

I. Intro.

A. You may have seen **ONE** this picture of Bridger Walker and his sister – Brielle. It was taken a few days after he saved her from a vicious dog attack two years ago by – as the picture makes obvious – stepping between them so the dog attacked him.

B. The story went viral, including his dad's statement that Bridger told him that he didn't run away because he thought that, "if someone had to die, it should be him."

C. I have looked at this picture a lot – for a few reasons: For starters, I worry that at 60 I might not have been as brave as Bridger was at six. You have to make these decisions instantly. And while I want to think I'd do exactly what he did if I had a second to think about it, I am not sure I would.

D. Secondly, I've thought about this picture because I've been encouraged by the response. Bridger has been showered with affirmation from athletes and actors and politicians and – well, pretty much everyone. Because everyone recognizes that what Bridger did was good. It was brave. It was selfless. It was right. And those are good things.

1. In the CS Lewis class last week, we looked at *The Abolition of Man*, which some think is Lewis's most important book. In it he argues that there is a universal moral code – a set of universal, objective truths. He notes that no society thinks betrayal is good.

2. But he fears that our embrace of relativism is leading us down the wrong path. If you are familiar with the line, "We make men without chests and expect of them virtue and enterprise. We laugh at honor and are shocked to find traitors in our midst." You know something of his argument.

3. It should be noted that the argument that there are universals did not start with Lewis. Among other places, we find it being made by Paul in Romans.

a) In chapter 1 he argues that while we can suppress the truth, we all know that there is a God.¹

b) And in Romans 2, he argues that even the Gentiles, who do not have the Law, have the law written on their heart.²

4. There is a lot of crazy out there. A lot of confusion and a lot of hypocrisy. We have a hard time thinking clearly or seeing our own hypocrisy. But occasionally there are moments when truth or moral beauty breaks through – and I'd argue that what Bridger did was morally beautiful – and we have reason to see everything differently.

5. I believe that one of the reasons some elite public intellectuals are coming to faith is because they are playing out the path we are on, realizing it does not lead to the things they know are morally beautiful.

E. The third reason I looked at this picture is because it reminds me of a story that has made the rounds for at least forty years. It's about a young boy whose younger sister was ill. She needed a rare blood type. The hospital did not have it. They asked if he would donate his. He said yes, and then, while the transfusion was taking place, he asked the doctor how much longer until he died. And at that point the doctor realizes that the boy thinks he is dying so his sister can live.

1. I doubt the story is true. I'm not sure it matters. It makes the same point – we are moved, at a deep level, by acts of sacrifice. I'd like to hold on to that today, because the sacrifice of Jesus for us is morally beautiful. The problem is, it's a bit shop-worn.
2. All of which brings us to today's passage.

II. Over the last few weeks, we've been looking at the Tabernacle.

A. By the way, last week - after the text was read - I did this riff about curtains. The passage was about curtains, and I said, "Curtains? Seriously? This guy is going to talk about curtains. The national debt is 34T. There are wars in Ukraine and the Middle East. We are marching towards an unthinkable election – and this guy is going to talk about curtains.

B. And then I listed a number of things, including "and the doctor says my blood pressure is too high" and so I come to church looking for a little help. A little inspiration. A little transcendence, that this clown is going to speak about curtains."

C. Some, umm, well, thanks to those of you who have reached out about my health concerns and who are praying for my high blood pressure. Sorry to mislead you. My blood pressure is fine. That was an apparently unsuccessful effort to channel what some of you were thinking. And yes, I do watch my salt intake.

III. Well, over the last few weeks we have been walking through an extended section in Exodus in which God is giving details about the Temple. After calling Moses up the mountain for a one-on-one meeting, he spends much of the next forty days explaining exactly how the tabernacle is to be built.

A. In previous weeks we have made note of the fact that the Tabernacle is not about God needing a place to stay, it is all about God dwelling with his people. It is a way he shows that he is not distant.

