

His Tabernacle is Superior: Hebrews – Week 11

HOOK

Meeting place: Have you ever had a place where you met someone so often that it became a tradition? I'll meet you at "our spot."

- A piece of road between two lakes, Backyard Burger, the New Dragon, Waffle House
- God established a place like that. It was so exclusive that it denied common people. Not because of God being wrong, but because of people's sinfulness.
 - However, it was only a picture what the meeting place God would establish – one where everyone was invited.

INTRO

The author of Hebrews is proving the old covenant was only shadows, and now obsolete. Almost every discussion in the book of Hebrews is proving that Jesus is superior. He is superior to all other messengers of God's word: the **prophets**, **angels**, and **Moses**. And His new covenant is superior to the former covenant: the Levitical **priesthood**, the **tabernacle**, and the **sacrifices**.

The gospel writers concentrate on Jesus' earthly life/death showing the significance of the work He did in revealing the Father and atoning for sin. The author of Hebrews focuses on the work Jesus did and is doing in heaven. In **Ch. 9**, the author opens with an explanation of what priests would do in the tabernacle. The tabernacle was a copy of the heavenly sanctuary. So, by understanding what took place in the symbol, we have a better understanding of what Jesus did in reality.

BOOK

DESCRIPTION OF THE TABERNACLE – 4 things that made it inferior

Hebrews 9:1 - *Now even the first covenant had regulations for worship and an earthly place of holiness.*

- We just finished going into detail about the old and new covenants. Just like the former covenant had a priesthood and certain promises of God, so does this one, but far superior.
 - In the same way, the first covenant had a certain place of holiness representing where God's presence dwelt. So does the new covenant,

but again, this one is far superior. The first was a picture. The second is the reality.

- All the details were important (8:5) because they all meant something.
- **1st thing which makes it inferior: It's "earthly"** and made by human hands.

What is the tabernacle?

Something big happened at Sinai. God expressed His intention to be WITH Israel. Different from every other nation on earth, His presence would dwell with them in a very special way.

Ex. 29:45-46 - *I will dwell among the people of Israel and will be their God. 46 And they shall know that I am the LORD their God, who brought them out of the land of Egypt that I might dwell among them. I am the LORD their God.*

God did it through a portable temple, a tent called the Tabernacle (**Ex. 25-30**), made of fabrics, animal skins, bronze, and gold. It would be God's dwelling place in the middle of their camp. The tent would have two functions. It was both a dwelling place for God and a meeting place for the priests to daily meet God and represent the people. **(Show video explaining the tabernacle)**

Hebrews 9:2 - *For a tent was prepared, the first section, in which were the lampstand and the table and the bread of the Presence. It is called the Holy Place.*

- Table for the **bread of the presence** – 12 loaves representing 12 tribes – God's presence is here. God would sustain his people (Ex. Manna).
- **Lampstand** – Menorah, 7 lamps. Perfect and complete light
 - **Jesus** – "I am the bread of light." "I am the light of the world."

The Hebrew word which we derive "tabernacle" from is used 58 times in **Exodus**. But translating it as simply "tabernacle/tent" doesn't convey the meaning well. A tent could be used for many purposes. But the Hebrew word is best translated "dwelling," a place someone lives.

Bread and a lamp would be found in any tent of the common Israelites. These signified that someone lived here, and the use of gold covering highlighted the significance of who it was. It was YHWH living among His people.

God is omnipresent, so He wasn't contained in the tabernacle. But it made God's selection of Israel as His people and His special relationship with them perceptible, tangible, and visceral. This closeness to God was a step toward the relationship which had been lost by Adam's sin in the garden of Eden.

Hebrews 9:3-5 - *Behind the second curtain was a second section called the Most Holy Place, 4 having the golden altar of incense and the ark of the covenant covered on all sides with gold, in which was a golden urn holding the manna, and Aaron's staff that budded, and the tablets of the covenant. 5 Above it were the cherubim of glory overshadowing the mercy seat. Of these things we cannot now speak in detail.*

- **Alter of incense** (not in the Holy of Holies, but belonging to it).
 - David suggested that it represented prayer going up to God (**Ps.141:2**). It shows how Jesus is our intercessor continuously interceding for us at the right hand of the Father (**Rom.8:33-34**).
- **Ark of the covenant**
 - No light in the Holy of Holies. The smoke from the incense and darkness obscured the view of the ark and God's presence (Shekinah glory) over it. (see **1 Kings 8:12**)
 - Consider how inappropriate it would be for the high priest to enter the Holy of Holies and sit on the ark of the covenant. But Jesus is the superior High priest worthy to enter His holy presence who the Father calls to sit at His right hand. Why? Because Jesus is both High Priest and King by Sonship of God.

