

# The Table of Showbread

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Exodus 25:23-30

May 14, 2017

*Make a table of acacia wood—two cubits long, a cubit wide and a cubit and a half high.<sup>4</sup> Overlay it with pure gold and make a gold molding around it.<sup>25</sup> Also make around it a rim a handbreadth wide and put a gold molding on the rim.<sup>26</sup> Make four gold rings for the table and fasten them to the four corners, where the four legs are.<sup>27</sup> The rings are to be close to the rim to hold the poles used in carrying the table.<sup>28</sup> Make the poles of acacia wood, overlay them with gold and carry the table with them.<sup>29</sup> And make its plates and dishes of pure gold, as well as its pitchers and bowls for the pouring out of offerings.<sup>30</sup> Put the bread of the Presence on this table to be before me at all times.*

It took God six days to create the world but it took God forty days to explain to Moses how to build the tabernacle! No less than fifty chapters in the Old and New Testament were devoted to the construction, ritual, and priesthood of the tabernacle. Thirteen of these chapters are in Exodus, eighteen in Leviticus, thirteen in Numbers, two in Deuteronomy, and four in the letter to the Hebrews in the New Testament. No other single aspect of Israel's faith is given as much attention in the Old Testament as the tabernacle, the furnishings of it, and the priests and rituals of its ministry.

So far we have covered the gate, the altar, and the basin. Today we move from the Outer Court into the holy place. But before you do that, you must offer your sacrifice and then wash in the basin. Now you are ready to move into the holy place.

One of the things you may have noticed is that as you progress into the tabernacle that there is a change. First of all there is a change in who may enter. Any Israelite could enter the outer court. But in the holy place only members of the priestly tribe could enter. In the holy of holies, only the high priest could enter and only on the Day of Atonement. You also see a change of material used; from bronze to silver to gold and then to pure gold as you went further in. In the Outer Court the worshipper learned about praise and thanksgiving, sacrifice, cleansing, and forgiveness.

In the holy place, that begins to change. What the worshipper begins to learn is about communion with God. The other day at my Life Group we were talking about our Sunday worship and how during a certain part we all noticed a change, like the presence of God had just entered the room. Some felt their eyes getting misty; others felt a chill run down

their back. The air thickened and stillness settled in.

Our worship had moved in to the holy place.

While the outer courts are outside, noisy and subject to the elements, the holy place is quiet and enclosed. To the right would be a table of acacia wood covered in gold. Around the top of the table is a gold crown pattern. The table is small about three feet long and a foot and a half wide, standing only about two feet high.

On top of the table are golden plates, and on the plates are twelve loaves of unleavened bread. One loaf for each of the 12 tribes of Israel. There are also golden cups on the table that held wine and gold bowls of frankincense and spoons to sprinkle the frankincense on the bread.

So it would smell of freshly baked bread and incense. It is lite only by the seven flames of the golden lampstand.

Wine, bread, candlelight, and gold. This is the table of showbread. Sometimes called the Bread of the Presence. Literally it meant “the bread of face”. Every Sabbath the bread was replaced with fresh bread. The priests would eat the old loaves, standing up together. You may remember once that David, before he was king, was on the run from Saul. He stopped at Nob looking for food from the priest Ahimelek. But the only bread available was the Show Bread. The priest allowed them to eat it, but only if David and his men had kept themselves holy. This need for holiness is a theme that we will see runs throughout the chapters on Old Testament worship.

#### *The Presence of God*

So what does this all mean? The table and bread symbolized fellowship and

communion with God. Jesus picks up this theme in John chapter 6. He has fed the crowds on five loafs of bread and two fish from a little boy. Everyone is full and there is still plenty left over. A miracle has taken place right in front of them! They are so impressed that they want to make him king right there on the spot. Jesus hikes up the side of the mountain to get away from it all and that night Jesus and his disciples cross over the Sea of Galilee; the disciples in a boat, Jesus chooses to walk over... on the water.

The crowd had decided to camp out for the night. They like the free meals. But when they wake up in the morning they are hungry again and they look around for breakfast, maybe a coffee and Egg McMuffin, but the nearest McDonald’s is in Capernaum and that’s a far walk. Jesus is nowhere to be found. When they discover that Capernaum is where Jesus has gone, they make the trip. They seem to really like being with him.

