

Heb 9:1-5 The Tabernacle: A Parable of New Covenant Worship

In our context today we find the author describing the specifics of Israel's worship as he describes the parts of the tabernacle and the ongoing role of priests. And this system was at the CENTER of their worship. And as long as the tabernacle and its system of worship remained, they must continue to worship God in that way by doing EVERYTHING according to God's pattern (8:5). But with the coming of Christ, that system came to an end. It was good and right and everything they needed to worship God properly for their time Until when? Until a BETTER way of worship is put into place. And this new way, this "new" covenant came in the person and work of our great high priest. Look at v. 11: **"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) . . ."**

So as New Covenant Christians today, how do we preach these verses as we are not Hebrew Christians who are in danger of going back to that system? How do we learn from describing and remembering the tabernacle and the function of those priests? Well, look over at 8:5. **"They serve a copy and shadow of the heavenly things, he was instructed by God, saying, See that you make everything according to the pattern that was shown on the mountain."** They themselves serve as a "type" of that which is REAL. Look at 9:8-9: **"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)."** The word for "symbolic" is *parabole*, which is where we get our word "parable." And what is a parable? It is an earthly story with a heavenly meaning. So, the tabernacle is as an earthly picture for a heavenly truth, namely worship as New Covenant Christians. With this in mind, I have two parts to the sermon: 1) The Tabernacle and 2) The Contents of the Tabernacle. In this way I hope we will see the beauty of Christ in New Covenant Worship. So let's begin.

1. The Tabernacle. The nation of Israel was established as God brought them out of Egypt and led them to Mount Sinai where God spoke with Moses, giving him the ten commandments and all his laws, and all the specifics of how Israel must worship God. And at the center of his worship was the tabernacle and the priests who would serve and "offer gifts and sacrifices" (9:9). This "tent," which was set up and tore down as the people moved had 3 parts, an outer court, and then two main sections inside, the holy place and the holy of holies. There were two curtains, one dividing the holy place from the outer court and another dividing it from the most important holy of holies. And the center of attention was given to the holy of holies, the place where God's "presence" would dwell. And it was the place of the altar where the blood of bulls and goats would be sprinkled in a yearly sacrifice. There was no place like it on the earth. And to no other nation was this tabernacle given, but to Israel. In v. 1 it is called "an earthly place of holiness."

I remember the old movie "Raiders of the Lost Ark" with Harrison Ford. And the whole movie is about his search for this lost Ark. And there is one scene where the Germans open the "Ark of the Covenant" and everyone who looks upon it dies. Well, they take their story from the Bible where the two sons of Aaron died because they did not follow God's instructions in the way they were to worship God. Or during the time of David when Uzzah touched the Ark when they were attempting to move it into Jerusalem. Now, ONLY the priests could enter the holy place, and ONLY the high priest could enter the Holy of Holies, and this once a year. And it was HERE, in

this tabernacle, that ALL of Israel's worship was centered. And later, the Ark of the Covenant would be moved into a new temple, built by Solomon. And this new temple, which also contained an outer court, a holy place, and the holy of holies was patterned after that first tabernacle. Later, after Solomon's temple was destroyed by the Babylonians, a new temple would be built in much the same way. Why? Because God commanded Israel to worship according to the Law of Moses under the Old Covenant. And as long as it was in place, this was the ONLY way to worship God properly.

So, now move forward more than 1500 years, to the time of the Messiah, the Son of God. Do you remember John's words in his Gospel when he says in 1:14: **"And the Word became flesh and dwelt ("tabernacled") among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth."** Brothers and sisters, Jesus is the "tabernacle" of God. In Matt. 12 Jesus teaches on the Sabbath and he says, **"I tell you, something greater than the temple is here"** (Matt. 12:6). And later in the same chapter he says, **"I tell you, something greater than Solomon is here"** (v. 42). This is the theme of the Book of Hebrews. Jesus is the tabernacle. Jesus is the temple. As Jesus said to the Samaritan woman at the well in John 4, **"Believe me, the hour is coming when neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship the Father . . . But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth . . . The woman said to him, I know that Messiah is coming (he who is called Christ). When he comes, he will tell us all things."** Jesus said to her, "I who speak to you am he" (John 4:21-26). Today, we worship God in the face of Jesus Christ. The old tabernacle was a picture of the real thing. It was an earthly type of the real Tabernacle, Jesus Christ. Now, let's move to it's parts.

