

GOD DWELLS WITH HIS PEOPLE

Series pt 20: Exodus 40
Stonebrook Sunday AM, 12/17/23, Matt Heerema

This morning we finally come to the end of our 20 week walk through of the book of Exodus. The theme couldn't be more fitting for this time of year, the season of advent. Advent is from a latin word that means "arrival" - and as we said at the beginning of the service, it is a time where we remember and reflect on what it must have been like to be God's people prior to Jesus. A time of waiting in need for the arrival of the Messiah to rescue his people.

Exodus is a rescue story. And in today's passage, chapter 40, God arrives, to finally dwell in the camp with the people, no longer far off on the mountain. Today's passage deals with this special tent, called a "tabernacle" - tabernacle is just a word that means "dwelling place.." By the way, as you read the whole bible you can just replace the word "tabernacle" with "dwelling place" every time you see it, and you could also replace the word "dwell" with "tabernacle" anywhere you see it in the Bible, and you will start to see some really cool connections.

A REVIEW

I think it would be helpful for us here at the end of the series to review what we've seen so far, so I'm going to attempt a brief summary of the whole book

The book of Exodus highlights a series of events that occur over a one-year period in the life of Israel. The book takes place in to major sections: chapters 1-18 describe God's rescue of Israel from slavery in Egypt. This takes the first three months. Chapters 19-40 describe the next 9 months of Israel's encounter with God at Mt. Sinai.

The Rescue (chapters 1-18)

Chapters 1-5 set up the backstory to the book, describing how Israel Israel went from 70 people in Egypt, to millions, and were enslaved by Pharaoh, the biggest bad guy in the whole Old Testament. It then introduces Moses, and rushes through 80 years of his life, until the moment God calls him to be his chosen rescuer. In this introduction, we hear some of the most comforting words of promise from God in the entirety of the Bible.

Exodus 3:7-8 (CSB) - Then the Lord said, "**I have seen** the misery of my people in Egypt, **and have heard** them crying out because of their oppressors. **I know** about their sufferings, 8 and **I have come** down to rescue them..."

In chapters 6-15, we find Moses and his brother Aaron confronting Pharaoh with God's message. God sends the 10 plagues on Egypt and eventually Pharaoh lets Israel go. But at the last minute he changes his mind, chases Israel and God miraculously rescues the helpless Israelites from the most powerful military force on the planet at the time, by parting the Red Sea, letting the Israelites walk through, and then causing it to crash down on the Egyptian army and Pharaoh.

One thing we see about Israel through this whole book is a waffling back and forth between faith and doubt, praise and grumbling, hope and despair. We see that in this section. On the one hand they doubt Moses...

Exodus 6:8-9 (CSB) - I will bring you to the land that I swore to give to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and I will give it to you as a possession. I am the Lord." 9 Moses told this to the Israelites, but they did not listen to him because of their broken spirit and hard labor.

...and on the other hand, after the rescue, they response for a moment in praise!

Exodus 15:11 (CSB) - Lord, who is like you among the gods? Who is like you, glorious in holiness, revered with praises, performing wonders?

In chapters 16-18, God leads Israel, by a pillar of cloud and fire, through the wilderness to a meeting spot He has picked out for them at Mt. Sinai. Along the way, God miraculously provides food and water in the desert, in spite of the people's groaning and complaining.

Israel at Mt. Sinai (19-40)

Chapters 19-24 - Having arrived at Mt. Sinai, God's presence in the pillar of cloud and fire settles on the mountain top, where he communicates his laws and requirements to Israel through Moses. Israel happily agrees to worship and serve their God.

Chapters 25-31 - God calls Moses and Joshua to come up to the mountain so God can explain his plan for dwelling among the people of Israel. Over the course of 40 days, God gives Moses instructions on how to build the tabernacle, and set up the priestly system.

Chapter 32 - everything takes a tragic turn for the worse, and the people end up betraying their God, breaking multiple commands by creating an idol to worship...

God punishes rebellious Israel through a plague and threatens to wipe them out entirely, but...

Chapter 33 and 34, we find Moses interceding on behalf of the people, asking God to have mercy on them, forgive them, and keep the covenant intact, which God does.

Chapters 35-39 - we find a repetition of 25-31, the people carrying out the work of building the items for the tabernacle and priesthood.

An amazing story of God's work to rescue his people from slavery and oppression, and miraculously providing for them again and again in spite of their sin and faithlessness. And we see the complexity of humanity, tottering back and forth between faith and trust. The narrative at the moment does end on a high note of trust and obedience and gratitude for mercy.

THE WORK THAT HAD TO BE DONE

And that brings us to our passage today. We get to see Moses preparing God's dwelling place, His tabernacle, according to the instructions God showed him on the mountain. And Moses had work to do, before God would be able to dwell among this contradictory, sinful people, special and specific work needed to be done. 32 steps by my count.

