their travels. It was the heart of their worship, and it was always with them.

It contained the ark of the covenant which itself contained God's law (in the Ten Commandments), and God's grace (in the manna), and God's blessing (in Aaron's staff). There was a table for bread, a golden lampstand for light, an altar for sacrifice and oil for the lamp. There were detailed instructions on the priestly garments and duties. There was an altar for incense, a basin for washing and more.

But when it gets right down to it, it was just a highly furnished tent, A classroom really. A tutor so-to-speak (*paidagogos* in Greek). That Old Covenant, often called **"the law"** was designed to prepare us and bring us to Christ.

Therefore the law was our tutor to bring us to Christ, that we might be justified by faith. ²⁵ But after faith has come, we are no longer under a tutor (Galatians 3:24, 25).

Any thorough examination of the tabernacle will reveal, almost shockingly, the person and work of Christ. The same author, John, in his gospel records the **“I am”** statements of Jesus. **“I am the bread” (John 6:35)** bringing our minds to the manna. **“I am the light” (John 8:12)** directing us to the lampstand. **“I am the door”** presumable into the holy of holies (**John 10:7**), etc. All of these found in the tabernacle.

When John writes of the tabernacle, in one sense, he brings our minds to that Old Covenant Tabernacle. But the Old Covenant Tabernacle teaches us of Christ. And there is something else John recorded that is remarkably similar to what we’re reading here. And here, perhaps Young’s Literal Translation may capture it best.

And the Word became flesh, and did tabernacle among us, and we beheld his glory, glory as of an only begotten of a father, full of grace and truth (John 1:14).

The **“word”** in this verse is referring to Jesus (He became flesh). But notice what He did. He **“did tabernacle among us.”** Literally, He tented *eskenosen* among us. It’s the same verb used in Revelation 21:3.¹ The point I wish to make is that John here is recording something very similar to something he already wrote.

In the incarnation (when the Son of God became flesh) the tabernacle joined humanity. He is God **“with us” (Matthew 1:23)**. And if we can add to that, He also promised at the conclusion of His earthly ministry, that He would be with **“always, even to the end of the age” (Matthew 28:20)**.

Even though these final chapters of Revelation present the full consummation of glory, in a very real sense, this tabernacling has already begun. This principle is often referred to as already/not yet, but that, though perhaps helpful, falls a bit short. Plus, there tends to be some confusion on what is already and what is not yet.

As I have done many times, perhaps it is best to understand this very glorious consummation-this macro redemption-similarly to the way we understand our own personal redemption (Romans 8:19-23). What we find is that there is a great deal under the *already*.

We are already redeemed (Ephesians 1:7). We already have life (Ephesians 2:5). We already belong to Christ (Ephesians 2:13-15). We are

¹ There is a noun form, *skene*, and a verb form *skenosei*. But it is the same root.

already seated with Him (Ephesians 2:6). Every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places is already ours (Ephesians 1:3). When God sees us (assuming faith in Christ) He already sees us as justified. He sees us and beholds the righteousness of Christ (Romans 5:1).

The Apostle Paul obsessed on this heavenly identity-his already-ness, if you will. So much so, that when he compared it to his earthly accomplishments, possessions and religious pedigree, he considered the latter to be **“rubbish” (Philippians 3:8)**. Even his own righteousness (which in earthly measurements would have been significant) was no aid to his peace. It was another righteousness (a far superior righteousness) that saw him through all of his trials with what Peter called a joy inexpressible (1 Peter 1:8).

Paul sums this up when he wrote of gaining Christ, and being found in Him...

...not having my own righteousness, which is from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith (Philippians 3:9).

Of course, in his earthly dwelling (for Paul, after all, was just a man), he knew that he had not attained the fulness of that peace. It was a battle. But to a degree, he had **“already attained”** it (Philippians 3:16) and therefore sought a certain mindset.

In Paul’s sharing of this quest, he speaks of his true citizenship; a citizenship which, no doubt, consumed his thoughts as he daily faced difficulty and death. It was a source of his peace and strength in this shaky and sinful world.

For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, ²¹ who will transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body, according to the working by which He is able even to subdue all things to Himself (Philippians 3:20, 21).

He Will Be Our God

That God will be our God is a recurring, and powerful, theme in the Scripture.

