
The Furniture for Worship

Exodus 37-38

Introduction What grave dangers face us today as Christians?

That we will be so overcome by the troubles and trials of our day that we do not pray or commune with God as we ought...

That we will come to give up the faith, stop publicly confessing that we are Christians or live as practical atheists through the week...

That we will become so wrapped in the activities of this life and the problems we struggle with that we stop gathering and fellowshiping with God's people so that we are not enabled, equipped and encouraged as God's people...

What does the Bible say about what we need to not fall prey to these dangers? There is much help for us about these in the Bible. But our text today, through the shadows, the symbols and types points us to the One who will meet all our needs.

So, we will take up this morning and consider all that Bezalel made as the furniture and framework for gathering in worship.

The Furniture in the Tabernacle (37:1-29)

The problem and privilege of *BEING IN* the presence of God is highlighted by the articles of furniture in the tabernacle.

Throne - The Ark of the Covenant (37:1-9)

Bezalel made the ark of acacia wood. Two cubits and a half was its length, a cubit and a half its breadth, and a cubit and a half its height. ² And he overlaid it with pure gold inside and outside, and made a molding of gold around it. ³ And he cast for it four rings of gold for its four feet, two rings on its one side and two rings on its other side. ⁴ And he made poles of acacia wood and overlaid them with gold ⁵ and put the poles into the rings on the sides of the ark to carry the ark. ⁶ And he made a mercy seat of pure gold. Two cubits and a half was its length, and a cubit and a half its breadth. ⁷ And he made two cherubim of gold. He made them of hammered work on the two ends of the mercy seat, ⁸ one cherub on the one end, and one cherub on the other end. Of one piece with the mercy seat he made the cherubim on its two ends. ⁹ The cherubim spread out their wings above, overshadowing the mercy seat with their wings, with their faces one to another; toward the mercy seat were the faces of the cherubim.

The Ark of the Covenant made by Bezalel out of acacia wood was a gold plated chest about 45 inches long, 27 inches wide and high. He made a molding of gold around all the edges and feet on each of the bottom corners so that it would not sit directly on the ground. Through rings attached to the feet were run two, gold plated poles. The lid of the chest, the top for the Ark was called the mercy seat or the place of atonement. Two, solid gold cherubim were also hammered out of the single piece of gold that made the lid. They faced one another while looking

down on the lid and their wings stretched out over the lid with the tips touching one another.

This is where the presence of God would dwell. The cherubim are always associated with Divine Presence. From the gate in the Garden east of Eden to the embroidery in tabernacle and Temple to the portable throne of God in Ezekiel and at the commissioning of Isaiah, the cherubim attend God's throne. From the throne God will govern His people with mercy, instruction and provision. Imagine the awe as this amazing creation took shape under the careful hand of the Spirit-filled craftsman.

Because of the death and resurrection of Christ, we now draw near to the throne of grace in heaven. Many texts in the New Testament show us the throne room of heaven in all its majestic glory. Jesus sits on the throne, the mercy seat, where He Himself as our resurrected Lord rules us, teaches us, hears us and comes to our aid in time of trouble.

Fellowship - The Table of Bread (37:10-16)

¹⁰ He also made the table of acacia wood. Two cubits was its length, a cubit its breadth, and a cubit and a half its height. ¹¹ And he overlaid it with pure gold, and made a molding of gold around it. ¹² And he made a rim around it a handbreadth wide, and made a molding of gold around the rim. ¹³ He cast for it four rings of gold and fastened the rings to the four corners at its four legs. ¹⁴ Close to the frame were the rings, as holders for the poles to carry the table. ¹⁵ He made the poles of acacia wood to carry the table, and overlaid them with gold. ¹⁶ And he made the vessels of pure gold that were to be on the table, its plates and dishes for incense, and its bowls and flagons with which to pour drink offerings.

The second piece of furniture that he made was the table for bread. It was a wooden table, 36 inches long, 18 inches wide and 27 inches tall. He overlaid it with gold and made a 3 inch border and molding running around its top. Where the legs joined the top, he attached gold rings through which another set of gold overlaid poles were run in order for it to be carried about. He also made a set of pure gold dishes, pans, goblets and pitchers. They were to be exclusively used to put out the bread and wine offerings.