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| 1. Laid the bases | 18. Put up the screen at the entrance |
| 2. Positioned its supports | 19. Placed the burnt offering altar |
| 3. Inserted the crossbars | 20. Offered the burnt offering |
| 4. Set up the pillars | 21. Offered the grain offering |
| 5. Spread the tent | 22. Placed the basin |
| 6. Covered the tent | 23. Put water in the basin |
| 7. Placed the testimony in the ark | 24. Moses, Aaron, and sons washed hands and feet |
| 8. Attached the poles to the ark | 25. Set up the courtyard for the tabernacle and altar |
| 9. Set the mercy seat on the ark | 26. Hung a screen for a gate. |
| 10. Placed ark in tabernacle | 27. Anoint everything with oil. |
| 11. Put up the curtain for a screen | 28. Wash Aaron and sons with water |
| 12. Placed the table in the tent (north side) | 29. Clothe Aaron with holy garments |
| 13. Arranged the bread | 30. Anoint Aaron with oil |
| 14. Placed the lampstand (south side) | 31. Sons clothed with tunics |
| 15. Set up the lamps | 32. Anoint Aaron's sons with oil |
| 16. Installed the gold altar | |
| 17. Burned the incense | |

And Moses did all these things just as commanded.

Exodus 40:33 (CSB)

“...So Moses finished the work.”

And so God could now, finally, come near to dwell among them.

Exodus 40:34-38 (CSB)

34 The cloud covered the tent of meeting, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle. 35 Moses was unable to enter the tent of meeting because the cloud rested on it, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle. 36 The Israelites set out whenever the cloud was taken up from the tabernacle throughout all the stages of their journey. 37 If the cloud was not taken up, they did not set out until the day it was taken up. 38 For the cloud of the Lord was over the tabernacle by day, and there was a fire inside the cloud by night, visible to the entire house of Israel throughout all the stages of their journey.

No longer was he “up there” on the mountain, he set up his dwelling, his tabernacle, right in the middle of the camp. God was now with them, in his tabernacle, surrounded by the curtain and inside a fenced off area. Simultaneously near, and separated, with only one way in, through the courtyard where sacrifices for sin could be made.

That’s an amazing detail in verse 35. Not even Moses could go in to the tabernacle while the glory of the Lord filled it. The way in to the tabernacle, the way to be near to God, is the subject of Leviticus, outlining the sacrificial system, and right worship of God for Israel.

And look at the last three verses of Exodus. Yes God is holy, and you can’t draw near because His glory is too great, but look how close he is in the middle of the camp, and look how clearly he leads them on their journey through the wilderness.

BUT WE ARE WE SUPPOSED TO DO WITH THIS?

Are we given this narrative and these instructions so that we can attempt to follow the law and set up a tabernacle and sacrificial system? No. We are to marvel at God’s holiness, and recognize our sinfulness and need for a sacrifice. Our need for a rescue.

And this is all meant to point us to Jesus.

Exodus 40 says that “Moses finished the work” and immediately God came to dwell in the camp with Israel. That should sound familiar.

Because Jesus declared His work finished on the cross, God is able to dwell, to tabernacle, with all those who trust Christ, through the Holy Spirit. Speaking of Jesus, John tells us at the beginning of his gospel, and it is

John 1:9-13 (CSB)

9 The true light that gives light to everyone was coming into the world. 10 He was in the world, and the world was created through him, and yet the world did not recognize him. 11 He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him. 12 But to all who did receive him, he gave them the right to be children of God, to those who believe in his name, 13 who were born, not of natural descent, or of the will of the flesh, or of the will of man, but of God.

Exodus is meant to make us marvel at the Glory and mercy of a God who sets His heart in love on His people so much, that in spite of their betrayal, grumbling, complaining, and doubt, he launches a rescue plan, one that ends with them worshipping Him, and dwelling in their midst.

God did this for *Israel* through His rescuer Moses as a way of foreshadowing what He would do for *the whole world* through His rescuer Jesus.

God told Israel, through Moses, in perhaps the central theme verse of all of Exodus:

Exodus 19:4-6 (CSB)

4 ‘You have seen what I did to the Egyptians and how I carried you on eagles’ wings and brought you to myself. 5 Now if you will carefully listen to me and keep my covenant, you will be my own possession out of all the peoples, although the whole earth is mine, 6 and you will be my kingdom of priests and my holy nation.’

Hear John echo this...

John 1:14; 16-18 (CSB)

14 The Word became flesh and dwelt among us. We have seen his glory, the glory as the one and only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth. ... 16 Indeed, we have all received grace upon grace from his fullness, 17 for the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. 18 No one has ever seen God. The one and only Son, who is himself God and is at the Father’s side—he has revealed him.

God has come to dwell with, (to tabernacle with!), his people, in his people, all those who trust Him.

And He is coming again once for all, to right every wrong, and bring peace and justice to the whole world some day soon. At the end of Revelation, we hear The Loud Voice From The Throne declare:

Revelation 21:3-4 (CSB)

3 Then I heard a loud voice from the throne: Look, God's dwelling is with humanity, and he will live with them. They will be his peoples, and God himself will be with them and will be their God. 4 He will wipe away every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more; grief, crying, and pain will be no more, because the previous things have passed away.

And Revelation closes the Bible out with The Great Advent Promise from Jesus:

Revelation 22:20-21 (CSB)

"Yes, I am coming soon."

Amen! Come, Lord Jesus!

The grace of the Lord Jesus be with everyone Amen.

Let's pray.