

Why a Tabernacle?

Before I begin this morning's message, I want to give you a brief update on our first quarter financial giving; we want to be transparent with you about our church's finances. We are in a pretty solid financial position three months into this year. Our revenue for Operations is 5% over budget, and our expenses are 8% under budget. Giving to both our Missions and Building Maintenance budgets are on target.

Our Building Connections project is progressing on schedule, and we are really anticipating a wonderful Grand Opening on June 11th. Through March, we have received a little more than \$1 million in contributions, toward a total cost of \$3.6 million. Your contributions help keep our interest costs lower on our building loan.

Soon, we will be heading into the summer months when attendance drops off, and giving is at its lowest point of the year. Your steadiness in both attendance and giving will help mitigate any downturn.

As always, our treasurer and financial secretary are willing to discuss questions and comments with you.

I want to say thank you Church for your generosity! Your faithfulness is helping change lives and reach people for Christ both here at home and around the world!

Today, we're starting a new sermon series called "Some Assembly Required". Together, over the next several weeks, we're going to be exploring the Old Testament tabernacle, and how it gives us a model for how to worship God today.

You'll remember after God called His people out of Egypt, they began to wander in the wilderness. God wanted to form them into His own people, to let them learn who He is, and God wanted them to focus on worshipping Him. So, He instructed Moses to establish a place for this worship to occur. That place was called the tabernacle.

Now, the story of God setting the Israelites free from slavery in Egypt is the pinnacle story in the Hebrew Bible. It is THE deliverance story; the story that shapes everything else. Just like the death and resurrection of Jesus is the pinnacle story for Christians upon which everything else hinges.

So, you might find it strange to know that the Bible never mentions the name of the Pharaoh that finally let the Israelites go free, but it does describe in detail the kind of underwear Aaron and the priests were to wear when serving the Lord in the tabernacle!

You may also find it strange that the pinnacle moment of the Israelite's freedom—walking through the Red Sea on dry land, Moses stretching out his hand for the water to return to its normal place, and the Egyptian army drowning in the sea—all takes place in four verses. Yet forty-six chapters are devoted to how to build and how to worship in the tabernacle in the books of Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy!

And you might also note that it only took six days for God to create the whole universe, but forty days to explain to Moses how to put up a tent!

So, if we let scripture guide us, it seems that the

tabernacle and the worship that happens there is a really important topic to God, and so it should be for us too.

Now, the tabernacle was a portable tent that moved with the Israelites during their forty years in the wilderness. It noted the presence of God among His people, and it was the means by which a sinful man could approach a holy God.

Over the next several weeks, we'll explore each element of the Old Testament tabernacle, which later was replaced by the temple in Jerusalem. We'll see a biblical model that can transform our modern worship, both corporately as the church, and personally, since each one of us is a temple for the Lord.

Through the study of the tabernacle, we'll discover answers to the questions we have about worship: what it is, who it is for, what it accomplishes, and how we do it. We'll learn that we are all priests, and priests are meant to worship God and to help other people worship God.

We'll also see how the tabernacle and all the elements of it were a foreshadowing of Christ, as Jesus made a way for unholy people to dwell in the presence of a perfect and holy God. And our response to that is worship!

Worship is a posture of our hearts that informs every action of our lives.

Jesus worshiped regularly in the temple. And he had a lot to teach us about worship.

One day as Jesus was traveling through Samaria in the middle of the day, he got thirsty, so he sat down at a nearby

well for a cool drink of water. A Samaritan woman happened by the well at the exact same time, and they began to talk to one another. Now, Jews and Samaritans didn't normally do this since there was some enmity between the two people groups. Originally they had all been from the Israelite tribes, but over the years the Samaritans had intermarried with other people, so the Jews looked down at them as impure.

The conversation between the Samaritan woman and Jesus eventually turned toward worship. She said, "Our fathers worshiped on this mountain, but you Jews claim that the place where we must worship is in Jerusalem."

Jesus replied, "*Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks. God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in spirit and in truth.*" (John 4:23-24)

Jesus was saying that God is spirit—God is not a physical being who is bound to a particular place. He is present everywhere and hence He can be worshiped anywhere. Just like God was with the people of Israel wherever they went in the wilderness, dwelling right there with them, so it is that God dwells with us, inside of us, and we can worship him anywhere and everywhere we go! It is how we worship God that we'll be learning about together in this message series, "*Some Assembly Required*".

You see, God wanted Moses and the priests to build a tabernacle because He wanted to be near His people. God gave every single detail of how that tabernacle should be planned out, built, and utilized, and every single detail was meant for a purpose; it had meaning.