B. We've noted about how many ways it is full of symbolism – about what it can teach us about God and about us and about how we can approach God.³

C. We've noted that the Tabernacle is a form of the incarnation and that it foreshadows Christ. I keep underlining that Jesus claimed to be the temple, and citing Paul in I Cor. 6 saying that if we are in Christ, we become the Temple – so God is really, really close.

D. Two weeks ago, we looked at the Ark of the Covenant. Last week we looked at the curtains – the 15' long, 4" thick veil that separated the Holy Place from the Holy of Holies that was ripped in half when Christ died.

1. When He stepped into our place. When he – – think Bridger Walker for a moment – stepped in front of the dog.

E. Today we are in chapter 27 – which includes a description of the altar and the courtyard.

IV. I am reading now – Exodus 27:1 **TWO**

A. Build an altar of acacia wood, three cubits high; it is to be square, five cubits long and five cubits wide. Make a horn at each of the four corners, so that the horns and the altar are of one piece and overlay the altar with bronze.

1. Horns are always a little bit confusing. We know they represent power and strength, because animals with horns use them that way. And we see these imagery with the horns we read about in the Book of Revelation. But we are not 100 percent sure if they were for decoration or served a purpose.

2. Given that the whole point of the altar was to kill things – this is where an innocent third party was going to die so that guilty people could go free. The altar is where the blood of atonement is poured out. Given this, some argue that the horns were used to tie up the animals that are about to be sacrificed. Maybe.

B. V3: **Make all its utensils of bronze** – as we move further out from the holy of holies, where everything was gold – we see lesser metals being used. The stands were silver. Now we get bronze – which is still valuable. It is a mix of copper and tin and it has some great qualities. **Make all its utensils of bronze - its pots to remove the ashes, and its shovels, sprinkling bowls, meat forks and firepans. Make a grating for it, a bronze network** **THREE**

1. The grating is suspended part way down the altar. It separates the meat from the fire and allows more oxygen to get in. (Even a second tier BBQer knows that. I didn't have to call the Holy Smokers to know that).

C. And then we get a few details about making the altar portable: **and make a bronze ring at each of the four corners of the network.** ⁵**Put it under the ledge of the altar so that it is halfway up the altar.** ⁶**Make poles of acacia wood for the altar and overlay them with bronze.** ⁷**The poles are to be inserted into the rings so they will be on two sides of the altar when it is carried.** ⁸**Make the altar hollow, out of boards. It is to be made just as you were shown on the mountain.** HERE **FOUR** and **FIVE** are helpful pictures of the altar.

D. Now we pivot to the courtyard. (As an aside, there is just one here. When Solomon builds his temple, and then when Herod the Great expands the second temple – they will add court yards. God suggests there is to be one.⁴

E. V9: **SIX** **Make a courtyard for the tabernacle. The south side shall be a hundred cubits long and is to have curtains of finely twisted linen, with twenty posts and twenty bronze bases and with silver hooks and bands on the posts. The north side shall also be a hundred cubits long and is to have curtains, with twenty posts and twenty bronze bases and with silver hooks and bands on the posts.**

V. I am going to stop reading here. We get a half dozen more verses with details describing the courtyard. And there are some things to note in these verses:

A. It's an enclosed area of about 10,000 sq. feet – about 150' x '75'. Roughly the size of four tennis courts.

B. And it is surrounded by an 8' fence.

C. And it has one entrance.

D. And there are specific colors to be used when making the curtains – which may have had special meaning or may just have been for beauty.⁵

E. There are more things we might learn from the design – and lots of speculation about what those things are. But, for today, let's keep the main thing the main thing. There is an altar designed for the death of innocent substitutes. It is a fire designed for the sins of the Jews to be atoned for.

VI. God is showing up in the center of the people. To make this point, he needs a tent just like everyone else.

A. But He is not everyone else. He is the holy creator. So there needs to be a buffer area about His dwelling place to keep people from walking up to God, because if they did they would die.

1. And so, the holy of holies is buffered behind the holy place, which itself is buffered by a wall, which is surrounded by a court yard, all of which is behind a wall of curtains.

