



Sunday, September 27, 2026 -THE LIVING TABERNACLE – Pastor John Henry Raskin

The Light of the World

Jesus Christ did not begin in Bethlehem. The eternal Son was already present with His covenant people—as their light, rock, shelter, provision, and unfailing keeper—and He remains our living tabernacle today.

SERMON AT A GLANCE

Sukkot: Remembering God's Presence

Sukkot, the Feast of Tabernacles, recalls Israel's forty years in temporary booths after the Exodus. Their shelters were fragile, but God's presence was constant: a cloud by day, fire by night, protection, guidance, and provision.

The question: Who was with Israel in the wilderness? Scripture reveals the pre-incarnate Christ—active before Bethlehem, caring for and interceding for His people.

Psalm 27: Christ Our Shelter

David calls the LORD his light, salvation, strength, pavilion, tabernacle, and rock. In danger and betrayal, he longs to dwell within God's own *sukkah*—the secure presence of the One who never forsakes His people.

Our hope: Whatever temporary or exposed season we face, the same Lord who sheltered Israel shelters us. "Wait on the LORD; be of good courage."

Christ Revealed Through Sukkot, the Tabernacle Story

- Light — Psalm 27:1; Exodus 13:21; John 8:12: **The LORD lit Israel's wilderness nights. At the Feast of Tabernacles, Jesus declared, "I am the light of the world," identifying Himself with that divine light.**
- Rock — Psalm 27:5; 1 Corinthians 10:4: **The One who sustained Israel was not merely a symbol: "that Rock was Christ."**
- Tabernacle — Psalm 27:4–5; John 1:14: **David sought refuge in God's *sukkah*. The eternal Word later "dwelt"—tabernacled—among us in human flesh.**
- Keeper — Psalm 27:10; Deuteronomy 32:10: **Even when His people wandered, God encircled, instructed, guarded, and refused to forsake them.**
- Permanent Dwelling — Zechariah 14; Revelation 21:3: **Temporary booths point toward the day when God's dwelling with His people will never end.**

Hold Fast

- Christ was there all along.
- His presence—not our circumstances—is our security.
- He does not abandon His covenant people.
- Waiting on the Lord is active courage rooted in His faithfulness.

Live It This Week

- Name the "temporary booth" you are living in.
- Remember how Christ has provided before.
- Follow His light rather than fear the darkness.
- Encourage others—especially Jewish friends—to see Sukkot as pointing to the Messiah who tabernacles with His people.

"Wait on the LORD; be of good courage, and He shall strengthen your heart." — Psalm 27:14

Lord, You are our light, salvation, Rock, and hiding place. Hide us in Your presence, teach us Your way, strengthen our hearts, and help us wait courageously for You. In the name of Yeshua Ha'Mashiach.

Amen.

THE LIVING TABERNACLE-THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Last Sunday was Yom Kippur, the Mosaic Day of Atonement and we trembled in awe as we discovered the God of Israel who is Holy, Holy, Holy and who Isaiah encountered in his vision, as the living Christ according to the Gospel of John.

As we have, for the past several weeks, this morning we are going to continue to explore the reality of the pre-incarnate Son of the Trinity throughout the Old Testament.

As I have stated clearly before, it is our understanding at Abundant Life Church, that Jesus Christ, as the Son of God, was present and alive and interceding for His Covenant people before He was born in Bethlehem as the Son of Man.

It is exactly one week since Yom Kippur and according to the Jewish calendar, today is Sukkot, the Feast of Tabernacles.

Sukkot is another one of six major festivals ordained by God to be kept by the Israelites.

On this day, observing Jews all over the world build booths, also called tabernacles, in their backyards, and live in them for one week in remembrance of their sojourn through the desert after passing through the Red Sea.

As it happens when I was an executive recruiter, I had a client who was also a friend who was a Physician and the president of a large Medical Group.

He was an observant Jew and had a large home in Encino.

Every year, he invited family and friends to experience Sukkot by spending one night in a number of these booths that he had erected on his property.

The booths were made of modern materials for the most part, but the roof was made of palm branches that were open enough to the sky that you can see the stars through the branches.

You might think t's a strange thing to do in the twenty-first century: to leave a perfectly good house and go sit under a roof of palm branches.

But God commanded it in Leviticus 23, precisely so that Israel would never forget something about themselves and never forget something about Him.

Leviticus 23:42–43

You shall dwell in booths for seven days... that your generations may know that I made the children of Israel dwell in booths when I brought them out of the land of Egypt.

Forty years in temporary dwellings. Forty years of a nation with no walls of their own, wandering between a sea they'd already crossed and a land they hadn't yet entered.

The booths that the people made for themselves in the desert were made of branches, twigs, leaves and any other plant material they could gather.

And in the middle of all that exposure... no real walls, open roof, nothing between them and the harsh desert...

A pillar of fire stood guard at night. A cloud gave shade from the desert sun. Every single day. For forty years.

I want to ask you a question this morning that we have been asking together for weeks now, in psalm after psalm:

Who was the pillar of fire?

