

**Acts 7: 44-46; “The Tabernacle of Witness”, Sermon # 33 in the series –  
“Laying the Foundations”, Delivered by Pastor Paul Rendall on  
September 27<sup>th</sup>, 2015, in the Morning Worship Service.**

Stephen’s defense to the leaders of the nation of Israel represents one of the mightiest sermons which is recorded in the Bible. What Stephen was trying to say to these wicked men, who had put the Lord Jesus to death, was that God had always been faithful to their fathers, but that in many ways, many among Israel had not been faithful to God; including them. He was trying to relate to them this great truth; that the great purpose for God’s bringing the children of Israel out of Egypt was that He might have a people who would worship and serve Him. But none of the people whom Stephen was preaching to was worshipping God aright; because they had not come to realize that salvation could only be obtained through believing in the Lord Jesus Christ. And He was the One whom they had crucified. He was telling them, in so many words, that salvation was not to be obtained by their ceremonial works, but by faith in the word concerning Christ. Stephen was telling them that their fathers had the tabernacle of witness in the wilderness, and since some of them had learned to worship God according to His will, by abiding in it, then truly God had been with them. They were able to drive out all the inhabitants of the land, in the time from Joshua to David, and they take possession of it. Stephen was implying that there was a gospel to be believed in more deeply thinking about the tabernacle. And he was implying that these were truths which these men should have understood.

So, this morning I would like to show you the symbolic and typical meaning (the representative meaning) of the Old Testament tabernacle of witness, for it is a witness to Christ and His gospel. 1<sup>st</sup> of all – I will give you a description of the tabernacle itself; its spiritual and symbolic meaning. Then 2<sup>nd</sup> – I will give you a description of the altar in this tabernacle, and why we should take notice of it. And 3<sup>rd</sup> – I will conclude by attempting to show you the tabernacle’s relevance to the Church of Jesus Christ today. May each of us be strengthened by the truths that we will hear this morning, to a sincere worship of, and obedience to our God, through the grace of Christ revealed in these verses.

**1<sup>st</sup> of all – Let me give you a description of the tabernacle itself, and its spiritual and symbolic meaning.**

Verse 44 says: “Our fathers had the tabernacle of witness in the wilderness, as He appointed, instructing Moses to make it according to the pattern that he had seen...” Here Stephen is telling us that Moses made the tabernacle according to the pattern which He received from the Angel in Bush, who was what theologians call, a Theophany. These appearances of the Angel, first in the bush, and then again on Mt. Sinai, were visitations of the Pre-incarnate 2<sup>nd</sup> Person of the Divine Trinity, our Lord Jesus Christ. Stephen reminds his listeners of the ancient worship of Israel at the tabernacle; that which they thought that they understood. But did they really understand it? What was the tabernacle in the wilderness? The tabernacle was a large portable tent, made to exact specifications, and it was made out of very particular materials. It was made this way so that much truth would be set forth to them in shadowy form, as to what God would bring to them spiritually, if they had faith in the Christ who was coming. Our Lord Jesus Christ would be the grand fulfillment of what the Old Testament worshiper was beholding and participating in, in their worship.

The Rev. John Newton Brown in his Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge says that this tabernacle was: A “magnificent divine pavilion, the emblem of heaven itself (Hebrews 9: 24) which Moses built for God by His express command, partly to be the place of his visible residence as King of Israel (Exodus 40: 34 and 35), and partly to be the center and medium of that solemn worship which the people were to render to Him.” (Exodus 40: 26-29) He says:

“The tabernacle made a splendid appearance.” “It was of an oblong rectangular form, thirty cubits long, ten in height; (Exodus 26: 18, and 36: 23 and 24), which was 55 feet long, 18 ft. wide and 18 ft. high.” “It was called a tent, a habitation, a sanctuary, a house, the dwelling place of Jehovah’s glory, Jehovah’s tent, and the tent of the congregation, and sometimes the palace, although these names are not always preserved distinctly in our English version.” James Gardiner in his encyclopedia says: “The outer enclosure was the court of the tabernacle, about one hundred and fifty feet long and seventy-five feet wide.” “The tabernacle itself was divided into two unequal parts; the first occupied about two-thirds of the length, or nearly thirty-five feet.” “This was called the Holy Place, or the First Tabernacle.” Hebrews 9: 2 “The inner apartment was only half the length; it was separated from the outer by a wrought curtain or veil, and was called the Most Holy Place.” “The height of each of these was 18 ft.” (end of quote)