2. There are layers of protection.

B. And today's big point is that blocking your passage – positioned right between the entrance into courtyard to the Holy Place - is an altar (a fire pit; what one scholar called a stove) - where animals are to be killed to atone for the sins of God's people SO THAT you can enter more fully into God's presence.

C. This altar – this fire pit, this stove – not only is the first thing you see, not only does it block your ability to get to the tabernacle itself – it:

1. Is the biggest piece of furniture in the camp.

2. It is elevated four feet off the ground, so there is no chance to miss it.

3. And it has a fire that is to never go out. (Which makes it a center of attention. When I was a pledge in the fraternity, we went through what was then called Help Week. It was the lead up to initiation. And it featured all kinds of work projects and nonsense, designed to break us or bond us or something. One of the things we were required to do was keep a fire going 24 x 7. And if it went out, bad things would happen. Well, it turns out that keeping a fire going 24 x 7 requires commitment. You have to think about it all the time.

4. The fire of the altar never goes out. This is one of the most important aspects of the temple.

- a) Indeed, one of the reasons we talk about two Temples instead of three – remember, the temple Solomon builds in 1000 BC is destroyed in 586 by the Babylonians; So a second Temple is built by Nehemiah 70 years later. But then Herod builds a massive Temple five hundred years later. But even though it is massively bigger than what Nehemiah had built, they are both thought of as the second Temple because they kept the fire of Nehemiah's temple going and just transferred it to the new Temple Herod built.

D. We need to appreciate the object lesson here.

1. God is in camp. Close. With us. But in order to approach him we need to be pure – which we are not. So we need to keep making payment – which requires someone or something to die.

2. And these deaths end up being carried out day after day, week after week, month after month, year after year, decade after decade and century after century.

3. So, the fire keeps burning for hundreds of thousands of sacrifices. Think of the effect of that. Think of the way the deaths of hundreds of thousands of animals on that prominent altar drove home the point that:

- a) We are sinners.

- b) Sin is a capital offense - the wages of sin is death.

- c) But, substitute deaths are allowed.

E. We get more of the theology and practice behind the altar in the book of Leviticus. There we learn that:

1. There are different kinds of sacrifices: burnt offerings, peace offering, sin offering, grain offerings, fellowship offering.
2. And we also learn how it unfolded. In his book, *The Shadow of Christ in the Law of Moses*, Vern Poythress writes:
 - a) In a typical case the process begins with the worshipper who brings an animal without defect to the priest. The worshipper has raised the animal himself or paid for it with his earnings, so that the animal represents a sacrifice in the sense of the word. It cost something to the worshipper, and a portion of the worshipper's own life was identified with it. The worshipper lays his hands on the head of the animal, signifying his identification with it. He then kills the animal at the entranceway into the courtyard, signifying that the animal dies as a substitute for the worshipper.
 - b) From that point onward, the priest takes over in performing the sacrificial actions. The intervention of the priest indicates that a special holy person must perform the actions necessary to present the worshipper before God, even after the death of the animal. The priest takes some of the blood and sprinkles it on the sides of the bronze altar or on the horns of the altar... depending on the particular type of sacrifice ... All of these actions constitute the permanent marking of the altar as a testimony to the fact that the animal has died.⁶
3. Suffice it to say that it was an expensive and bloody mess that would get your attention. And it went on and on and on and on.

VII. So, where should we go with this? Well:

A. You might find some benefit reflecting on the Psalms that reflect on the courtyard. There are many:

1. Psalm 100 instructed people to: **enter his gates with thanksgiving and his courts with praise!**⁷
2. Psalm 84: 2 reads: **My soul longs, yes, faints for the courts of the Lord; my heart and flesh sing for joy to the living God;** Verse 10 reads: **For a day in your courts are better than a thousand elsewhere. I would rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God than dwell in the tents of wickedness;**
3. Why are people so excited about the courtyard? Because it was the place of forgiveness. The first thing you saw was the flaming altar which represented forgiveness. The doorkeeper in the house of the Lord – the one standing at the flaps of tabernacle – could not help but see the provision that was made for him. There was the altar, and the flames were burning.

