

Glory Came Down

Exodus: Revelation and Redemption

Exodus 40:1-38

Pastor Josh Black

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The Anticipation

It's beginning to look a lot like Christmas. I know there are different feelings in the room when it comes to the holidays, but for me, I love it all. I especially love the traditions that build around the Christmas season. I think it's because of all the anticipation that grows in the weeks leading up to it.

In our family, it all starts Black Friday. Not because of the shopping. We don't do much of that on Black Friday. But that's the day we cut down our tree and hang our lights on the house. It's quite a sight. All eight kids up on the roof hanging lights. The neighbors looking at us like we're nuts. Then as the days pass, the cards start to come in the mail. The concerts and parties start to fill the calendar. Then we start buying and wrapping presents. I get so excited just thinking about my kids opening their presents. And even excited to open a few of my own. Then the day comes. It's a day full of anticipation. The drama of it all; the rhythm of it all. Dare I say, it's glorious!

And all I'm talking about is family traditions. All of this is simply an analogy of the anticipation of what we really celebrate at Christmas. How much more exciting is the anticipation of Christ's coming. And that's what I want to talk about today. But before we get to Christ, we need to begin with Exodus.

Today we come to the final chapter in Exodus. Everything's been building to this point. There's been great anticipation. The point of the whole book is that God wants to make himself known. And this goal has come in dramatic stages. We've seen how God saved Israel out of Egypt by signs and wonders. But that wasn't the end of the story. God wanted them to know him in a deeper way. So he set them apart at Sinai, and established a covenant with them on the fiery mountain. But that wasn't the end of the story either. No, God's end game was to draw near to them. He not only wanted to save them and sanctify them, he also wanted to settle among them. He not only wanted to rescue them, he wanted to reside with them.

And so, over the last few weeks, the anticipation's grown thick as we've studied the tabernacle. All of the instructions for the tabernacle beginning in chapter 25—the furniture, the priests, the offerings, and the Sabbath—may seem anticlimactic in such an epic book. But it's actually the very thing this book's been pointing to! And now, in chapter 40, the day's finally arrived. Now the tabernacle is finally put together.

Chapter 40 gives a lot of instruction on how to set up the tabernacle. But the passage is not an instruction manual. It's actually a story. It's a narrative that ends in a glorious climax. Listen for the anticipation as we read this chapter together.

Exodus 40:1-38¹

¹*The LORD spoke to Moses, saying,* ²*“On the first day of the first month you shall erect the tabernacle of the tent of meeting.* ³*And you shall put in it the ark of the testimony, and you shall screen the ark with the veil.* ⁴*And you shall*

¹ Scripture quotations are from The Holy Bible, English Standard Version® unless otherwise noted.

bring in the table and arrange it, and you shall bring in the lampstand and set up its lamps. ⁵ And you shall put the golden altar for incense before the ark of the testimony, and set up the screen for the door of the tabernacle. ⁶ You shall set the altar of burnt offering before the door of the tabernacle of the tent of meeting, ⁷ and place the basin between the tent of meeting and the altar, and put water in it. ⁸ And you shall set up the court all around, and hang up the screen for the gate of the court.

⁹ “Then you shall take the anointing oil and anoint the tabernacle and all that is in it, and consecrate it and all its furniture, so that it may become holy. ¹⁰ You shall also anoint the altar of burnt offering and all its utensils, and consecrate the altar, so that the altar may become most holy. ¹¹ You shall also anoint the basin and its stand, and consecrate it. ¹² Then you shall bring Aaron and his sons to the entrance of the tent of meeting and shall wash them with water ¹³ and put on Aaron the holy garments. And you shall anoint him and consecrate him, that he may serve me as priest. ¹⁴ You shall bring his sons also and put coats on them, ¹⁵ and anoint them, as you anointed their father, that they may serve me as priests. And their anointing shall admit them to a perpetual priesthood throughout their generations.”