What did all of these things signify? Why was a tabernacle needed? Well, the tabernacle was a part of God’s plan for the Jewish people that they could come and worship Him, offer sacrifices to Him, and learn His will by meeting together there. We should understand that this is where the true worship of God begins and continues; in learning His will in all the specifics. Certainly it begins by a person’s beholding the glory of God; that is, their beholding the excellency of His Being; that it is He who is the One who is worthy of all of worship, worthy of our giving our hearts and lives to serve Him. He is the most excellent of Beings; most holy, and awesome. And He has created us for His good pleasure. And it is learning that we are sinners and that His will is that we should repent and believe in the gospel of Christ. God created Adam, and He created you, for His good pleasure. However, sin entered the world through the first man Adam when he disobeyed the commandment that God gave him; not to eat of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. He was thereby became guilty of sin, and deserving of punishment. And what was just as bad, sin entered his heart, and defiled every part of his being. And, since Adam was the first man which God created, he was seen by God as being the federal head of our whole race. When he fell, we fell. All of Adam’s descendants, every one of us here, is born into the world with Adam’s nature and from their birth has the guilt of his sin imputed to them.

Each person confirms Adam’s sin by many sins of their own. We break His commandments in many subtle ways, and sometimes in greater ways. We should understand that God is under no obligation to save any person since the Fall of Adam. And yet He has had a plan from all eternity to save some, and you should know that He is very merciful. He has always saved some in every generation. He placed His special love upon people of His choosing. Abraham was one of those people. He was the first Hebrew. From Abraham came the whole Jewish nation and other nations as well. But the promises of salvation and God’s revealing Himself and His will in the Scriptures came for the most part, to the Jews alone. And those few Gentiles in those times who became worshipers of God, came to be the people of God in relation to revelation of God in the Scriptures which had been given to the Jews. All the revelation of God given to men in Old Testament times was pointing forward toward to what God would do, in order that He could have a people who would worship Him and honor Him in the way that He deserved. God would have an inheritance in His people, and He would have them to worship Him. But all this could only come to be realized by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ whom God would send.

So God knew what it would take, in that day, to bring people to the place where they would truly worship Him. And He knows what it takes in our own day. It would require something which no sinful person was able to perform. It would take a sacrifice for sins which would satisfy His justice and atone (would pay the price necessary to take away those sins and to cover us with a robe of righteousness. God Himself would have to provide this sacrifice so that a righteous covering could be provided for every person that He would save. This sacrifice would have to be provided by Himself, and it would be found in the Person of His dear Son, our Lord Jesus Christ. So, according to God’s plan, this great salvation would be preached beforehand, in

Old Testament times, in pictorial form in the construction and use of the tabernacle of witness. The tabernacle of witness was a witness to the great salvation which God would accomplish in and through His Son, our Lord Jesus Christ. It would be a tent that God would pitch, not man. Let me open this up for you a little more by having you consider this verse from John 1: 14. It says there: "And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth." This word that was made flesh is the 2<sup>nd</sup> Person of the Trinity, who was with the Father in the beginning; the One through whom all things were made. The Son was begotten of the Father in eternity past, before the world was made. He was brought forth in the great purpose of the Father agreeing to become what He had never been, a Man. He would take upon Himself flesh; a true sinless human nature, and He would come to dwell, or "tabernacle" among us.

The word in the Greek is σκενω (skay-no-o) which means "to tent" or "to encamp"; that is, figuratively it means "to occupy" (as a mansion) or (specifically) to reside (as God did in the Tabernacle of old, a symbol of protection and communion); - to dwell with men." The spiritual and symbolic meaning of the children of Israel's putting up the tabernacle in the wilderness was their faith in God's providing for them a way of salvation in and through the Lord Jesus Christ. Even though they did not know His name, in the building and setting up of this tabernacle they were declaring His Person and His work. The tabernacle represented the human nature of Christ. Outwardly, the tabernacle was covered with all different kinds of skins of animals. The color was a red dye or dark hue. Even so, Christ did not have any beauty that we should desire Him. There was no form or comeliness in His physical Person, but within His heart He spoke: "I have come to do your will, O God."