2. The Furniture. Every part of the tabernacle, every piece of furniture, had a specific purpose relating to Israel's worship. Let's begin with the holy place, which is called the first section and then move on to the second section (holy of holies). I will mention each piece before we move into some applications. Look at v. 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."** A.W. Pink says the holy place represents the "earthly" work of the ministry of Christ as the holy of holies represents the "heavenly" work of Christ. In this first section we see three items.

i. lampstand. This can also be translated "candlestick." There is no window in this part of the tent, for the light of nature cannot reveal spiritual things. But inside this part, light comes from the lamp (Exod. 25:31-36). This lamp was made of gold, without joints or screws. And pure olive oil was provided for it. Some commentators say this represents Jesus as the light of the world. This is certainly true. For Jesus says, **"I am the light of the world"** (John 8:12). However, he also says that He is the light as long as He is in the world. And the world loves darkness. The world does not love the light, but walks in darkness. And He is hidden from their eyes (John 9:5; John 12:35-36). Prov. 4:19 says, **"The way of the wicked is like deep darkness; they do not know over what they stumble."** From this perspective, for the world, it is now night-time, for Christ, the "Dayspring from on high" is absent. This means that the lampstand in the holy place is a parable for us. In its earthly form, it pictures that during this time of darkness, Jesus is our light. And as the olive oil was continually fed into the lamp, so Christ gives us the Holy Spirit as we pilgrim, as we journey, as we fight with sin.

ii. table. Inside the holy place there was a table with twelve loaves of bread. What do you think the table pictures? It is communion. I think of the family table. What happens families when you sit together and have a meal around the table. This was one my favorite things about living in Mexico (1990-1992). Every evening our large family would sit for a couple hours, sharing what happened during the day, stories, laughs, concerns. It was a special time. And whether young or old, we understand this picture of communion. In most cultures, what do you do with your guests? You sit together and have a meal, which is one of the most intimate things you can do. I think of David after he became King of Israel. And in order to show kindness to the family of his enemy, he took Mephibosheth (Johnathan's son who was crippled) to always eat at his table (2 Sam. 9).

iii. Bread. In the original Hebrew, the literal translation of this word is "bread of faces." It is translated in the ESV as bread of the Presence. In other words, the presence of God. You see, this bread in the holy place was replaced every week. It was always "fresh" and always on the table. In Exod. 25:30 God tells the priests: "**And you shall set the bread of the Presence on the table before me regularly.**" And the twelve loaves pictures the twelve tribes of Israel. So when you put the table and the bread together we see a beautiful picture of the Lord Jesus Christ who is always with his people. When he was on the earth, He himself was with them. But, when he ascended, he gave them the Holy Spirit. Here we see a beautiful picture of the presence of God the Father, and God the Son, through the power of God the Holy Spirit. Today, Jesus says, "**I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you**" (John 14:18). No matter what is going on in your life, no matter what trials, tests, difficulty, or persecution, the presence of God is with you through the person and work of the Son. I think of Is. 7:14, quoted again in Matt. 1:23: "**Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel**" (which means, **God with us**)." Now, let's move to the 2nd section, called the holy of holies, where we find 7 items.

iv. golden altar of incense. The literal translation is "golden censer." And if you go back and read Leviticus and Exodus, this "censer" is not in the holy of holies, but instead is in the holy place. One may think the author of Hebrews is mistaken. But, he is referring to the Day of Atonement when the high priest would take burning incense into the holy of holies, thus becoming a part of that room. And this aroma was pleasing to God. And this aroma coming from the incense pictures that God accepted the sacrifice of his Son.

v. ark of the covenant (and its parts). This is the most important and mysterious part of the tabernacle. It was made of "shittim" wood, which was said to never rot. And then it was overlaid with pure gold. The lid, or the mercy seat formed the top part of the ark as it pictured the mercy of God. Built into the ark were the Cherubim, spreading their wings downward towards the center. Ps. 80:1 says of God, "**You are enthroned upon the Cherubim . . .**" This would make the ark of the Covenant God's throne upon the earth. Inside the ark was the golden urn holding manna, the same manna given by God while they were in the dessert. Inside was also Aaron's rod that had once budded with almonds. Finally, it contained the tablets with the 10 commandments. (Quick note: Here, the author mentions these three items inside the ark. But, back in 1 Kings 8:9, it says that only the tablets were inside. Well, the author of Hebrews is speaking of their time in the dessert, way before the ark was transferred into the Temple during

Solomon. And at that time, only the tablets were placed inside.) There is so much more to say about the tabernacle, but not enough time (v. 5).