The table highlights the Lord Jesus who is our bread of life and our source of joy. As both our sustenance and our joy, it is in Him that our fellowship is full and complete. When we come to the Lord's Table, which fulfilled the Passover, we should also remember that we fellowship with one another in the presence of God. Thus John writes in his first epistle, "*That which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you, so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ. And we are writing these things so that our joy may be complete.*" [ESV]

Illumination - The Lamp Stand (37:17-24)

¹⁷ He also made the lampstand of pure gold. He made the lampstand of hammered work. Its base, its stem, its cups, its calyxes, and its flowers were of one piece with it. ¹⁸ And there were six branches going out of its sides, three branches of the lampstand out of one side of it and three branches of the lampstand out of the other side of it; ¹⁹ three cups made like almond blossoms, each with calyx and flower, on one branch, and three cups made like almond blossoms, each with calyx and flower, on the other branch—so for the six branches going out of the lampstand. ²⁰ And on the lampstand itself were four cups made like almond blossoms, with

their calyxes and flowers, ²¹ and a calyx of one piece with it under each pair of the six branches going out of it. ²² Their calyxes and their branches were of one piece with it. The whole of it was a single piece of hammered work of pure gold. ²³ And he made its seven lamps and its tongs and its trays of pure gold. ²⁴ He made it and all its utensils out of a talent of pure gold.

The next piece of furniture Bezalel made was the golden lampstand. It was a stand for lamps. This single piece of hammered gold was made into a stand for lamps and resembled a tree with a central trunk that ran all the way up the center to the middle lampstand. Evenly spaced off of each side were three branches, making six all together. He made them so they arched out from the trunk with a golden almond bud hanging at the attach point and curved up to the top. He made it so that the cups on the top were at the same height as the central one. The lampstand on each end was shaped like an almond blossom and cupped to securely hold their lamp. He made all the utensils needed to light, snuff and maintain the lampstand and its lamps.

Jesus is the light, not just of the tabernacle, but of the whole world. The fellowship at the table is shared in the presence of the lights of the lampstand. So, after writing about our fellowship in joy, John reminds us, *“This is the message we have heard from him and proclaim to you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all. If we say we have fellowship with him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth. But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin.”*

Prayer - The Altar of Incense

(37:25-29)

²⁵ He made the altar of incense of acacia wood. Its length was a cubit, and its breadth was a cubit. It was square, and two cubits was its height. Its horns were of one piece with it. ²⁶ He overlaid it with pure gold, its top and around its sides and its horns. And he made a molding of gold around it, ²⁷ and made two rings of gold on it under its molding, on two opposite sides of it, as holders for the poles with which to carry it. ²⁸ And he made the poles of acacia wood and overlaid them with gold. ²⁹ He made the holy anointing oil also, and the pure fragrant incense, blended as by the perfumer.

Bezalel built an altar for the burning of incense. It was 18 inches square and 36 inches high. It was made of the now familiar acacia wood and overlaid with gold. He installed a set of golden rings so that it can be carried about on the gold overlaid poles. It was to be placed in the outer room of the Tabernacle just in front of the curtain that divided the rooms.

Listen to Revelation 5:8 and 8:3-4. *And when he had taken the scroll, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb, each holding a harp, and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints. —and - And another angel came and stood at the altar with a golden censer, and he was given much incense to offer with the prayers of all the saints on the golden altar before the throne, and the smoke of the incense, with the prayers of the saints, rose before God from the hand of the angel..* The altar of incense points to Christ in our praying. The prayers of the saints filled with the person and promises of God rise up like sweet incense to the Lord. We take our place on our knees before the mercy seat and there *is no veil*. We pray and He is pleased.

The Court around the Tabernacle

(38:1-20)

The problem and provision of *APPROACHING TO* the presence of God is shown us by the courtyard around the tabernacle and all that occupied it.