And so, we must understand that inwardly, there in His Person, there was this beauty of sinlessly, and this beauty of righteousness and holiness. There was this glory; glory of the only-begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth. It was there at the tabernacle that the children of Israel worshipped God in those times. How does this apply to our worship today? It shows us that in order for our worship of God to pleasing to Him, we must first see what God has done for us in sending His Son. We are undeserving, unworthy sinners in ourselves, but God has given us a perfect Man to be our Savior; One who came and tabernacled among us. The Lord Jesus lived the life that each of us should have lived to God, and have not. He is God's Man to take our place in both obedience and sacrifice. Therefore we should worship God in and through the finished work of obedience and sufferings which He accomplished on our behalf. Have you come here today to behold the glory of Christ and to believe in Him? For that is a great part of true worship.

**Now 2<sup>nd</sup> – I want to give you a description of the altar in this tabernacle, and why we should take notice of it.**

Turn with me over to Exodus Chapter 29, verse 35. "Thus you shall do to Aaron and his sons, according to all that I have commanded you. Seven days you shall consecrate them." "And you shall offer a bull every day as a sin offering for atonement." "You shall cleanse the altar when you make atonement for it, and you shall anoint it to sanctify it." "Seven days you shall make atonement for the altar and sanctify it." "And the altar shall be most holy." "Whatever touches the altar must be holy." "Now this is what you shall offer on the altar: two lambs of the first year, day by day continually." "One lamb you shall offer in the morning, and the other lamb you shall offer at twilight." "With the one lamb shall be one-tenth of an ephah of flour mixed with one-fourth of a hin of pressed oil, and one-fourth of a hin of wine as a drink offering." "And the other lamb you shall offer at twilight; and you shall offer with it the grain offering and the drink offering, as in the morning, for a sweet aroma, an offering made by fire to the Lord." "This shall be a continual burnt offering throughout your generations at the door of the tabernacle of meeting before the Lord, where I will meet you to speak with you."

Here you see the worship of the children of Israel was initiated by the priests; Aaron and his sons. But we find that they themselves were not sinless. They too needed to be consecrated to this work. They were to offer every day a bullock for a sin offering, every day of their consecration. Every day for seven days they were to do this. Seven is the number of completion in the Scriptures. It means that these priests needed to have a full and complete atonement, or satisfaction for their sins if they were to minister in a way glorifying to God. Let us remember that in order to have true and saving faith in Jesus Christ; you must enter by faith in to His finished work of obedience and sufferings. But it also should be remembered that in order to worship and serve God aright you must grow in your understanding of the intercessory work of Christ as well. His intercessory work is His cleansing us daily from our sins, His praying for us that our faith will not only not fail, but that it would be strengthened. And, it is His being our Advocate with the Father to defend us and help us against all the accusations of our own conscience, and also the accusations of Satan, on the basis of His having lived and died for us, and the fact that He is now raised from the dead. When we think about cleansing, we find that it is pictured very well for us in the daily ministrations of the Tabernacle. Even the altar itself needed to be cleansed and needed to have atonement made for it. Certainly an altar is not capable of sin. It does not have any guilt of its own, and yet to have sin offerings laid upon it, it needed to be cleansed in a ceremonial way. It needed to be purged from the uncleanness of the sins of Israel. (John Gill)

This altar was representative of Christ. Even though the Lord Jesus had no guilt of His own to be cleansed of, yet he had the guilt of all of God's elect people transferred to Him. He had their uncleanness place upon Him. And so when he offered Himself up to the death of the cross, He purged away all of our sins; our sins which had been imputed and charged to His account; we who believe in Him. He was punished in our stead. But Christ, in His obedience to the Father, was anointed with the Holy Spirit, even with the oil of gladness. He even had great joy in the prospect of what His sufferings would accomplish on our behalf. He knew that He would purchase a people for God's own possession. Christ was an altar most holy, verse 37, and whoever touches the altar, it says in the NAS translation, "shall be holy". In the New King James translation it says: "And the altar shall be most holy." "Whatever touches the altar must be holy." This relates to the believer's service to God, our needing the daily cleansing and intercession of Christ.