Who was the cloud?

Who was standing watch over Israel in the wilderness, centuries before a manger in Bethlehem?

We have said it plainly in this series, and I want to say it plainly again on this feast day, because Sukkot is the perfect day to say it:

Jesus Christ did not begin in Bethlehem.

Bethlehem is where the eternal Son, who had always been, took on flesh and moved into our neighborhood.

But before Bethlehem, He was already there.

Already reigning.

Already interceding for His people.

And this morning, looking at Psalm 27, I want to show you that He was already their shelter as He is ours today.

David wrote this psalm out of his experience and very real danger...

enemies encamped against him, false witnesses breathing out violence, a father and mother who, for whatever reason, had let him down.

And in the middle of all that betrayal and danger, David reaches for the same thing Israel had lived inside for forty years: a tent, a hiding place, a rock.

I believe David reaches for that picture because it was already written into his people's memory, and I believe that memory points all the way

back to the same Person we have been tracing through this whole series...

...Yeshua Ha'Mashiach, the pre-incarnate Son, who was our Rock and our hiding place all along, in the wilderness and on the cross, in the miracles and out of an empty tomb, in the Old Testament and in the New, and alive in us today.

Psalm 27:1

The LORD is my light and my salvation; Whom shall I fear? The LORD is the strength of my life; Of whom shall I be afraid?

Light. In the wilderness. That was not a metaphor.

Exodus 13:21 tells us that the LORD went before Israel by day in a pillar of cloud to lead the way, and by night in a pillar of fire to give them light.

Every dark night in that howling desert, when the booths of Israel had nothing between them and the wilderness...

There was light.

Not torchlight. Not the moon. The LORD Himself was the light.

Now let's go to the New Testament, to the Gospel of John, to a Feast of Tabernacles in Jerusalem... the very feast we are exploring this week.

On Sukkot, the priests in the Temple would light the great menorahs in the Court of the Women so brightly that the light was said to fill every courtyard in the city, in memory of the fire that had once lit the wilderness camp.

And in the middle of that very feast, in John chapter 8, Jesus stands up in the temple and says something that would have stopped every heart in the courtyard:

John 8:12

I am the light of the world. He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness, but have the light of life.

He said it at Sukkot. On purpose. In front of the very lamps that were lit to remember the fire that led Israel through the desert.

Jesus was not inventing a new title that morning. He was claiming an old one. He was telling that crowd, quietly and unmistakably:

I was the fire. I was the light before your fathers ever passed through the Red Sea or erected a tent in the wilderness.

I have not changed my job description — I have only taken on flesh.”

David didn't know the name Jesus of Nazareth when he wrote Psalm 27.

But David knew the LORD — the Holy One, the great I AM — as his light and his salvation, and the New Testament tells us plainly who that LORD is.

In his letter to the Colossians Paul says of Christ that all things were created through Him and for Him, and that He is before all things, and in Him all things consist.

Before all things. Before Bethlehem. Before Sinai. Before the pillar of fire ever moved across the desert floor, the eternal Son was already the light David would one day worship.

Psalm 27:4–5

“One thing I have desired of the LORD, that will I seek: That I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life... For in the time of trouble He shall hide me in His pavilion; in the secret place of His tabernacle He shall hide me; He shall set me high upon a rock.”

Pavilion. Tabernacle. The Hebrew word here is sukkah — the very word we get Sukkot from.

David is not simply asking for a house to live in.

He is asking to be hidden inside God's own sukkah, God's own booth of shelter, in the day of trouble.

David, centuries after the wilderness generation had already entered the land, is still reaching back to Israel under the cloud, sheltered inside the LORD's own covering.

Notice what that shelter does for David: He says “He shall set me high upon a rock.”

Shelter and rock, in the same breath. Hold onto that, because the Apostle Paul is going to hand it to us directly once again.

Let's look at 1 Corinthians 10.

Paul is retelling the wilderness story — the cloud, the sea, the manna, the water from the rock — and then he says this:

1 Corinthians 10:4

They drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them, and that Rock was Christ.

Not “represented Christ.” Not “pointed forward to Christ.”

Paul says that Rock — the literal rock Moses struck at Horeb, the rock that provided water for a wandering, thirsty, complaining nation for forty years — was Christ.

The pre-incarnate Son of God was present in that desert, not as a symbol, but as a supernatural reality... the very source of Israel's provision and shelter.

He was the water. He was the rock. And Psalm 27 tells us He was also the tabernacle — the sukkah — that hid David in the day of trouble, centuries later.

I have told this story before here, but I think it bears saying again at this time, on this Feast of Tabernacles...

When I accepted Jesus Christ as my Lord and savior as a Jewish man at 43 years of age,

I was asked repeatedly by friends and family who were Jewish, although not necessarily practicing Judaism, why I converted.

I always found it an interesting question, because I knew that I had been converted from the old person, who was the unsuccessful Lord of my own life, to a completely new creation whose only goal was to walk out the life that God had intended for me all along.