B. Now let me pause here to note that many of you would rather not talk about sin. I get it. It's not a pleasant word. We'd like to avoid it. We would like to avoid any discussion of our sin or the discussion of the sins of any friends. We would really like to just go along and get along.

1. But, that is not the way it works. There is right and wrong. Good and evil. And if we want to draw near to God we do so according to His rules.

2. What is the solution? Someone pays our debt. Someone steps into our place and shields us from the consequences of our actions.
 3. The actions of Bridger are not perfect here. He is not perfect, and it does not appear as though his sister did anything wrong. But the idea of someone stepping between us and the dog works at some level. And that is what Jesus did.
- C. As I mentioned last week, we interpret the Old Testament in light of the new. And Hebrews is rich with explanations about Christ and his sacrifice. In Hebrews 13:10 we learn that we end up with a new altar that is better than the old altar. It is the cross.⁸
- D. Hebrews 9:24 has an extended section on this. It reads: **SEVEN**
1. **For Christ did not enter a sanctuary made with human hands that was only a copy of the true one; he entered heaven itself, now to appear for us in God's presence. Nor did he enter heaven to offer himself again and again, the way the high priest enters the Most Holy Place every year with blood that is not his own. Otherwise, Christ would have had to suffer many times since the creation of the world. But he has appeared once for all at the culmination of the ages to do away with sin by the sacrifice of himself. Just as people are destined to die once, and after that to face judgment, so Christ was sacrificed once to take away the sins of many; and he will appear a second time, not to bear sin, but to bring salvation to those who are waiting for him.**
- E. Men and women, the Tabernacle makes many points – three are prominent in today's text.
1. God has shown up in camp. He has drawn near.
 2. In order for us – in our sin – to draw near to him, we need someone to pay our moral debt. The path to the Holy of Holies goes through the altar, which means we need a sacrifice.
 3. Jesus is that sacrifice. He entered time and space to be that sacrifice. He lays down his life for those who want to be with him. Have you asked Jesus to be your sacrifice.
 4. This is a one-time event: Hebrews 10 reads: now when sins have been forgiven, there is no need to offer any more sacrifices.
 - a) We get adopted into his family. It is a one time event.
 - b) That does not mean you look the other way. For starters, there is ongoing confession to be done. But, more than that, Brielle – the little girl who was saved from the dog by Bridger, calls her brother her hero. And she adores him.
 - c) There are a lot of ways this story provides some object lessons. There is a sense in which we need to be like Brielle.
 5. But, like all analogies, it breaks down. Our focus needs to be not on what he did for her, but on what Jesus did for us.
- F. I am going to close the service leading us in prayer for two types of people.

¹ Rom. 1:18f: The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of people, who suppress the truth by their wickedness, ¹⁹ since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them. ²⁰ For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that people are without excuse.

² Rom. 2:13f: For it is not those who hear the law who are righteous in God's sight, but it is those who obey the law who will be declared righteous.¹⁴ (Indeed, when Gentiles, who do not have the law, do by nature things required by the law, they are a law for themselves, even though they do not have the law. ¹⁵ They show that the requirements of the law are written on their hearts, their consciences also bearing witness, and their thoughts sometimes accusing them and at other times even defending them.)

³ “The tabernacle was carefully constructed. God designed it in such a way as to reveal deep spiritual truths about his divine character. He made the tabernacle to communicate his supreme holiness, as well as his covenant love for His people.” (Philip Graham Ryken, *Exodus: Saved for God's Glory* (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 2005), 854.)

⁴ Ryken – p. 814 – argues that the addition of court yards is a problem because it creates divisions God did not intend to occur.

⁵ Ryken, Exodus, p. 813.

⁶ Cited by Ryken – p. 818.

⁷ Psalm 100:4

⁸ Hebrews 13:10: We have an altar from which those who minister at the tabernacle have no right to eat.