Sacrifice - The Altar of Burnt Offering

(38:1-7)

He made the altar of burnt offering of acacia wood. Five cubits was its length, and five cubits its breadth. It was square, and three cubits was its height. ² He made horns for it on its four corners. Its horns were of one piece with it, and he overlaid it with bronze. ³ And he made all the utensils of the altar, the pots, the shovels, the basins, the forks, and the fire pans. He made all its utensils of bronze. ⁴ And he made for the altar a grating, a network of bronze, under its ledge, extending halfway down. ⁵ He cast four rings on the four corners of the bronze grating as holders for the poles. ⁶ He made the poles of acacia wood and overlaid them with bronze. ⁷ And he put the poles through the rings on the sides of the altar to carry it with them. He made it hollow, with boards.

Bezalel, along with his craftsmen, built a massive bronze altar that would be placed in the courtyard of the tabernacle. It was a huge, hollow box, 7½ feet wide, 7½ feet long and 4½ feet high made of acacia wood planks. He overlaid it with bronze and cast horns into the bronze on each of the four corners. He cast a bronze grate with rings on its four corners and hung it, halfway down on the inside of the altar. He attached rings to the outside through which bronze plated poles were thrust and by which it was to be carried.

This is the altar for the sacrifices, the burnt offerings for sin. This is why all of it is made of bronze. It was a more durable metal and would handle the intense heat and carcasses better. But more importantly, the bronze symbolizes judgment. This is where Israel could come and gather. This is where sinners came with their sin offerings. Here, is where sin was dealt with. The altar of sacrifice made being in the courtyard possible, as near as they could come.

The bronze altar was fulfilled by a wooden tree and our crucified Savior. It was there that Jesus bore our sins in His body on the tree and suffered the full out-pouring of the wrath of God. There God's judgment, symbolized by the bronze, was satisfied. Because of the cross and resurrection, we have access to gather in the presence of God. Our access is not just limited to the outer courts, but granted to us into the very throne room itself.

Cleansing - The Washbasin

(38:8)

⁸ He made the basin of bronze and its stand of bronze, from the mirrors of the ministering women who ministered in the entrance of the tent of meeting.

In just a very simple sentence, we are told that Bezalel made the bronze basin for cleansing. This was a large bronze basin set on top of a bronze pedestal. In an interesting note we are told that he did not use just any bronze. Rather, he made the basin from the polished bronze mirrors donated by the women who served and worshipped at the tent of meeting. So, the tent where Moses met with God before the tabernacle was attended to by ladies who served there. These women brought with them the beautiful, polished bronze mirrors made in Egypt. These were highly prized possessions. They gave them as a contribution to the project. Bezalel took these mirrors, apparently bent them into panels, brazed them together and made the basin for washing. Some commentators wonder then if in-

side of this basin was reflective – the person coming to wash could see themselves in the basin itself.

This points us to the cleansing work of the cross, both in our salvation and in our daily walk. Jesus picks up the language as he serves the disciples in washing their feet. The bronze basin was not a place to take a bath, but a place to clean up from the work and filth of the day before entering into the presence of God. This is 1 John 1:9-10 for us. There, as we confess our sins as believer-priests, we are forgiven and cleansed. We can draw near for our consciences are cleansed by His blood (Hebrews 10:19-25).

Gathering - The Courtyard

(38:9-20)

⁹ And he made the court. For the south side the hangings of the court were of fine twined linen, a hundred cubits; ¹⁰ their twenty pillars and their twenty bases were of bronze, but the hooks of the pillars and their fillets were of silver. ¹¹ And for the north side there were hangings of a hundred cubits, their twenty pillars, their twenty bases were of bronze, but the hooks of the pillars and their fillets were of silver. ¹² And for the west side were hangings of fifty cubits, their ten pillars, and their ten bases; the hooks of the pillars and their fillets were of silver. ¹³ And for the front to the east, fifty cubits. ¹⁴ The hangings for one side of the gate were fifteen cubits, with their three pillars and three bases. ¹⁵ And so for the other side. On both sides of the gate of the court were hangings of fifteen cubits, with their three pillars and their three bases. ¹⁶ All the hangings around the court were of fine twined linen. ¹⁷ And the bases for the pillars were of bronze, but the hooks of the pillars and their fillets were of silver. The overlaying of their capitals was also of silver, and all the pillars of the court were filleted with silver. ¹⁸ And the screen for the gate of the court was embroidered with needlework in blue and purple and scarlet yarns and fine twined linen. It was twenty cubits long and five cubits high in its breadth, corresponding to the hangings of the court. ¹⁹ And their pillars were four in number. Their four bases were of bronze, their hooks of silver, and the overlaying of their capitals and their fillets of silver. ²⁰ And all the pegs for the tabernacle and for the court all around were of bronze.

