

It's hard to believe that exactly eight years ago, my family was watching our house being built. Every day for 3 1/2 months we would drive by and check the progress as the floors were built, as the walls went up, and the roof was completed. One day we got there just as they were finishing the driveway and Josh and Megan got to leave their handprints in the drying cement. It was a fun time for our family. The not-so-fun part wasn't waiting for the house to be done; it was all decisions that needed to be made before construction started. We had no idea all the details involved in building a house. What color did we want the exterior to be, or the carpet, the kitchen floor, the cabinets, the countertops, the appliances, we had to make all those decisions? Even what finish did we want the faucets to be: nickel, chrome, bronze, or stainless steel? Please understand, we felt, and still feel, incredibly blessed to be in our home, we just had a really hard time deciding all the details. But You know what? The details mattered because this is where we'd live... this house is where we'd call home.

Friends, we're at an exciting part of our journey through the book of Exodus. God has delivered the nation of Israel out of slavery... so that He can dwell with them. Last month, when Dan asked me if I was available to preach, I quickly said yes. Then he told me our text covered seven chapters! That's right, seven! Now before you panic, we're only reading three verses from chapters 24-31, but these three verses take us on an amazing journey where a single theme is seen over and over again throughout the bible, and here it is: Just like us, God cares about where He dwells. That's where we're headed today. So, buckle up, and let's dive in!

In Exodus 25. God said this to Moses: make a sanctuary for me, and I will dwell among them (Israel). Make this tabernacle and all its furnishings exactly like the pattern I will show you.  
Exodus 25:8-9

Notice that God made a promise: I will dwell among them. And the place God chose to dwell, he called the tabernacle. Now, this is where we have to dig in a bit and understand vital details. This is an artist's rendition of the tabernacle. As you can see it looks less like a permanent building and more like a temporary structure. Which it was! If you've been with us the last few weeks, you know the nation of Israel is in the desert! And this isn't their final destination. They are traveling, from Egypt where they were slaves, through the desert, to the promised land. So, the tabernacle had to be temporary and portable... to move, when they moved.

And in chapters 24- 31 of Exodus, God gives incredibly detailed instructions, for the building and furnishing of His tabernacle. Details like: The dimensions of the courtyard; how high the curtains should be, what they should be made of, how to secure the curtains, and even what materials the bases and tent pegs should be. This square was to be the Altar of Burnt Offering: it was a wooden box, overlaid with bronze, with poles attached so it could be moved from campsite to campsite.

This was where sacrifices were offered once a year, every year, for the sins of the nation. Hebrews 9 tells us that according to God's law without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness. Hebrews 9:22. Sin carries a punishment and could be forgiven yearly but a sacrifice was required.

In the center of the courtyard was a bronze washbasin. Whenever someone wanted to enter this structure, they had to wash their hands and feet with the water from the basin. Twice in the span of two verses God says whoever enters must purify themselves "so they will not die." That's a serious consequence for disobedience, but it was important! This tent is the heart of the tabernacle and was divided into two sections as you can see here. The outer section, called The Holy Place, was to have a table a lampstand and a small altar for incense, all made with pure gold. Then, beyond one more large curtain, The Holy of Holies, (AKA – The Most Holy place). This is where the Ark of the Covenant was kept, also overlaid with pure gold, to hold the tablets of the Ten Commandments and was constructed with two cherubim (or angels) on top.

So Holy and Sacred was this Ark that if someone simply touched it, they would die. Two books in the Old Testament record that actually happening. So Holy and Sacred was this space that only one person could enter it, only once a year. In fact, they wore a special robe with bells on the bottom and a rope tied around their feet so if they dropped dead by being in the presence of the Lord, the people outside the curtain would hear the bells stop ringing and be able to pull them out under the curtain!

And in Exodus 25:22, God revealed to Moses: There, above the cover between the two cherubim that are over the Ark of the Covenant law, I will meet with you and give you all my commands for the Israelites. This room is where God would meet Moses! This space is where God would dwell on earth!

The thing is, it's not the first time God tried to dwell with people. We read in the book of Genesis that God made the heavens and the earth to be one, where God and humanity could dwell together in a place called the Garden of Eden. But Adam and Eve disobeyed God and followed their own plans. And just as there were serious consequences in Exodus for not washing in the basin, or touching the ark, the consequences in Genesis was that heaven and earth were torn apart. People could no longer dwell with God.

Until studying this text I never realized all similarities between God creating the Garden and God's instructions for the tabernacle. For instance: both the Garden and Tabernacle were the place God chose to dwell with people. Both creation accounts are marked by divine speech. Seven times in Genesis we read, "And God said." Seven times in Exodus we read, "And the Lord said." Both accounts end with a day of Sabbath rest. Both creations are affirmed. In Genesis, by God saying, "It is good" and in Exodus 39, by Moses who affirmed the tabernacle was completed as instructed. And finally, both accounts describe gold, jewels, and cherubim. Why all the similarities between Creation and the Tabernacle?

