

I. Intro:

A. About fifteen years ago, one of the young staff guys asked if he could paint his office an unusual color. He worked with Middle School students and said he thought the students, especially the boys, would like it if he was a bit more like them. He said he'd pay for the paint and do the work himself. And he wanted to paint the room black.

B. I had learned from Sheri to say yes to these kinds of ideas that were easy to fix. When he was in second grade Austin wanted to shave half his head for half way day. I thought that was a crazy idea. Sheri was like, "that's a great idea." Hair grows back.

C. So I said, "we'll pay for the paint, but you have to do it. And you will have to repaint it yourself."

D. He did. And it lasted two days. He said, "I can't see anything and it's so depressing." So he then painted it a bright, fluorescent green – which was worse. But that lasted a couple years.

E. And... it shaped him. Because that is what environments do. To cite Winston Churchill, first we shape our buildings and then they shape us."

F. What is shaping you? Who is shaping you? Who or what is shaping your heart? And what is their agenda? (Do they have your best interest in mind? Are they simply after your money, or your vote?) How are they shaping you and why are you letting them?

G. I have been thinking about this quite a bit lately.

1. For starters, I recently attended a board mtg for ScholarLeaders, a group Christ Church has supported for thirty years. It's a great organization. Sheri and I really value the relationships we have gained through it. The group helps identify and invest in young and proven leaders from Africa, Asia and Latin America who we hope will go on to impact a million others. The idea is, the church is God's plan, in order to have strong churches we need strong pastors, and in order to have strong pastors they to be well trained. This means, they need books to read and mentors to train them. So, ScholarLeaders invests in those who are going to write the books and teach the pastors. To date we have helped 400 women and men get their PhD and head back to serve in key leadership positions in Africa, Asia and Latin America.

2. Secondly, there is today's text. Which talks a lot about a building – the tabernacle. We are moving into the longest section in the Pentateuch. The single biggest topic in the first five books of the Bible, is the design of the Tabernacle. It gets six chapters here – we have six somewhat tedious chapters full of specifics about the design of the building. And then, after a few chapter sidenote, we get that same information a second time as they build it.

a) If you are reading through the Bible, this is the first time you wonder, what am I doing this for?

b) The reason is, we are shaped by our environments – they mold us and teach us.

3. Now, to be clear, there is more that is going on.

a) For starters, we are not to be passively shaped, we are to be shaping. We are to be salt and light, agents of change, forces for good.

b) But we need to be alert to the color of the walls.

II. We are in Exodus 25 – which means we are now well into the second half of the book.

A. We have moved from “getting the Jews out of Egypt” to “getting Egypt out of the Jews.” We are in a section in which God is forming them – not just rescuing them, but redeeming, realigning, repositioning them so their identity changes, so they no longer think and act like Egypt’s slaves, but start to think and act like God’s people.

B. And this is of great interest to us – or sure should be – because that is part of what we need to do. We need to be shaped by God not by something else – not by the whims of the moment, the dictates of culture at this second. We need to be doing what we can in order to be changed and become more like Christ.

C. God is directing the Jews down that path.

1. In Exodus 19, God asked them if they wanted to be his people. They said yes.

2. In Exodus 20, He said, then here are the laws you need to keep in order to be my people and represent me to others. The laws were the Ten Commandments.

3. In Exodus 21-23, he further developed the law. Helped them see how these laws would be applied in a bunch of settings.

4. In Exodus 24 the relationship was formalized. God called Moses and other leaders onto the mountain to meet with Him, and then He called Moses even higher up.

a) Moses goes through the clouds and through the fire and apparently enters some type of higher realm – comes to some place where heaven and earth are intersecting.

5. And he is there so, as a representative of the people, he can enter into a new covenant with God. So, the deal made with Abraham can be updated. Two weeks ago I made much of the fact that the covenant language used in Exodus 24 is the backdrop for what Jesus says when he updates the covenant in his own blood.

6. Today we are in Exodus 25. The meeting Moses is having with God is continuing. It will last forty days.

7. Last week, in the first part of Exodus 25, God directed Moses to tell the people that they are invited to give gold, silver and bronze - a lot of the bling they got when they fled Egypt – so they can build a sanctuary. Today we read on as God gives more instruction to Moses about what this sanctuary is to be like.

8. In Ex. 25:8, God says: **Have them make a sanctuary** – sometimes called the Tent of meeting, because God will meet with Moses here¹ - **for me, and I will dwell among them.** (Not, “I will live in it,” but, “I will dwell with them.” The tabernacle is not for God because he needs a place to stay. It is for the Jews)

9. In verse 9 he says, **Make this tabernacle and all its furnishings exactly like the pattern I will show you.**

10. Here is a picture of what they are to build. **PICTURE**

11. As you can see, there are several buildings in a fenced off area in the middle of their camp. The main structure is this building, which is to be divided into two. Here is a diagram (**PICTURE**): the holy area – which has some special furniture in it. And then further in, the holy of holies, in which is placed the Ark of the Covenant. And here **PICTURE** is the Ark itself - the box in which the Ten Commandments are to be placed.