The tabernacle is designed to teach the world the protocol for worshiping the Lord. Every element and piece of furniture teaches us an aspect of worship. The furniture pieces were to be put in the order God commanded for a reason—because they each prepare us for another step into His presence and a deeper level of access.

How many of you have ever tried to assemble something? It can be pretty intense can't it? Have you ever had a bicycle to put together on Christmas Eve? Have you ever felt the pressure to get it done, but you still have to wait until your kids are all in bed, nestled in with visions of sugarplums dancing in their heads before you can even begin? You open that box, and out spill all those parts! You look at the clock and you wonder if you'll even finish before the night is gone, and the kids wake up and fly down the stairs to find out if that shiny, new bike is waiting for them under the Christmas tree!

And then there's practically anything you buy at that Swedish store up north of town! I want to know how they fit all the parts that go into an entertainment center into such a small box? A box that weighs about a billion pounds? You kind of have to be a weightlifter to even shop there!

Again, you get home, you open the box, and you carefully lay out all of the items and check them off the list. You look through the dozen or so languages that the instructions are written in, and you just hope that one of them is going to be English!

You do lay out all the parts and make sure they are all there first, don't you? And you do follow the instructions, don't you? I mean, let's face it, trying to build something

without paying attention to all the parts is a recipe for disaster! I once built an entertainment center, without checking to see if I had all the right screws first. And of course, when I got near the end, I did not have enough of the right screws! Well, that wasn't too bad, 'cause it was easy enough to just buy a couple more like I needed.

But I once knew a guy who was building a swing set for his kids. And he didn't check that he had all the parts first, and when he got near the end, he didn't have all the parts. He went back to the store to get the part he needed, or order the part he needed, and they couldn't just do that. He had to take the whole swing set apart that he had built up to that point, return the whole thing, and get another one! So note to self, check that you have all the parts first! There is a purpose behind every part!

Our main scripture lesson this morning is Exodus 25:1-9,

The Lord said to Moses, ² "Tell the Israelites to bring me an offering. You are to receive the offering for me from everyone whose heart prompts them to give. ³ These are the offerings you are to receive from them: gold, silver and bronze; ⁴ blue, purple and scarlet yarn and fine linen; goat hair; ⁵ ram skins dyed red and another type of durable leather; acacia wood; ⁶ olive oil for the light; spices for the anointing oil and for the fragrant incense; ⁷ and onyx stones and other gems to be mounted on the ephod and breastpiece.

⁸ "Then have them make a sanctuary for me, and I will dwell among them. ⁹ Make this tabernacle and all its furnishings exactly like the pattern I will show you.

There were a couple of ground rules God gave to Moses for building the tabernacle.

First, God would only accept freewill offerings from his people. *Tell the people to bring me an offering. You are to receive an offering from everyone whose heart prompts them to give.*

God doesn't force himself on us. He doesn't use guilt, fear, or condescension to force us to submit to him. God gives us free will. We are free to choose Him, or not to choose Him. God only wants the heartfelt and genuine praises of his people. He only wants affection that is freely given, gifts that are joyfully given, and hearts that are willingly given. After all, love that isn't freely given, isn't really love at all, is it?

God loves you for who you are, not what you can do for him. God does not want to force us to worship him. But when God comes near to us, and we learn who God is and just how wonderful God is, then our natural response is to worship such a great God! Once we learn what worship is, and we begin to see how wonderful, and loveable, and faithful God is, we become willing worshipers! We become enthusiastic worshipers! Worshiping God becomes what we want to do!

And because God came near and dwelt in the camp with the Israelites, what happened with their offerings? The people overwhelmingly responded in giving to the tabernacle! The people gave so much that it became too much! The builders came to Moses and said, "The people are bringing more than enough for doing the work that the Lord has commanded us to do." So Moses commanded that

they stop bringing their free will offerings!

Now that demonstrates hearts that have been changed by God. And that's God's second ground rule for building the tabernacle and worshiping him. God wants worshiper's hearts.

God doesn't just want to move people's intellect; He also wants to move their emotions. Exodus 35:21 says, *"Everyone who was willing and whose heart moved them, came and brought an offering to the Lord for the work on the tent of meeting, for all its service, and for the sacred garments."*

After God finished giving Moses the commandments for His people to follow, Deuteronomy 6:5 gives us the commandment which Jesus taught is the greatest commandment of them all, *"Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength"*. In fact, we are to take these to heart so much, to become so intimate with them, that we are to write them on our hearts.

You see, if God wins a heart, He has won the whole person. And if worship isn't from the heart, it isn't worship at all.