In verse 38 we see that two lambs were to be offered upon the altar continually, day by day; two lambs of the first year. These lambs are typical (representative of) Christ who was the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of His people. He was a lamb without spot. He was perfectly pure and holy in His person and all that He said and did. He then went to the cross in the morning, on the day that He was crucified, and He was there until the evening when His body was taken down, and buried. Even so, the efficacy, that is the power of His death and His continual intercession on behalf of His people at the right hand of the Father, is applied to them each moment of each and every day. His blood and righteousness plead for you, dear Christian. Since you as a New Testament believer are called to be one of a kingdom of priests, it says in Revelation 1, verse 6, you are to offer up spiritual sacrifices unto God each and every day. The sacrifices of praise and thanksgiving, the sacrifice of giving yourself daily in service to the Most High God, through Jesus Christ your Lord, ought to be the preoccupation of your heart each day. And each day you should be confessing your sins, and praying that you would make progress in holiness. Each night you should thank the Lord for the atoning blood and the righteousness of Christ which now clothes you.

Verses 40-42 speak of the offerings, by children of Israel, of their continual burnt offering throughout their generations, at the door of the tabernacle of meeting. These were written for our instruction, to show us who live in New Testament times, that we should often remember

that Jesus Christ died and He rose from the dead in order that our worship of God in our church, our families, and our individual lives, would be established, not only with favor in God's sight, but that when we worship, it would bring to us great joy at receiving His word, and praising His name, and serving Him each and every day. With the offering of the lamb, it says in verse 40, would be "one-tenth of an ephah of flour mixed with one fourth of hin of pressed oil, and one fourth of a hin of wine as a drink offering." I believe, that these very specific measures of flour, oil, and wine, are representative of what we as believers should remember day by day in our worship and service to God. We remember the offering of the Lamb of God; His death on the cross and His resurrection from the dead. In our worship and service we add to this a portion from the word of God, represented by the flour, the ground bread of life. We remember to pray and ask that a certain measure of the Holy Spirit's power, equal to the service that we would bring to God, would attend all of our labors for Christ. This is what is represented by the oil. And we also remember that the joy of the Lord is our strength. This is what is represented by the wine of the drink offering. Wine cheers the heart of man, but it is Christ's grace which cheers the heart of the Christian each and every day. The apostle Paul said in Philippians 2: 14 – "Do all things without complaining or disputing, that you may become blameless and harmless, children of God without fault in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world, holding fast the word of life, so that I may rejoice in the day of Christ that I have not run in vain or labored in vain." "Yes, and if I am being poured out as a drink offering on the sacrifice and service of your faith, I am glad and rejoice with you all." "For the same reason you also be glad and rejoice with me."

**And finally - I will conclude by attempting to show you the tabernacle's relevance to the Church of Jesus Christ today.**

In closing, look with me at verses 42-46 of Exodus 29. "This shall be a continual burnt offering throughout your generations at the door of the tabernacle of meeting before the Lord, where I will meet you to speak with you." "And there I will meet with the children of Israel, and the tabernacle shall be sanctified by My glory." "So I will consecrate the tabernacle of meeting and the altar." "I will also consecrate both Aaron and his sons to minister to Me as priests." "I will dwell among the children of Israel and will be their God." "And they shall know that I am the Lord their God, who brought them out of the land of Egypt, that I may dwell among them." "I am the Lord their God." We have seen that a tabernacle is a place where God would meet with the children of Israel, and where they would worship God at that place. God would meet with them to speak to them there. Aaron and his sons were consecrated to be priests there at the tabernacle. And there was an altar at the door of the tabernacle of meeting where sacrifices were to be offered for the sins of both the priests and the people. There was an outer court where the people could come and the priests would daily minister sacrifices. There was a smaller tabernacle, the holy of holies, which no one but the high priest entered once a year into, and it was behind a veil.