The courtyard of the tabernacle was around 75 feet by 150 feet. Bezalel made the seven foot tall fence that surrounded it and marked the tabernacle grounds off from the rest of the camp. The fence was made of sixty pillars set in sixty bronze bases. Hanging from silver hooks and fillets on the pillars were linen curtains strung between them which he then staked to the ground. He made an opening on the east side which served as a gate. It was thirty feet wide and was made of four pillars and the material hanging between them. It appears that when the courtyard was open, the gate portion was either moved forward or backward so that people could go around it and enter the fence.

The tabernacle and its courtyard invited the people to draw near while keeping them at a distance. The High Priest, once a year, could enter the inner room, the Holy of Holies. The ministering priests could enter the outer room of the tabernacle. The people whether Jew or Gentile who had received the sign of the covenant could enter the courtyard, offer their sacrifices and mingle with the priests. But those who had not been circumcised were not allowed to enter the courtyard at all. So here is not only a fenced and fearsome mountain, but even the portable worship center was fenced. Those who wanted to draw near could not come close.

But Christ has opened for us as the new and living way that we might enter into the presence of God. No longer do we come to a fenced and fearsome mountain. No longer is there a walled compound to keep us out and the mystery of a tent into which only the priests go. No, we can come near into the heavenlies and until that day, we gather together as believers. Even our gathering as believers requires that we enter through Christ our gate, that we partake of Jesus our Sacrifice, that we are washed by the blood of our Lamb and the water of the Word. Then we may, in the presence of God's people, offer up the holy sacrifices of our persons and our praises.

The Inventory of the Materials

(38:21-31)

The process and power for *SERVING IN* the presence of God is highlighted in these last two portions.

Wisdom - The People

(38:21-23)

²¹ These are the records of the tabernacle, the tabernacle of the testimony, as they were recorded at the commandment of Moses, the responsibility of the Levites under the direction of Ithamar the son of Aaron the priest. ²² Bezalel the son of Uri, son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah, made all that the LORD commanded Moses; ²³ and with him was Oholiab the son of Ahisamach, of the tribe of Dan, an engraver and designer and embroiderer in blue and purple and scarlet yarns and fine twined linen.

Moses required that a record of the building of the tabernacle be kept. He also required that an inventory of all the materials that were given and used be kept. He assigned that job to Ithamar, Aaron's son. They also delegated the leadership according to the skills they had: Bezalel as the master craftsman for making things and Oholiab as the decorator through designing, engraving and embroidering.

Here is the wisdom of God unfolded in the outworking of ministry. The project had its clear directions and its Spirit-enabled leadership. But it also had practical, wise steps of action used to implement God's plan. It is evident that this just did not unfold without careful thought, detailed planning and tireless labor. That has not changed. The work of ministry by Spirit-enabled people must still be implemented and carried out by wise planning, careful record keeping and attention to detail. This is where the wisdom of God emerges through faith and the work of the Spirit.

Grace - The Product

(38:24-31)

The following is the New Living Translation which helps us understand the actual amounts and values of what was contributed.