And the third ground rule for building the tabernacle is that skillful people were to be the ones to build it. I mean, think about it, would you hire an unskilled person to build your house? Would you take your car to be fixed by someone who doesn't know anything about fixing cars? Would you let someone who's watched a "how to" video on Youtube perform surgery on you? Of course not!

God chose skilled workmen to build the tabernacle. He chose Bezalel, and *filled him with the Spirit of God, with wisdom, with understanding, with knowledge and with all kinds of skills. So Bezalel and Oholiab, and every skilled person did the work according to all that the Lord commanded.*

These were no run-of-the-mill artists. They were the absolute best weavers, smiths, jewelers, and woodworkers in the entire nation. Why? Because God is the King of kings and the Lord of lords, and He is worthy of more and better than we can ever bring him.

Whenever we bring an offering to the Lord, it should be the best we have. That doesn't mean we have to be the best in the world to bring Him an offering, but it does mean we must bring Him the best that we can.

I may not be the best preacher in the world, but I want my preaching to be the best I can possibly offer to God whenever I step up to deliver His word.

You may not be the best singer in the world, but if you offer your song and your voice the best that you can, it will be pleasing to God. I once served a very small, country church. There was a man in that church who sang a solo about once a year. He could not carry a tune in a bucket. By earthly standards it was difficult to listen to. Yet every time Elton sang, he offered his gift to God the best that he could. And I truly believe that God smiled on His heavenly throne every time Elton lifted a song up to Him.

Our word "*worship*" is a compressed form of the Old English term "*worthship*". In other words, worship really

means to give something worth—to demonstratively attribute value, especially to a deity or to God. To value something, we have to put a price on it. That's why worship is so often associated with sacrifice. We make a sacrifice for something or someone that is important to us—something valuable. Worship—valuing God—must cost us something. Worship always involves giving.

We make a sacrifice when we offer God our time, our money, our songs of praise even when our circumstances don't look praiseworthy; an attitude of gratitude even when we feel like grumbling.

Worship is not for us. Worship is for God, to God, and toward God. And God is always worthy to be praised!

God ordained the Levites to be His priests, and the priests were to be the stewards of the tabernacle. The priests were meant to worship God, and to help other people worship God too. The priests job was to set up the place where God and people came together to meet. It was their job to set up, tear down, transport, guard, and attend to the ministry of the tabernacle.

In the new covenant that Jesus brings to us, you are a priest! 1 Peter 2:5 says that you are being built into a spiritual house. You have become a walking, talking, breathing tabernacle! A spiritual house! A meeting place for God and people! Can you imagine? What an honor!

What would happen if you viewed your day as being filled with divine appointments? What would happen if you looked at the people God brought across your path as opportunities for Him to inhabit those moments? Pitch the tent of

meeting—set up the place where God and people come together to meet—and see what God will do!

As a priest, you are to carry the presence of God with you wherever you go. The ancient priests were to carry the Ark of the Covenant when they traveled; that was the presence of God. We'll learn more about that in a later week. But for now, just remember you carry God's presence and power inside of you!

Next, as a priest, you are to minister to God. Remember, worship is not about us, it is about God. Too often, we have made worship about us—our preferences, our tastes, our comforts, our needs. We have made it about ministering to our needs and our self-centered natures. But a priest's first ministry is to God. And when priests minister to God, God shows up! God is enthroned on the praises of His people! And when God shows up, anything is possible! Healing happens in the presence of our Healing God. Salvation happens in the presence of our Savior. Captives are set free in the presence of our Deliverer. Anything is possible when God is in the house. And God enters the house when His priests minister to Him. So think about how you minister to God when you are in His presence.

And last, as a priest you are called to bless people! When we use the word bless we often think of making a person happy, making them feel good, or saying something nice. "Worship really blessed me today" or "Pastor's message blessed my heart."

But get this, biblical blessings catalyze destiny in people's lives! Biblical blessings catalyze destiny in people's lives! They call something forth! They call the future into being!

Think about the way the biblical patriarchs blessed their children. Those words of blessing always spoke to their son's destinies. When Isaac blessed Jacob he spoke of the future Jacob would live into. As a priest, you've been given by God the authority to speak life and destiny into others.

Remember, 1 Peter 2:9 says, *"But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light."*

Why have we been made priests? So we can declare the praises of God!

So, let's go and be the priests God made us to be. Tabernacle-building, God-ministering, presence-carrying, people-blessing priests! Let's be that place that God has set apart and consecrated as a meeting place between Himself and His people. Amen.