We cannot overstate the importance of the ark of the covenant. For God's people, Israel under the Old Covenant, the ark was the CENTER of their worship. And every part pictured some qualities and truths about God. Today as New Covenant Christians, we look back upon the ark and we see it's fulfillment in Jesus. Jesus told his disciples: **"If you've seen me, you've seen the Father"** (John 14:9). So let's consider briefly how those parts show us Christ. The gold of the ark picture holiness and perfection. Jesus was the sinless Son of God. The "shittim" wood that was under the gold was said to never "rot." And so Jesus does not change. He is eternal. And the fact that both the wood and the gold are together in one piece picture the humanity and deity of Christ, two natures in one person.

The manna pictures Jesus who came down from heaven and the one who is, "the bread of life." Today Jesus is the heavenly sustenance for our souls. **"For without him we can do nothing"** (John 15). And as the golden urn holds the manna, so in Christ, we see ALL the glory of God as He now sits at his right hand in heaven. And when I think of the budding of Aaron's rod as God confirmed his choice of high priest, so God has confirmed his sending of the Son as he has risen from the dead. (So much more I could say, but let's end with some applications about NC worship).

Application: God always instructs his people as to how they are to worship him. In the OC, it was the ceremonies and rituals and rites of the priestly system under Mosaic Law. They were divine; for that people in that time, there was no fault. But, they were always types, shadows, figures, pictures, of the REAL antitype who is Christ. Today, our instructions are found in the Christ and the New Covenant.

Application: Therefore, we should consider the beauty of the Old Testament types, as they picture the Son of God. The entire Bible speaks of Christ and his beauty.

Application: Worship under the OC was in a place. But, in the New Covenant, our worship is in a person. Yes, they worshipped God through the priests of the tabernacle. But, in Christ, we worship God himself, through the Son. There are no more sacrifices (as in Corban), no more rites and rituals, etc. (I think of all the outward acts of worship in the religions of the world.)

Really, worship has become more simple in the New Covenant. This is reflected in our definition of the church. Centered around the word as we sing, baptize and take the Lord's Supper (there are other things, but do you see the simplicity of it all. Compare with all the rituals of the priests in the tabernacle.) This means that to worship God in the face of Jesus Christ is really very simple as seen in our worship service.

Application: True worship is found ONLY in the Son of God. The world wants to "worship" God in its own way. But, there is only one way. And it is the way God prescribes. **"I am the way, the truth, and the life . . ."**

Application: So, how do we come to Christ now! In faith and repentance. We turn from our sins and believe on the Lord Jesus Christ who takes away our sins, frees us from it's power, gives us

the Holy Spirit and leads us to heaven itself. This means worship is 24/7. And how does the NT tell Christians to worship. I think of Rom. 12:1-2: **“I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.”**

Application: The way we worship sets us apart. We worship as we live godly lives in this world (again Rom. 12:1-2). But, as we come together how do we worship? I think of Col. 3:16: **“Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God.”** As the tabernacle and all its parts and the ways the priests entered worship under the Old Covenant hedged Israel in as a holy nation, so we are also a holy nation, a holy priesthood in Christ. 1 Pet. 2:5 says: **“You yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.”**

Application: Under the OC, there were divine institutions (in fact many of them in the priestly service of the tabernacle). In the NC, what are our divine institutions. There are many, but the two most prominent are baptism and the Lord’s Supper. These are our primary commands under the NC.

Application: Our worship is eternal worship. Worship around the tabernacle was “earthly.” Now, this doesn’t mean “evil” as we consider the word “world.” The emphasis is that their worship was transient and not eternal. Their worship continued as long as THAT system continued. But, when the New has come, the old system must finish. This means our worship in the NC is eternal. And this worship is final and will continue forever. The tabernacle was a portable tent that could be moved and used in another place, and it was made of this world, and of the things of this world. But today, our Lord has finished his mission. He is risen. He ascended back to heaven. And now he sits forever at the right hand of God. And forever, He will be the attention of our worship.