¹⁶ This Moses did; according to all that the LORD commanded him, so he did. ¹⁷ In the first month in the second year, on the first day of the month, the tabernacle was erected. ¹⁸ Moses erected the tabernacle. He laid its bases, and set up its frames, and put in its poles, and raised up its pillars. ¹⁹ And he spread the tent over the tabernacle and put the covering of the tent over it, as the LORD had commanded Moses. ²⁰ He took the testimony and put it into the ark, and put the poles on the ark and set the mercy seat above on the ark. ²¹ And he brought the ark into the tabernacle and set up the veil of the screen, and screened the ark of the testimony, as the LORD had commanded Moses. ²² He put the table in the tent of meeting, on the north side of the tabernacle, outside the veil, ²³ and arranged the bread on it before the LORD, as the LORD had commanded Moses. ²⁴ He put the lampstand in the tent of meeting, opposite the table on the south side of the tabernacle, ²⁵ and set up the lamps before the LORD, as the LORD had commanded Moses. ²⁶ He put the golden altar in the tent of meeting before the veil, ²⁷ and burned fragrant incense on it, as the LORD had commanded Moses. ²⁸ He put in place the screen for the door of the tabernacle. ²⁹ And he set the altar of burnt offering at the entrance of the tabernacle of the tent of meeting, and offered on it the burnt offering and the grain offering, as the LORD had commanded Moses. ³⁰ He set the basin between the tent of meeting and the altar, and put water in it for washing, ³¹ with which Moses and Aaron and his sons washed their hands and their feet. ³² When they went into the tent of meeting, and when they approached the altar, they washed, as the LORD commanded Moses. ³³ And he erected the court around the tabernacle and the altar, and set up the screen of the gate of the court. So Moses finished the work.

³⁴ Then the cloud covered the tent of meeting, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle. ³⁵ And Moses was not able to enter the tent of meeting because the cloud settled on it, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle. ³⁶ Throughout all their journeys, whenever the cloud was taken up from over the tabernacle, the people of Israel would set out. ³⁷ But if the cloud was not taken up, then they did not set out till the day that it was taken up. ³⁸ For the cloud of the LORD was on the tabernacle by day, and fire was in it by night, in the sight of all the house of Israel throughout all their journeys.

This is the Word of the Lord

Like I said earlier, this passage comes at the end of a long story. It's the culmination of all we've been anticipating since chapter 25. And the passage itself, even though it's full of instruction, is actually a story too. So to divide my sermon this morning I want to begin by walking you through the narrative of chapter 40. Then, as we've done the last couple of weeks, I want to show how this passage points to Jesus and why we celebrate Christmas. Finally, I want to consider what it means for us today.

THE NARRATIVE

Most stories begin with a conflict and rising tension. That's true of Exodus 40. The rising tension builds as the LORD gives very specific instructions to Moses and Moses fulfills those instructions. This rising tension is really more like anticipation. In 25:8-9 the LORD said, "Let them make me a sanctuary, that I may dwell in their midst. Exactly as I show you concerning the pattern of the tabernacle, and of all its furniture, so you shall make it." In 29:45 we're told that after they do everything according to God's instruction, God will then dwell among the people of Israel and be their God.

It's like putting lights on the tree or on your house. As you put them up, you anticipate plugging them in! In a much greater way, as Moses begins setting up the tabernacle, there's an anticipation that God will finally dwell among his people.

This rising action comes in two simple movements. In verses 1-15 the LORD gives Moses a set of commands—seven have to do with setting up the tabernacle and seven more with anointing the tabernacle and the priests. Then in verses 16-33 we're told seven times that Moses did exactly what the LORD commanded him.

So the structure is simple, but the instructions are very detailed and orderly. And Moses' follow-through is equally precise and orderly. Why? Why all the detail and precision?

The basic reason is to show that the tabernacle is a new creation. I've tried to demonstrate this over the last few weeks, so I won't rehash all of those sermons. But I'd like to briefly summarize what we've learned.

For starters, the instructions start in the most holy place and move to the courtyard. They begin with the most precious, or heavenly objects, and move to the most common, or earthly objects. This shows that heaven is coming down to earth.