The relevance of the tabernacle for the Church of Jesus Christ is this. It is first of all that we should remember that Christ Himself is the fulfillment of the Old Testament tabernacle. In Him is all the fullness of the glory of God. It is through His bloody sacrifice on the cross that all of our sins have been forgiven and we have been brought near to God. Christ came as High Priest of the good things to come; He came with the greater and more perfect tabernacle not made with hands, that is not of this creation. He was raised up by God to be this greater tabernacle by taking on a human nature in His incarnation and by being born of the Virgin Mary. His nature was perfect, pure, and holy. In His life He was holy, harmless, and blameless. It was not with the blood of goats and calves, but with the sacrifice of His own blood that "He obtained eternal redemption and entered the Most Holy Place of heaven to appear on our behalf." In His satisfying the justice of God, "He has obtained a more excellent ministry than Moses and Aaron,

inasmuch as He is also Mediator of a better covenant, which is established on better promises.” It was through Christ’s making this New Covenant in His blood that each one of us who has believed in Jesus can now have the boldness to enter the Holiest place, by a new and living way which He consecrated for us through the veil of His flesh. (Hebrews 10: 20) There is now a High Priest over the house of God, and we can draw near to Him with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water.” We can now worship in God in spirit and truth, and rejoice in the hope of the glory of God. God dwells in us and walks among us, and we are people separated unto God because of Christ. Therefore our worship is sweet, and our chief delight can be found in God and Christ.

Another point of relevance for us here today is that we have a High Priest of the Order of Melchizedek, whose priesthood endures forever. He does not need daily, as those high priests, of offer up sacrifices, first for His own sins and then for the people’s, for this He did once for all when He offered up Himself.” And because God the Father was satisfied this sacrifice, He raised Jesus from the dead; crowned Him with glory and honor and has placed all things under His feet. Even though we do not see all things actually subjected to our Christ yet, we should understand that we will. It is because we know that we have a High Priest who is seated at the right hand of the throne of the majesty in the heavens, a Minister of the sanctuary (that is in heaven itself) and of the true tabernacle which the Lord erected, and not man”; this is the reason that we know that all of our prayers which are in accordance with His will, shall be answered.

A 3<sup>rd</sup> point of relevance is how the tabernacle pertains to our being sanctified. It says in verse 43 of Exodus 29, “And there I will meet with the children of Israel and the tabernacle will be sanctified by My glory.” If the tabernacle represents the human nature of our Lord Jesus Christ, in the sense of our redemption, it also represents Him in terms of the building of His Church. For the Church is the body of Christ. The Church is the temple of the Living God. The Church is the place where His glory dwells. And for us as individuals, when we gather together as a church it is here that He meets with us, and we are sanctified by Christ’s glory. In the tabernacle of old when Moses finished all the work of making it, it says in Exodus 40, verse 34 – “Then the cloud covered the tabernacle of meeting, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle.” “And Moses was not able to enter the tabernacle of meeting, because the cloud rested above it, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle.”

Let us think of how this should apply to ourselves. When we minister to the Lord here in this church, in a way that is pleasing to Him, trusting in Christ alone for our salvation, and thankful that He ever lives to make intercession for us, then we will come to behold the glory of the Lord filling our hearts; causing us to realize what a great God we really have. “God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble.” Stephen could think this to himself as he preached this sermon. “Therefore we will not fear even though the earth be removed, and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea; though its waters roar and be troubled, though the mountains shake with its swelling.” Things would change greatly as a result of Stephen’s preaching this powerful sermon. These men, the leaders of the nation of Israel, were rejecting the Christ whom he was preaching. But Stephen could still know in his heart the reality of the words of Psalm 46: 4 – “There is a river whose streams shall make glad the city of God, the holy place of the tabernacle of the Most High.” “God is in the midst of her, she shall not be moved; God shall help her, just at the break of dawn.” “The nations raged, the kingdom were moved; He uttered His voice, the earth melted.” “The Lord of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge.”