But when they catch up with Jesus they find that the all- you- can- eat buffet is shut down. He is not passing out free meals anymore.

And then he says to them, *“Very truly, I tell you, you are looking for me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate your fill of the loaves. Do you want the real deal that will feed you for eternal life? Believe in me. I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will never go hungry. He who believes in me will never be thirsty.”*

So they reply, *“Our ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness; as it is written: He gave them bread from heaven to eat.”* I find it interesting that they make mention of the manna. This was bread like substance that came daily to them. They couldn't store it up because it spoiled overnight. Except on the Sabbath so they didn't have to go out and gather it. They could stay home and take a Sabbath rest.

And they found that it was just enough for their daily bread

There are plenty of stories I could tell of people who in the midst of life found that having a little bit of religion isn't enough. There comes a time when you are ready to leave the outer court and move into the holy place. So here in John 6, the crowd has to decide if Jesus is enough. Are they hanging around for the perks, or is it really about a deep communion and relationship?

Jesus tries to help them see the connection between him and the bread in the wilderness and make the move closer, *“Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood abide in me and I in them.”* He's talking about how his death will bring life but they can only think literal and verse 60 says, *“When many of his disciples heard it, they said, ‘this teaching is difficult, who can accept it?’”* and many of

his disciples turned back and no longer followed him. They go home.

It happens doesn't it? We like the idea of heaven. We like miracles, signs and wonders. We like a free dinner and show. We like the excitement of being around a crowd. But we are not ready to plunge deeper into a relationship with Christ.

I had a young man come into my office feeling far from Christ. He had grown up going to church but after the death of his father, stopped going. I talked to him about Jesus and asked him if he would like to invite him into his life. He said sure, and we prayed and I was so excited for him. He started coming to church, brought his kids and enrolled them in Kids' Rock. But a few months later he was gone. He just stopped coming. He was busy at work and his wife wasn't interested and it was not convenient to come. And he left.

At this point Jesus turns to the twelve, his closest followers and says, "*Do you also wish to go away?*"

I suppose there are several ways you could interpret this but I hear sadness. He is God- yes- but he is also fully human and I think it would sting to find out that your best friends liked you only because of your fame or money or position.

He's wondering if his disciples are ready to move into a closer relationship. Or are they going to leave when the teaching got tough, when the crowds began to disappear, when the opposition began to coalesce?

And Peter responds, "*Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. We believe and know that you are the Holy One of God.*"

Peter's answer sums it up, "To whom shall we go?" Peter speaks for all of us

who have encountered God's grace in Jesus. Peter and the other disciples had pretty much left everything; homes, jobs, and family to follow Jesus. We're not turning back. Bridges have been burned behind us. Once you have a relationship with him, you don't want to go back to the old way of living or anywhere else.

The holy place symbolizes that next stage in our relationship with God. It was designed for intimacy with God.

#### *The tent of meeting*

In Exodus 33 we learn about the tent of meeting. It's a little confusing but most scholars don't think this is the same thing as the tabernacle for several reasons. It was better understood as a precursor until the tabernacle was up and running. Here is what it says starting in verse 7, "*Now Moses used to take a tent and pitch it outside the camp some distance away, calling it the "tent of meeting."* Anyone *inquiring of*

*the LORD would go to the tent of meeting outside the camp. <sup>8</sup>And whenever Moses went out to the tent, all the people rose and stood at the entrances to their tents, watching Moses until he entered the tent. <sup>9</sup>As Moses went into the tent, the pillar of cloud would come down and stay at the entrance, while the LORD spoke with Moses. <sup>10</sup>Whenever the people saw the pillar of cloud standing at the entrance to the tent, they all stood and worshiped each at the entrance to their tent. <sup>11</sup>The LORD would speak to Moses face to face, as one speaks to a friend. Then Moses would return to the camp, but his young aide Joshua son of Nun did not leave the tent."*

If you wanted to have face time with God, this is where you went. A lot of people were content to let Moses go out and they would stand back and watch from their front porch. When Moses went in, God came down and spoke to Moses. And his young intern Joshua went with him.

Moses was teaching Josh how to talk with God. But this is the part I love, “*Joshua did not leave the tent.*” Joshua loved being in the presence so much that he didn’t want to go home.