You may remember this moment in 2015 when Steve Harvey announced the wrong Miss Universe on live TV. The following year the pageant executives gave Steve Harvey a do-over, bringing him back to give him another shot at getting it right. We've seen other "Do-overs" in recent years: In 2009 President Obama had to redo his oath of office because it was quoted to him wrong. In 2017 Adele restarted a song during the Grammy's. In 2018 Mariah Carey got a second chance to sing during New Year's Eve after falling short the year before. They got a second chance to get it right!

Friends, building the Tabernacle was God's "Do Over" for humanity. God was trying to make right what went wrong in the Garden. As Israel walked forward towards their new home this structure would point them back to the Garden of Eden reminding them: God has always wanted to dwell with people!

I love what one scholar wrote: "the Tabernacle is laden with redemptive significance, not just because of the sacrifices and offerings within its walls, but because of what it is: a piece of holy ground amid a world that had lost its way." –Peter Enns

God cares about where He dwells, and this Tabernacle would temporarily bring Heaven and Earth together again. Why temporarily? Because the tabernacle didn't just point backwards to the Garden, it also pointed forward to Jesus!

The fourth book of the New Testament opens with these words: In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God ... the Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth. John 1:1,14

The Word (Jesus) became flesh and made his dwelling among us. That phrase can best be translated: The word became flesh and "tabernacled" among us. Same word as in Exodus. God once again made a way to dwell with people, this time in the form of His son, Jesus, and this time to permanently fixed what went wrong in the Garden. Jesus would go on to live a sinless life, becoming the perfect sacrifice, shedding His blood to forgive sin. Not on an altar outside a portable structure, but on a cross. Not to forgive the sins of a single nation, to be repeated yearly, but to forgive the sins of everyone, everywhere, forever!

But something else important happened when Jesus died, and three different gospels record it. Reading from Matthew's account: And when Jesus had cried out again in a loud voice, he gave up his spirit. At that moment the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom. Matthew 27:50-51

At the moment of Jesus' death, the curtain, that had hidden and limited the presence of God to one man, once a year, was torn in two. And notice how it was torn from top to bottom. These were tall, thick, and ornate curtains which would've required many men to tear apart, and to do it from top to bottom is simply not possible, and to happen the moment Jesus died - friends, God tore the curtain in two! Jesus' death gave access to God's presence as never before!

Hebrews 6 says it this way; We have this hope as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure. It enters the inner sanctuary behind the curtain, where our forerunner, Jesus, has entered on our behalf. Hebrews 6:19-20

Later, in Hebrews 10 we read; Therefore, brothers and sisters ... we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body. Hebrews 10:19-20

Jesus tabernacled among us, died for our sins, giving us access to God as never before. Three days later He rose from the dead, and after appearing to many of His disciples, He ascended into Heaven.

All of that leads to a single question: Where is the tabernacle of God now? It came first in the form of The Garden, then as a portable structure in the desert, then in Jesus but what about now? Many look around the world and ask, "Where is God in all this mess?" Is there an actual place on earth where God dwells today?

Well, about five years ago I had the opportunity to travel to Israel, to minister to pastors who were planting Christian churches in highly populated Muslim areas. (We have a team from The Creek in Israel right now in fact). In Jerusalem, among many sacred sites we visited, we got to see this. This is a picture I took of the "Wailing Wall" in Jerusalem. It's called that because for Jews this is as close as they can get to the "Most Holy Place" of the Temple that was destroyed long ago. You can see people praying, reading, and some weeping wanting to physically be closer to God. I remember feeling incredibly sad as I stood there watching. Later, I realized I felt that way, not only because I sensed their sorrow and desire to be close to God, but also because deep down I knew this wasn't the place where God dwells on earth today. I was sad because these well-intentioned people were missing what God had done through Jesus.

The apostle Paul wrote these words to Christians in the town of Corinth: Do you not know that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? 1 Corinthians 6:19. One translation says it like this; "Do you not know that your body is a house of God? 1 Corinthians 6:19 (NLV)

Friends, when we turn to God and are baptized, we receive, through the blood of Jesus, the forgiveness of sins and the gift of the Holy Spirit. Paul says We (individually) are God's tabernacle. But Paul also wrote these words to a church in Ephesus: In him (Jesus) the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. And in him, you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit. Ephesians 2:21-22

Did you catch that? These verses tell us that We (the church) are God's tabernacle. There is a place where God dwells on earth today: God dwells in (us) and God dwells in us. If you're a follower of God then your heart, mind, whole body is sacred space where God lives. If you're a believer in community with other believers, that is sacred space where God dwells. He dwells

amongst us and in us. Listen, God still cares about where He dwells.

Because each of us are God's tabernacle, scripture tells us we should Pursue Purity. That's the context of the verses in 1 Corinthians 6 about our bodies as temples of the Holy Spirit: Purity. Specifically - sexual purity. And as soon as I say that, we're flooded with a variety of emotions. Some of us get anxious because we're not comfortable talking about these kinds of things, some of us feel shame because of past or recent failures in purity, and some might simply feel resistance. But that is the context for our bodies as God's Tabernacle: Look at what we read in 1 Corinthians 6:18 Flee from sexual immorality. All other sins a person commits are outside the body, but whoever sins sexually, sins against their own body. Do you not know that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore, honor God with your bodies."