D. What is going on? What is so important? Why is God spending so much time on this? What is so important about the Tabernacle? Well, we need to dig into the text. We are going to be focusing on Exodus 25:10-22

- E. As you turn there let me explain a few things:
1. This is the most important building in the world. There have been other memorable and important buildings built – the Great Pyramids, Taj Mahal, the Parthenon – but nothing as important as this.
 2. The most important thing about the Tabernacle is not the tabernacle itself, it's God. It's his presence, not the building.
 - a) The building is important in its own rite because: 1) it shapes us; 2) and it needs to model what is in heaven; 3) the design is full of symbolism; and 4) it will shape their worship
 - b) But the main thing about the tabernacle is not the tabernacle, it is what is inside it – starting with the furniture, but mostly God himself.
 - c) The big, big deal about the tabernacle is that God is showing up to dwell in the center of camp with them.
 3. Moses is high in the mountain – perhaps in heaven, or at least looking into it, just like John will do with his vision that leads to the Book of Revelation.
 4. And what follows – in the first of seven tranches of instructions – is the most important part, the ark of the covenant that will go in the center of the Holy of Holies. The exact place where God will reside. The instructions go from the inside out. He makes the main thing the first thing.
- F. We will get more about the building, but God's design starts with the most important point.

III. V10: **Have them make an ark of acacia wood - two and a half cubits long** (a cubit was a standard unit of measure in ancient world (from your elbow to the tip of your middle finger – so 15 – 20 inches), **a cubit and a half wide, and a cubit and a half high.** (So, 4' by 3') **Overlay it with pure gold, both inside and out, and make a gold molding around it. Cast four gold rings for it and fasten them to its four feet, with two rings on one side and two rings on the other. Then make poles of acacia wood and overlay them with gold. Insert the poles into the rings on the sides of the ark to carry it.** If you know much about the ark it may be because of the Spielberg movie *Raiders of the Lost Ark*, in which Harrison Ford – playing the intrepid Indiana Jones - is trying to find it to be sure Hitler does not get it, because the belief is that whoever has the Ark cannot lose.

- A. Never mind that in I Samuel 4 we read about Hophni and Phinehas, the sons of Eli bring the ark into battle against the Philistines thinking that if they have it they cannot lose the battle, and then they lose both the battle and the ark.
- B. The Philistines take it and put it into their Temple, where it keeps knocking down the statue of their god, Dagon. So they get rid of it.
- C. And then in 2 Samuel 6² we are told that when David wants to bring it back to Jerusalem he has it loaded on a cart, but when it starts to slip off, Uzzah reaches out to steady it and when he touches it, he dies.
- D. As general info:
1. David will collect everything that is needed to build a permanent tabernacle – which is called the Temple.
 2. Several hundred years later - after Joshua leads them back into the Promised Land; after they've move through the era of the Judges and the reigns of Saul and

David, Solomon will build the Temple, which is basically a permanent tabernacle. The designs are much the same, although the Temple is bigger.

3. There will be two of those.
 - a) In I Chronicles we read that David wants to build a house for God and God says no, he has shed too much blood. But he allows David to gather all the supplies for the Temple Solomon will build.³
 - b) That Temple is built around 1000 BC in Jerusalem, and it last until 586, when the Jews fall to the Babylonians.⁴
 - c) We suspect the ark was carted to Babylon.
 - d) The Jews return from exile 70 years later, and rebuilt the Temple. It's not much for the next 400 years, but eventually Herod the Great sets out to rebuild it. That will be a massive, massive project.
 - e) That is the Temple that was in place when Jesus was alive. But it does not last long. In 70 AD it is destroyed by the Romans.
4. Six hundred years later, the Muslims will build the Dome of the Rock on that same spot – on the Temple Mount – which is why that is the most contested piece of real estate on the planet.

E. So, that explains what happens between then and now. Let's turn back to the ark. Exodus 25 tells us a few key things about the ark.

1. Verses 10-14 tell us that it is a 3' x 4' box made of gold.
2. Verse 15 tells us that it has two rings on each side so you insert poles through the rings so you can carry it without touching it.
3. Verse 16 tells us that it is to hold the two tablets of the covenant law, which, God says, "I will give you." Moses does not have them yet.
4. Then we get five verses that talk about the covering of the ark.