But the conversion that they were talking about was the conversion from Jew to Christian.

My answer to them then, is my answer to all who question me now...

It is that while I was undoubtedly blessed to be one of God's chosen people by birth, I was infinitely more blessed to have been allowed to choose Him back.

It was a question that my observing Jewish physician friend asked me and it gave me a great opportunity to give him food for thought so that he might also choose God back in Christ Jesus.

I'm reasonably sure that many of you have Jewish friends that you love and would like to see accept the Lord in spirit and in truth.

So here is what I want you to remember this morning:

Let them know that when they build a sukkah this week, they are not just remembering an ancient temporary dwelling.

Let them know that they are not even just remembering a gracious God who delivered their people thousands of years ago...

Let them know what you know, that whether they know it or not, they are remembering a Person.

The tabernacle in the wilderness, the tent David longed to dwell in, the rock that sheltered and provided for God's covenant people...

all of it was Christ, active and present and caring for His people... centuries before He was ever laid as a babe in a manger.

He was hiding His people in Himself long before He wrapped Himself in our flesh.

Now let's jump back for a moment to Psalm 27...

Psalm 27:10

When my father and my mother forsake me, then the LORD will take care of me.

We don't know exactly what David meant by this.

But we do know what Israel's whole wilderness story was...

Forty years of a people who, over and over again, wanted to forsake the LORD... who grumbled that He had abandoned them...

who built a golden calf while Moses was still on the mountain receiving instructions for how to build the very tabernacle that would shelter them.

Israel, in a sense, kept trying to forsake the LORD. And the LORD kept refusing to let them go.

Moses describes God's love for Israel like this, in Deuteronomy 32:10:

Deuteronomy 32:10

He found him in a desert land, and in the wasteland, a howling wilderness; He encircled him, He instructed him, He kept him as the apple of His eye."

Encircled. Instructed.

Kept, guarded, watched over, like His most tender and precious possession.

That is not distant, detached deity-language.

That is the language of a Father who will not let His children go, even when His children keep trying to wander off.

I want you to hear this clearly: that Father-language in the Old Testament, that fierce, protective care in the wilderness, is the same care the eternal Son was already extending to Israel before He ever took on a human mother of His own.

He was caring for Israel as a Father cares for His son, before He ever became, in the incarnation, a Son cared for by Mary and Joseph.

The One who would one day be forsaken on a cross for us — crying, “My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?” — was, all along, the One who refused to forsake His people in the wilderness.

And David continues in verses 13 and 14...

Psalm 27:13–14

I would have lost heart, unless I had believed that I would see the goodness of the LORD in the land of the living! Wait on the LORD; be of good courage, and He shall strengthen your heart; wait, I say, on the LORD!

Wait. That is the word that describes forty years in the wilderness better than any other.

Israel waited — not patiently, not always faithfully, but they waited, under the cloud, in the booths, for the land of promise.

And the whole time they waited, the LORD was already there with them, already sheltering them, already their rock.

Here is where the story comes full circle, and here is where Sukkot points us straight to Bethlehem and right past it, into eternity.

John 1:14

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.

The word John chose for “dwelt” here shares its root with skene, meaning “tabernacle,” and echoes the Greek Old Testament's word for the wilderness Tent of Meeting.

John is telling us, in one verb, that the incarnation that was Jesus Christ was Sukkot fulfilled: God pitching His own booth among His people.

He tabernacled. He pitched His tent. He built His sukkah among us.

The very Person who had been the fire, the rock, the hidden shelter, the Father who wouldn't let go, finally did what every sukkah that is built this week only pictures for seven days:

He moved in permanently.

Not a temporary booth open to the sky, but God Himself, tabernacled in human flesh, among His people.

And it doesn't stop there.

Zechariah 14 tells us that one day, all nations will go up to Jerusalem to keep the Feast of Tabernacles with the LORD Himself.

And Revelation 21:3 promises us the last word on this whole story:

Revelation 21:3

Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself will be with them and be their God.

The booths observant Jews build for seven days and then take down is a rehearsal.

Even this life in our temporary bodies as we walk in God's Spirit is a rehearsal.

One day, our dwelling will be permanent, and it will never be taken down again.

So, on this Day of Sukkot, on this Feast of Tabernacles, I want you to leave here holding onto this:

The Christ who saved you is not a God-man who showed up two thousand years ago.

He was our light before there was light in the sky over the wilderness camp.

He was our rock before Moses ever struck the stone at Horeb.

He was our hiding place, our sukkah, centuries before David ever picked up a pen to write about longing to dwell in the house of the LORD.

And He was refusing to forsake His children even while they, and we, were still, in our hearts, trying to forsake Him.

He is refusing to forsake you today, even if you, in your heart are still trying to forsake Him.

Whatever booth you are sitting in this week — whatever thin, temporary, exposed-to-the-weather season of life you are in right now, know that the same Person who sheltered Israel for forty years in the wilderness is sheltering you even now.

Wait on the LORD. Be of good courage.

He was there all along, and He has not moved.