God's presence would manifest in a special way in/over the tabernacle in the middle of their camp (fire/cloud). The Holy of Holies was seen as a representation of God's heavenly throne room. Inside of it, was the ark of the covenant which held the stone tablets which God wrote His commandments. It's gold lid had two angels with their wings stretched toward each other. The lid was called the mercy seat. The ark represented the point where heaven and earth (the spiritual realm and the physical realm) overlapped. Over it God's glory was manifested. It was seen as the lowest point of God's throne. He sat in the heavens and the ark was His footstool. How profound that God's throne which was on the foundation of His covenant would be called the "mercy seat."

Hebrews 9:6-7 - *These preparations having thus been made, the priests go regularly into the first section, performing their ritual duties, 7 but into the second only the high priest goes, and he but once a year, and not without taking blood, which he offers for himself and for the unintentional sins of the people.*

The tabernacle was also the tent where Moses, then the successive priests, met with God daily in the Holy Place to represent the people and hear from God.

But most importantly, the tabernacle was critical on the Day of Atonement (Yom Kappur), particularly the Holy of Holies. An Israelite would long for this day. They couldn't go into the presence of God themselves, but the High Priest could go in for them for their atonement. **Explain: Leviticus 16 – Day of Atonement**

- The whole nation of Israel would fast for 24 hours and feel the weight of their sin and mortality.
- First, the high priest would first take off his beautiful, majestic robes and bathe himself.
- Dress in clean, white linen
- Sacrificed a bull (sin offering) for his own sin
- He also took two goats, and casting lots for them, selected one to be sacrificed and one to be released in the wilderness (scapegoat = goat of departure).
- After sacrificing the bull for his sin offering, he took coals from the alter and placed them in a censer. This he carried into the holy of holies and poured into it handfuls of incense to fill it with a cloud of smoke and cover the mercy seat (ark of the covenant).
- He would return to the alter and bring some of the bull's blood into the Holy of Holies to sprinkle on the mercy seat seven times. This atoned for (purified) the Holy of Holies, the Holy Place, and the brazen alter (which he'd put the blood on the four horns).
 - Now the priest and the tabernacle have been made clean. The next was the atonement for the people of Israel.
- The first goat would be sacrificed, and the high priest would bring its blood into the Holy of Holies to sprinkle on the mercy seat seven times.
- Then, he would come out and lay his hands on the head of the scapegoat and confess the sins of the nation over it. Another priest would lead the goat into the wilderness so far as to never be seen again.
 - The two goats showed both halves of the atonement. The one that was sacrifice and its blood sprinkled on the ark of the covenant represented the people being made right with God (justification). The one who symbolically carried the sins of the people away represented their purification from sin. Their sin would be remembered no more (**Heb.8:12**).
- Then, when the ritual of atonement was complete, he would bathe again and put on his ornate garments of glory and beauty.

THE TABERNACLE WAS INSUFFICIENT

Hebrews 9:8-10 - *By this the Holy Spirit indicates that the way into the holy places is not yet opened as long as the first section is still standing 9 (which is symbolic for the present age). According to this arrangement, gifts and sacrifices are offered that cannot perfect the conscience of the worshiper, 10 but deal only with food and drink and various washings, regulations for the body imposed until the time of reformation.*

- **2nd thing which makes it inferior - It's inaccessible to people.** Only the priests were allowed in the Holy Place, and only the High Priest in the Holy of Holies.
 - The first covenant revealed God's presence as a closed door because of people's sin/unholiness. At best, they could have a mediator to represent them, and he could only come through the means of a blood sacrifice.
 - BUT still, that door can't be opened by gifts, cleansing rituals, and animal blood. - "**symbol**" – "side by side" (word for parable)
 - **Illustration:** Ever been locked outside your house?
- **3rd thing which makes it inferior – It was temporary.** As long as it was a barrier between God and man it showed that God had not yet finished His work of undoing the damage done in the garden of Eden. It was a step, a picture of what was coming, but the relationship between God and man had not been restored.
- **4th thing which makes it inferior – It only deals with the external, but not the heart = "conscience."**
 - **Illustration:** A glass vase with mud water. Polishing the outside won't clean the water inside.
 - These were meant to be temporary until the time God would deal with sin and transform the human heart = the new covenant! – "**reformation**" – "to make straight," "correct."