Also, there are two sets of seven commands. And we're told seven times that Moses did exactly as the Lord commanded him. As we saw last week, the repetition of seven probably alludes to the seven days of creation. Remember how the creation story ends in Genesis 2: "Thus the heavens and the earth were *finished*, and all the host of them. And on the seventh day God *finished* his work that he had done, and he rested on the seventh day from all his work that he had done..." (Gen. 2:1-2). And notice in Exodus 40:33 that after Moses set up everything, we're told he *finished* the work! This sounds almost identical to Genesis 2:1 when on the seventh day God finished his work.

God is re-establishing a place in the tabernacle, like Eden in creation, where he resides with his people in relationship with them.

So when Moses begins setting up the tabernacle, you can feel the anticipation; the expectation that God will come to dwell with his people. Moses erected the tabernacle just as the LORD commanded, but God's glorious presence didn't come down.² Then he put the testimony in the ark just as the LORD commanded, but the Lord's presence didn't come down. He put the table, the lampstand and the golden altar in the tent just as God commanded, but God's glorious presence didn't come. Then he set the altar of burnt offering at the entrance of the tabernacle and the basin

² Philip Graham Ryken and R. Kent Hughes, *Exodus: Saved for God's Glory*, Preaching the Word

between the tent and the altar just as the LORD commanded, but God's glory didn't come down. Finally, in verse 33, he erected the court around the tabernacle just as the LORD commanded.

Moses finished the work. Then it happened! Look at verse 34: "Then the cloud covered the tent of meeting, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle." At last! God's glorious presence came down. God now dwells among his people. The purpose of creation. The purpose of redemption. It's finished.

The resolution to the story comes in verses 36-38. We're told that God's presence stayed with his people throughout their journeys. God will go with his people into the Promised Land. Eden has been restored!

Well, kind of – sort of. There's a twist in the narrative. Look at verse 35: "And Moses was not able to enter the tent of meeting because the cloud settled on it, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle."

God is among his people, but his main man—Moses—can't enter; he can't go in! What's going on with this?

CONNECTION TO CHRIST

As the book of Exodus unfolds, the anticipation builds. At each stage God accomplishes part of his plan to make himself known, but at each stage there's a disappointing twist. After God saves his people out of Egypt, Israel grumbles in the wilderness. After God sanctifies them through covenant at the mountain, Israel makes a golden calf. After God finally comes down in glory to settle among them in the tabernacle, we see that not even Moses can enter.

The anticipation has built and been fulfilled in Exodus. But the whole book actually creates a further anticipation. All of the disappointing twists make us anticipate a greater salvation, a greater covenant, and a greater way into God's glorious presence. They make us anticipate the coming of Christ.

How does this specific twist at the end of Exodus 40 make us anticipate Christ? Let me try to explain.

Even though Moses can't enter the tabernacle here, in Leviticus 9 he does enter. But it's only after sacrifice is made for his sin. He entered, but only by blood! Remember when God banished Adam and Eve from the garden? He set cherubim and a flaming sword to guard the way to the tree of life. God's people were banished from God's presence and life. There's a connection here to the tabernacle.

The entrance to the Most Holy Place was blocked by a curtain. And on that curtain were embroidered cherubim. They served as a reminder of the garden. The only way to enter the presence of God is through the death of a substitute. Even Moses couldn't enter the tent of meeting without a sacrifice.

How does all of this anticipate the coming of Christ?

Later in Israel's history, God's presence left the temple. (You can read about this in Ezekiel.) God's presence was connected with his covenant. But the people broke his covenant. So God's presence

left the temple. It moved from the Most Holy Place, into the Holy Place, through the courtyard, and finally departed over the Mount of Olives. When the exiles come back from Babylon and rebuild the temple, guess what *doesn't* come back? God's glory and his presence never returned to the temple.

But God's glory and presence did return when Christ came. In John 1:14 we're told, "The Word became flesh and dwelt [or tabernacled] among us and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth." Jesus is Immanuel, God with us (Mt. 1:23). He's the new tabernacle. And the new temple.

But not only did God's glory come down in Christ. The most glorious thing in Jesus' life was the hour he was lifted up on the cross. He made a way for us to come into God's presence through *his* blood. Not the blood of an animal.