IV. **V17: Make an atonement cover** (this is sometimes called "a mercy seat") **of pure gold—two and a half cubits long and a cubit and a half wide. And make two cherubim** (this is a kind of angel. They are guards not messengers. We get more about them – their wings and four faces – in Ezekiel 10)⁵ **out of hammered gold at the ends of the cover. Make one cherub on one end and the second cherub on the other; make the cherubim of one piece with the cover, at the two ends. The cherubim are to have their wings spread upward, overshadowing the cover with them. The cherubim are to face each other, looking toward the cover.**

V. **Place the cover on top of the ark and put in the ark the tablets of the covenant law that I will give you.** This speaks to the law being the foundation of the covenant, and suggests that the holy needs to defend the ethical. (This is a big point. I keep noting that some secular elite have been noting that secularism cannot sustain the things people want.⁶

VI. **There, above the cover between the 2 cherubim that are over the ark of the covenant law, I will meet with you and give you all my commands for the Israelites.**

VII. The rest of chapter 25 is devoted to the description of two other pieces of furniture.

- A. In vs 23-30 we learn about a table that is to be made of acacia wood, overlaid with gold, also to have rings on its sides so it is moved without being touched. It is to hold plates, pitchers and bowls – also of solid gold. This table is where they will set "the bread of the Presence."

B. And then in verse 31 we are told about a six branched lampstand – made of gold – which we now know as a menorah. Menorah means lamp stand.

C. We then get five more chapters of instructions. And we need to not only be impressed by the specifics, we need to be sobered by

VIII. What are we supposed to do with all of this? Let me suggest you hold on to a few things. Let me suggest that you ponder a few big ideas.⁷

A. Don't miss that God shows up. That he moves into the neighborhood. God has a tabernacle built – a building that allows him to dwell in the center of the Jewish camp.

B. Don't miss the symbolism of this place.

1. We find barriers protecting the holy of holies from the people – not so God is protected from the people, but so the people are protected from God. You approached in stages – that forced you to deal with your sin.

2. At the center of the center we find God dwelling with his feet resting on the law.

3. And separating the two – between God and the law - is a mercy seat or an atonement cover that is annually covered in blood.

C. Do not miss that the Tabernacle – and then the Temple – are place holders for Jesus.

1. The Temple is the place where God shows up most fully. It's the intersection of heaven and earth. It is the place where Jews go to pray, to meet with God and to get forgiveness of sins. Jesus becomes that.

2. In John 1:14 we are told that Jesus came to dwell among us. The word for dwell in Greek is skene, which is the same word for tabernacle. What we are being told is that Jesus tabernacles or temples among us.

3. This was shocking and scandalous and unthinkable to the Jews. In ??, Jesus will present himself as the new temple.

D. Don't miss that you become that.

1. In I Corinthians 6, Paul tells us that now that the Holy Spirit dwells in us, our body is a temple.

2. Imagine yourself as a living house. God comes in to rebuild that house. At first, perhaps, you can understand what He is doing. He is getting the drains right and stopping the leaks in the roof and so on; you knew that those jobs needed doing and so you are not surprised. But presently He starts knocking the house about in a way that hurts abominably and does not seem to make any sense. What on earth is He up to? The explanation is that He is building quite a different house from the one you thought of - throwing out a new wing here, putting on an extra floor there, running up towers, making courtyards. You thought you were being made into a decent little cottage: but He is building a palace. He intends to come and live in it Himself.⁸

E. Don't miss how prone we are to being shaped, molded, directed. Even buildings matter.

IX. I am going to end by asking you to do two things

A. First, I want to suggest that you think about the furniture in your life?

1. There is a few hours before the game. You could take a brief walk before you overeat. Spend some time asking – what are the arks and tables, the lampstands and the colors shaping my heart. Who or what is saying what to me when I am not

paying attention? Remember, first we shape our buildings and then our buildings shape us.

- B. Second, I am going to ask you to join me in a prayer of confession.
1. Most merciful God,
we confess that we have sinned against you in thought, word, and deed,
by what we have done,
and by what we have left undone.
We have not loved you with our whole heart; we have not loved our neighbors as ourselves. We are truly sorry and we humbly repent.
For the sake of your Son Jesus Christ,
have mercy on us and forgive us;
that we may delight in your will,
and walk in your ways,
to the glory of your Name. Amen.

X. Questions:

- A. If it is true that first we shape our buildings, and then our buildings shape us. What is shaping you?
- B. What is one part of the “architecture of your life” that you are going to change in order to be shaped to be more like Jesus?

¹ Exodus 29:42; 30:36; Numbers 7:89

² 2 Sam. 6:f, I Chronicles 13:9)

³ I Chronicles 22:7f: David said to Solomon: 'My son, I had it in my heart to build a house for the Name of the Lord my God. But this word of the Lord came to me: "You have shed much blood and have fought many wars. You are not to build a house for my Name, because you have shed much blood on the earth in my sight.

⁴ 2 Kings 24 reports that King Jehoiachin foolishly showed the treasures of Israel (e.g., the gold in the Temple). And so the Babylonians attacked and took it, carting the Jews into exile and destroying the Temple.

⁵ Hebrews 9:5 refers to them as “cherubs of glory.”

⁶ Prager writes a bit about this in his commentary on Exodus, p. 374.

⁷ I do not think that the reason God gives so many details is so it would be easier to audit the project. I am in favor of open bookkeeping, but I do not think that is what is driving this, as Prager argues. FWIW, Prager credits Rabbi Saul Berman with the idea. (*The Rational Bible: Exodus*, p. 364).

⁸ C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*