²⁴ The people brought special offerings of gold totaling 2,193 pounds, as measured by the weight of the sanctuary shekel. This gold was used throughout the Tabernacle. ²⁵ The whole community of Israel gave 7,545 pounds of silver, as measured by the weight of the sanctuary shekel. ²⁶ This silver came from the tax collected from each man registered in the census. (The tax is one beka, which is half a shekel, based on the sanctuary shekel.) The tax was collected from 603,550 men who had reached their twentieth birthday. ²⁷ The hundred bases for the frames of the sanctuary walls and for the posts supporting the inner curtain required 7,500 pounds of silver, about 75 pounds for each base. ²⁸ The remaining 45 pounds of silver was used to make the hooks and rings and to overlay the tops of the posts. ²⁹ The people also

brought as special offerings 5,310 pounds of bronze,³⁰ which was used for casting the bases for the posts at the entrance to the Tabernacle, and for the bronze altar with its bronze grating and all the altar utensils.³¹ Bronze was also used to make the bases for the posts that supported the curtains around the courtyard, the bases for the curtain at the entrance of the courtyard, and all the tent pegs for the Tabernacle and the courtyard.

Here is the record of God's amazing grace in the lives of the Israelites. With gold at around \$895.00 per *ounce* or \$14,320.00 per pound, then they gave around \$31,403,760 worth of gold. With silver at around \$17.00 per *ounce* or \$272.00 per pound, then \$2,052,240 worth was collected from a head tax on all heads-of-households who were at least 20 years old. The amount of acacia wood, linen, thread, goats hair and other materials was not recorded here for us. But all that was given stood as the expression and the evidence of God's grace in their lives. This repentant people responded to the call and the commanded with a super-abundant giving.

Conclusion I want to close with two amazing texts that have been the source of my meditations and reflections on this text as being about Christ.

First, the glory of what Christ has done for us in Hebrews 9:1-15 from the New Living Translation:

That first covenant between God and Israel had regulations for worship and a place of worship here on earth. There were two rooms in that Tabernacle. In the first room were a lampstand, a table, and sacred loaves of bread on the table. This room was called the Holy Place. Then there was a curtain, and behind the curtain was the second room called the Most Holy Place. In that room were a gold incense altar and a wooden chest called the Ark of the Covenant, which was covered with gold on all sides. Inside the Ark were a gold jar containing manna, Aaron's staff that sprouted leaves, and the stone tablets of the covenant. Above the Ark were the cherubim of divine glory, whose wings stretched out over the Ark's cover, the place of atonement. But we cannot explain these things in detail now.

When these things were all in place, the priests regularly entered the first room as they performed their religious duties. But only the high priest ever entered the Most Holy Place, and only once a year. And he always offered blood for his own sins and for the sins the people had committed in ignorance. By these regulations the Holy Spirit revealed that the entrance to the Most Holy Place was not freely open as long as the Tabernacle and the system it represented were still in use.

This is an illustration pointing to the present time. For the gifts and sacrifices that the priests offer are not able to cleanse the consciences of the people who bring them. For that old system deals only with food and drink and various cleansing ceremonies—physical regulations that were in effect only until a better system could be established.

So Christ has now become the High Priest over all the good things that have come. He has entered that greater, more perfect Tabernacle in heaven, which was not made by human hands and is not part of this created world. With his own blood—not the blood of goats and calves—he entered the Most Holy Place once for all time and secured our redemption forever.

Under the old system, the blood of goats and bulls and the ashes of a young cow could cleanse people's bodies from ceremonial impurity. Just think how much more the blood of Christ will purify our consciences from sinful deeds so that we can worship the living God. For by the power of the eternal Spirit, Christ offered himself to God as a perfect sacrifice for our sins. That is why he is the one who mediates a new covenant between God and people, so that all who are called can receive the eternal inheritance God has promised them.

Finally, may all the shadows of the tabernacle point us to Christ who is its substance, its reality. May we learn to see the connection between seeing Christ in the Word, knowing what He has done for us and the practical needs we have. May our response to this be shaped by Hebrews 10:19-25.

Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus, by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain, that is, through his flesh, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful. And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near. [Hebrews 10:19-25]

May we draw near to God with one another with a sincere heart and genuine faith.

May we all hold fast to our confession of faith regardless of the pressures upon us, resting in the promises of our faithful God.

May we continue to gather together for the sake of one-anothering, rejecting the practice of many who deny the value of church even as the final Day draws near.