THE SUPERIOR TABERNACLE

Hebrews 9:11-12 - *But when Christ appeared as a high priest of the good things that have come, then through the greater and more perfect tent (not made with hands, that is, not of this creation) 12 he entered once for all into the holy places, not by means of the blood of goats and calves but by means of his own blood, thus securing an eternal redemption.*

- It all points to Jesus who would finally deal with the human heart (**Ez.36:25-27**)
- "**greater and more perfect tent**" – Heaven! The heavenly throne room. Jesus performed the work of atonement for us in a superior tabernacle. The very presence of God in heaven. Not one that is physical and of creation, but above, more real than anything we know in creation. **And it is sufficient in the four way the former was inferior:**
 - 1. He operated in a tabernacle which was heavenly.
 - 2. We was a "**forerunner**" making God's presence accessible to all (**6:20**)
 - The curtain ripping at His death.

- 3. His work is as eternal as God's heavenly sanctuary.
 - **"once for all"** - We shouldn't think of Jesus as repeatedly offering sacrifices like the high priest did on earth. He is our living sacrifice who was eternally sufficient.
- 4. He deals with the human heart. He redeems us, not with the blood of animals on behalf of a human need for redemption, but with His own human blood offered as our divine High priest.
- Jesus operates as a superior high priest in a superior Holy of Holies who brings a superior sacrifice to produce a final and superior outcome on our behalf. = **"eternal redemption."**

LOOK

The tabernacle was seen as the place where heaven and earth overlapped. Jesus would be the point where heaven overlapped earth, where the spiritual realm overlapped the physical.

John 1:1-5,14 - In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. 2 He was in the beginning with God. 3 All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made. 4 In him was life, and the life was the light of men. 5 The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it. [...] 14 And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son[d] from the Father, full of grace and truth.

He was truly God and truly man. Becoming our high priest, He took off His robes of glory (He emptied Himself) to take on human flesh but remained holy (white). Not needing a sin sacrifice for Himself, He fulfills the symbols which both goats point to. He went before God **"by means of His own blood"** to justify us before God in the heavenly tabernacle. AND He took our sin away – *"I will be merciful toward their iniquities and I will remember their sins no more."* He was our High Priest and our Sacrifice of Atonement. After His work was finished, He ascended to heaven = put back on His robes of glory (John 17:5) and sat at the right hand of God.

TOOK

All of these sights and smells and rituals are things the receivers of the book of Hebrews would have known very well. These are their heritage, their fond childhood memories, and their profound ways of worship before coming to Christ.

And it was these symbols they were tempted to return to when the pressure was on. So it's these he's recalling in their memories with his opening verses of **Ch.8**.

The whole point of God's work of redemption, every step, is about relationship.

Matthew 6:33 – *Seek first the kingdom of heaven and His righteousness...*

James 4:8 - *Draw near to God and He will draw near to you.*

Jeremiah 29:12-14 - *Then you will call upon Me and go and pray to Me, and I will listen to you. 13 And you will seek Me and find Me, when you search for Me with all your heart. 14 I will be found by you, says the LORD...*

Illustration: Bill McCartney at Promise Keepers pulled me through the crowd.

- **H.B. Charles Jr.** – “What you seek you will find, and right now we are as close to God as we want to be.”

RECAP

- The tabernacle of the first covenant was inferior in four ways:
 - It was earthly, inaccessible, temporary, and only dealt with the external
- The Holy of Holies where Jesus operated as our High Priest was in heaven.
- Because of His work being done in the real presence of God, it was sufficient to justify His people and permanently remove their sin.

Challenge 1: What are some ways you can pursue relationship with Him?

~ *Soli DEO Gloria*