I want to focus for just a moment on this one phrase; Flee from sexual immorality. To flee means to run away from danger! It's written as a present tense command, which means it's something we must do continually, and always be the on alert for.

If you're a parent, especially of young ones, you feel like you're always watching out for danger. I can't tell you the number of times when Josh or Megan were young, I pulled them back from being too close to a busy street we were waiting to cross, or back from a high ledge while on a hike, or away from a campfire as they crept closer out of curiosity. Children test boundaries!

But isn't that our approach to sexual purity? "How close can I get to the edge without falling off?" "How close can I get to the fire before I get burned?" Not fleeing - but inching closer and closer to the line not realizing the danger. And we feel the damaging effects, but instead of fleeing, we justify our choices and keep going: "Everyone's doing it, but I love them and I'm afraid to lose them, I have needs my spouse isn't meeting, God understands I feel lonely, so it's ok..."

Friends, there's a word that keeps subtly showing up through Exodus. We saw this word again today! God told Moses; make the Tabernacle and all its furnishings exactly like the pattern I will show you. The subtle word is obedience!

Sexual purity is all about obeying God, knowing that He loves us and has plans for us that can't be realized when His dwelling place isn't pursuing purity. Obedience isn't the easy pathway, but it's the right one. Obedience Honors God and allows God to move in us and through in ways we can't imagine. Obedience keeps us from experiencing or causing pain.

Preacher and Author Andy Stanley wrote: "Nothing has stolen more dreams, dashed more hopes, broken up more families, and messed up more people psychologically than our propensity to disregard God's commands regarding sexual purity."

Honoring God with our bodies as His tabernacle means we don't walk towards, or test the boundaries of purity, we FLEE! We run the other way like an animal running for its life because

the consequences of disobedience to us and those around us are serious. Because our bodies are where God dwells, we should individually pursue purity. And because we together are where God dwells, we should as a church keep unity!

If you remember back to our summer series, “God’s love changes everything,” we read this in Ephesians 4:3; Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. Unlike purity, unity isn’t something we have to pursue - unity already exists! Paul tells us to make every effort to keep unity. Protect it, guard it, keep it safe! So, what does keeping unity look like practically? It looks like a community of believers walking together, in the same direction, on mission! It looks like people who resolve conflict lovingly, and quickly. It looks like people who are grateful, generous, who serve, and bear each other’s burdens. It looks like people, not focused on personal preferences asking, “what’s best for me?” but instead asking, “What’s best for the church to reach a lost and dying world and make disciples?”

Did you know, that before His death, Jesus prayed for unity among believers! We read a part of His prayer in John 17, I pray also for those who will believe in me (that’s us) that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you ... so that they may be brought to complete unity. Then the world will know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me. John 17:20-23

Just as the tabernacle in the desert pointed back to the Garden, and forward to Jesus: as God’s tabernacle today, Jesus prayed we would be completely united and point the world to a God who loves us so much, and wants to dwell with them forever. We went back to the beginning of God’s word, and we are going to finish in the end. From Revelation 21, Then I saw “a new heaven and a new earth,” for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, ...I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Look! God’s dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.” Revelation 21:1-4

Friends, this tabernacle (us) is temporary. And this tabernacle (the church) is temporary. A time is coming soon when all this will end, and only those who’ve believed that Jesus is the way, the truth, and the life, will get to dwell with God forever. Until that day we have the privilege and mission of being God’s tabernacle on earth: to each pursue purity (to run towards it) and to together keep unity (guard, protect, keep it safe). So that (we) and (the church) can show a piece of holy ground, wherever we go, to a world that’s lost its way.

Maybe you’ve been struggling in your faith; doubting, trusting in yourself instead of trusting God. We’re going to open the doors to The Porch. And if you need help getting back on track, if you need someone to pray for you, between now and the rest of service we invite you to go and talk to one of our caring volunteers. They want to help you!

Maybe you've never turned to God to forgive your sins or been baptized and received the gift of the Holy Spirit. If that's you, please hear this: God wants to dwell with you and in you. He's knocking, but you have to open the door ... He will never force His way into your life. In fact, He may let you face consequences from walking your own way until you're ready to trust that His plans are better than yours. If you're ready, today can be the day the curtain of your heart is torn in two and you experience God's presence as never before. Please go to the porch and talk to someone about your next steps.

Maybe you've fallen recently in purity, or not practiced unity well. Well, we come to a time of communion. On the tables are double stacked cups. The top cup has juice, the bottom cup has bread, the symbols of the body and blood of Jesus shed to pay the price for ALL our sin. Forgiveness for everyone, everywhere, forever! Those who have said yes to God and consider themselves a part of this church family can continue to worship by placing your tithe in the clear boxes. And we invite everyone to put a dollar or two into the orange buckets so we can bless others in the community and point them to Jesus.

Whether you go to the porch or come to the table, remember God's love and forgiveness that's ours because of Jesus. Also, remember the Spirit He gives to stay faithful and that He did all this because He wants to dwell with us and in us. And God cares about where He dwells.