#### *We are all priests*

How about you? See-- we are all priests. First Peter reminds us of that. “*But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s special possession...*” We can go into the holy place. We can go directly into the presence of God. What does that mean? It means locking eyes with God until all the distractions fade and he is all that matters to your heart. Face time is good worship. It means it’s important enough for us to invest quality time in God. It’s about maintaining a deep personal relationship with him.

But first we prepare our hearts through gratitude—coming into his gates with thanksgiving and into his courts with praise. That prepares our hearts for

surrendering. And that’s important because we have to submit to being clean before God can clean us.

Then we are ready for communion.

#### *Communion*

It is impossible to consider the table of show bread without thinking of Communion—bread that is broken and shared by the priests, and wine that is poured out as a sacrificial offering to God. The table of the Lord. This clearly is an Old Testament foreshadowing of the New Testament relationship with God. Look at Matthew 26. “*As they were eating, Jesus took bread, blessed it and broke it and gave it to his disciples and said, ‘Take and eat. This is my body.’ Then he took the cup and after he gave thanks, he gave it to them saying, ‘Drink of it, all of you. For this is my blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many for the remission of sins.’*”

The word “communion” is from the Greek *koinonia*. It’s a beautiful word rich in meaning. Sometimes it’s translated fellowship, partnership, sharing, or communion. It means to share life together. Isn’t that what the blood and body of Jesus were really about? We are sharing the experience of the cross with Jesus because he wants to share the experience of our lives with us. Communion is Jesus’ invitation to share the experience of life with him.

Communion means to join together, to become one or to reach unity with someone. Through his body and blood Jesus has invited you to become one with him, to join with him in the benefits of his death so that you can join with him in the benefits of his resurrection. Communion means never being alone again, because we have a God who is now our friend. And he wants to join with us. He wants us to join with him. And he wants to reach a level of intimacy with us

that defies separation. And his blood is the glue that holds us together.

Communion is not however something we do once a month. It’s not even an event. It’s a way of living. In the same way, my marriage is not an event either. Sure we started it July 30, 1977 and we celebrate it every July 30. But if the observance of my marriage was reduced to a yearly event, my relationship with my wife wouldn’t last very long. It’s a daily thing.

During our courting days, Melinda was student teaching in Cleveland and I was in school in Lexington. We saw each other once during those months. We called each other as often as we could. I had to use a pay phone outside my dorm room. Those of you under 20 have probably never seen one. You put coins in little slots to make a call and then you stick your finger in a hole and turn a dial.

The separation was hard. You can do it for a while but prolonged separation will



have a negative impact. But forty years later I still miss her if we are separated for more than a few days.

It's the same with my relationship with God. We are starving our relationship with God if we are not spending time with him daily.

In Revelation 3 Jesus is confronting the lukewarm passionless church of Laodicea. He says to them, *"Hear I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with that person, and they with me."*

In other words, "Here I am church! Standing on the outside of my own community, my own house because you have not been interested in fellowship with me. But I'm knocking because I want to have fellowship with you. If you will only hear me and open the door, I'll come back in. Then we can sit down at the table and commune together and get

to know each other again. We can be close again.

#### *Conclusion*

As we practice the presence of God we will be able to hear his voice. We will be overcome with a relentless, insatiable, craving for more of him. Past the outer courts of our own need, worship will be all about ministering to the Lord himself. Once more his house will be called a house of prayer for all nations. An hour in his presence will accomplish more than weeks of counseling and human effort at healing our souls. We will understand that the Healer is healing and simply being with him cleanses, refreshes, and satisfies. Not just once a month or once a week but a steady diet of it every day.

We had a little taste of it in April when Dr. Cabot was with us. No one wanted to go home. We just waited until we could experience a healing touch from the Lord.

Great relationships never happen by accident. And they take time. We need to have a daily time to commune with Christ. If we fail in this area, we will never go deeper. Jeremiah 29 says, *“When you search for me, you will find me; if you seek me with all your heart, I will let you find me, says the Lord.*

God wants you to find him. So let's get started. Carve out some time each day this week to meet with God in the holy place. If you already do, great. Now try to increase it. If you spend 15 minutes a day with God, increase it to 30. If you are already doing 30 minutes, increase it to 45 minutes. Do it every day for seven days this week. Spend time just being quiet. Listen to what he wants to tell you. And then share with me what you have heard.

Amen.