It's interesting. In John 2, Jesus says his body is the temple. And in verse 19 he says, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." And that's what happened. After Jesus was arrested, he came down from the Mount of Olives, from the same place God's presence left in Ezekiel. And he was crucified. The temple was torn down. Then it was built up when he was raised. And remember what Jesus said when he was hanging on the cross? Right before he breathed his last? He said, "It is finished" (Jn. 19:30).

In Christ, God's work is finished. And this finished work on the cross is the beginning of God's new creation.

But that's not the end of the story. In the same way that the glory of God in Exodus pointed to a greater glory in Jesus, Jesus' first coming points to his second coming. His birth, death, and resurrection are the climax of all of history. But it leads us to anticipate the resolution of history we read of in Revelation.

Even though God dwells in believers now, we still wrestle with sin and death. Even though we know God now, we do not know him fully. But we will! The Holy Spirit is "the guarantee of our inheritance, until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory" (Eph. 1:14).

When Christ returns, the new heaven and the new earth will come down from heaven. The New Jerusalem will come down from heaven. And at that point we will see his glory and experience his presence in a way we've never known it before. "The dwelling place of God will be with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God" (Rev. 21:30). Forever! Uninterrupted, unshrouded. We'll behold his face forever.

This is the greatest news ever told.

APPLICATION FOR US

So how should we live as we anticipate Christ's second advent? To finish our time this morning I'd like to offer three applications: We should believe the good news, we should declare the good news, and we should demonstrate the good news.

Believe

First and foremost, we should believe the good news. We should place our trust in Jesus. His death on the cross for our sins is the only way to be saved. Do you believe that? Do you believe you're cut

off from God because of your sinful heart? And do you believe Jesus has made a way for you to be restored to relationship with God?

You must trust in Christ to be saved from your sins. You must trust in Christ if you want God's glory to dwell in you. And that's what you were created for.

It's amazing. In Christ, we're not only forgiven for our rebellion and disobedience to God. If we trust in Christ, we are a new creation. God gives us a new heart that enables us to obey God. And we become the temple of God. God's glorious presence that came down on Sinai and that filled the tabernacle, now fills us. If we are in Christ, we are indwelt by the Holy Spirit. This is good news. We're called to believe it.

Declare

We're also called to declare this good news. To go tell it on the mountain that Jesus Christ is born. We need to go and tell people about the significance of Christ's incarnation. God has taken on flesh and tabernacled among us for a reason. He has come to save us from our sins. This is good news. And we're called to declare it!

It's hard to take the gospel to the nations. But here's the thing. Jesus promises he will be with us as we go. Just like God was with Israel and directed their steps into the Promised Land. Jesus is with us in the Great Commission. He's with us. So, we go and declare the gospel.

Demonstrate

We're also called to demonstrate the implications of the gospel in our lives. Like Israel, we're a kingdom of priests. We share and show what God has done. We share that God dwells with us. And we show that God dwells with us.

How do we do that? One specific way this is seen is in our life together as a church. There's a really interesting passage in 1 John 4:12. It begins saying, "No one has ever seen God..." This is the same language used in John 1:18 talking about Jesus. "No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father's side, he has made him known." That is, Jesus displays the glory of God. He brings God's presence to earth. He makes God known. But in 1 John 4:12 it says something different: "No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God abides in us and his love is perfected in us."

Do you see what's going on here? In John we hear that God's glorious presence is seen in Jesus. But in 1 John we hear that it's also seen in the church when the church loves one another the way God has loved us in Christ.

He even says that when we love one another, it's clear that God abides in us, that he resides in us, that he dwells among us, in us. When we love one another, his glory is seen through us.

So, let me ask you a question. Are you loving one another in the church? Are you gathering with the church regularly? Are you building up the church with your gifts? Are you giving generously to the church?

These are some of the ways we love one another and demonstrate God's abiding presence with us.

We have a responsibility. Those who have come to know God are called to make him known. Those who have been blessed are called to be a blessing. We're called to declare his glory. And to display his glory. Especially in our lives together.

Let us not keep God's glorious presence to ourselves. Let us share it with the world with our lips and through our lives.