My dwelling place shall be with them, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. ²⁸ Then the nations will know that I am the Lord who sanctifies Israel, when my sanctuary is in their midst forevermore (Ezekiel 37:27, 28-see also Leviticus 26:11, 12; 2 Corinthians 6:16).

It is a statement which assumes that which is yet to be the case (especially the future tense in 2 Corinthians 6:16 passage). That is to say that we're not born into a right relationship with God. We must be given life and it is true life indeed. Matthew Henry beautifully expresses the full consummation of that life-the gloriously inevitable future for those in Christ.

The presence of God with his people in heaven will not be interrupted as it is on earth, but he will dwell with them continually...The covenant, interest, and relation, that there are now between God and his people, will be filled up and perfected in heaven. *They shall be his people; their souls shall be assimilated to him, filled with all the love, honour, and delight in God which their relation to him requires, and this will constitute their perfect holiness; and he will be their God: God himself will be their God; his immediate presence with them, his love fully manifested to them, and his glory put upon them, will be their perfect happiness.*²

Yet it is the nature of our lives to be interrupted from that fellowship and joy. This is due to our sinful selves living in a sinful world. It is also due to our neglect of the means of grace-those things God has provided to keep our thoughts and hearts grounded, solid and joyful in our true citizenship. These means of grace are ordinary, yet powerfully fruitful. At their heart, they include prayer, the word (reading it and hearing it) the sacraments (Lord's Supper and baptism), and more.

All of these things should be the staples of corporate worship, the neglect of which results in the weakening to our souls. Churches have a responsibility to ever provide this, and Christians have a responsibility to take advantage.

² Henry, M. (1994). [*Matthew Henry's commentary on the whole Bible: complete and unabridged in one volume*](#) (p. 2484). Peabody: Hendrickson.

I was in a recent conversation with a friend. We have a mutual friend who, though a professing Christian, simply did not want to attend any church. He had gone through some devastating experiences and was very wounded. Yet, sadly, he was not availing himself of that which God has provided for him to know, as Paul wrote, to a certain and greater degree, the true peace of God being his God. There is a peace and intimacy which is escaping him. And God seems all about this peace and intimacy.

And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away” (Revelation 21:4).

No More Death

There is a story of a blind man being brought to Jesus in Bethsaida. Not to go far into that entire story, but records that Jesus led that blind man to his healing when **“He took the blind man by the hand and led him out of town” (Mark 8:23)**. Why would Mark record that Jesus led him by the hand? Mark wanted his readers to feel this warmth and intimacy.

The language of verse four is designed to poetically convey affection and tenderness. If there is no crying, why would He have to wipe tears from our eyes? It’s because there are few things more intimate than wiping tears away from somebody’s face. Some of the warmest moments I ever had with my own children was comforting them in their pain.

These are remarkable promises. The final enemy, death, is itself dead. **“He will swallow up death forever” (Isaiah 25:8)**. Other words could be (and often are) used to describe the destruction of death. But here the word **“swallow”** is used, as when the great fish swallowed Jonah.

One of our former elders (David Kennard), who is now in glory, would speak of a father driving his family in a car. As they drove, the noticed a bee flying in the car and they began to panic. The father grabbed the bee and took the sting, the released the bee. The family continued to panic until the father showed that he took the sting (of which the bee only has one).

It is not as if Jesus merely removed the poison of death, hiding it, as it were, on the back of the shelf. He took the poison (the sting) of death on our behalf, that we might ever, eternally feast at His table.

Questions for Study

1. Why do you suppose the Revelation was written? How do these words affect you (page 2)?
2. What does it mean to have an identity? What is yours (pages 2, 3)?
3. How is our life like a bride walking down the aisle (pages 2, 3)?
4. What was the primary purpose of the tabernacle in the Old Testament? Give reasons why you think this (pages 3, 4)?
5. Where else did John write of the tabernacle among us? What do we learn from this? What is not yet? What is already and what difference does this make (pages 4, 5)?
6. Are people born into a right relationship with God? Explain (pages 5, 6).
7. Has God provided the means by which we can know His love, peace and strength to a higher degree? What are these means (page 6)?
8. Discuss the intimacy conveyed in Revelation 21:4. Why do you suppose Isaiah records death being swallowed up? How do you know that is true for you (page 7)?