

March 16/17, 2024

The God Who is With Us
Exodus: The God Who Is With Series
Exodus 40:34-38
Pastor Bryan Clark

I want to invite you this morning to think about the great Creator God of the universe. The God whose glory is so magnificent that if Moses would have seen God in all His glory, it would have destroyed him. Here's my question: Do you think it's possible that that God wants to be with you more than you want to be with Him? That's what we want to talk about this morning. If you have a Bible, turn with us to Exodus Chapter 40.

This morning, we will finish up our study through the book of Exodus. Ryan did a great job last week of walking us through the renewal of the covenant and Moses experiencing the glory of God. From that point, Moses goes back up Mount Sinai. He will stay there for 40 days; he will get the final details related to the tabernacle. So, as Ryan mentioned, the tabernacle is this mobile tent, this mobile temple, in order for a holy God to dwell in the midst of sinful people. It's worth repeating that from chapter 25 all the way to the end of the book—chapter 40—other than the interruption of the golden calf, what's been happening is God is laying out all the details related to the building and the protocol of this tabernacle, this tent of meeting, in order to make it possible for a holy God to dwell in the midst of sinful people. So now at the end of verse 33, it reads, **Thus Moses finished the work.** So, everything has been gathered; everything has been built; everything has been put together; this whole thing is set up and finally in place. Verse 34:

Then the cloud covered the tent of meeting, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle. Moses was not able to enter the tent of meeting because the cloud had settled on it, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle. (*NASB, Exodus 40:34-35)

So this must have been an absolutely magnificent moment, where after all the gathering of the materials—it was very meticulous; it had to be built exactly this way, set up this way; everything is finally in place—and this cloud that is the presence of God and has been with them since they've left Egypt, now descends into the tent of meeting and fills it with His glory. The cloud is the focus; it shows up in each of the final five verses. It is the very presence of God with His people.

It's very interesting how the journey of the nation of Israel basically replicated Moses' own personal journey. All the way from the beginning of Exodus, Moses is delivered from the Pharaoh, and delivered from death in the Nile River as Pharaoh's own daughter would rescue him and raise him. But he ends up having to flee from Pharaoh, out into the wilderness. He will travel in the Sinai Desert and end up at the base of Mount Sinai. There he will experience Yahweh, the great I AM, the God of Israel. First in a burning bush, God will call him to be the one to deliver His people from bondage. But Moses, dealing with his own fears and insecurities, basically says to God, "I don't know. Maybe think about somebody else." And what does God promise him? God speaks to him and says, "I will be with you."

So then Moses goes back to Egypt, and the nation is delivered from the bondage of Pharaoh. The nation has to exit out of Egypt, and they will travel across the Sinai wilderness—retracing the steps of Moses. They will end up at the base of Mount Sinai, and this is God's declaration. "I will be with you every step of the way to the Land of Promise." So this is quite a remarkable moment. The glory of God so fills the tent of meeting that even Moses is not allowed to go in. Now, this isn't all that difficult to understand in the sense that Moses was not allowed to just go up and down Mount Sinai as he felt like. Moses would have to wait for an invitation from God to ascend the mountain, to experience God. You remember in chapter 24, he waited six days until God finally extended the invitation for Moses to come up. But starting now, the tabernacle had all kinds of details and protocol that would define how one would enter the presence of God.

Now, just to give you some sense of what we're talking about, I want to kind of lay it out for you in a very simplified version. So the tabernacle was to sit right in the middle of the camp of Israel. So there were three tribes to the north, three to the west, three to the south, and three to the east. Literally, it would sit right in the midst of the people. It was always to be situated so the gate faced the East, so we're setting it up right here. The area was marked off by a *fence*, so to speak, kind of a *pole and curtain setup* that went 150 feet long and 75 feet wide. It was seven and a half feet tall. It was essentially a fence to mark off the area. It was not possible for either an animal or a person to just go meandering through, so it defined the boundary. There was only one gate, and the gate always faced the East. When you go in, about two thirds of the way back, there was a tent and that was the *tent of meeting*. It was 45 feet long, 15 feet wide, and 15 feet high. There were two compartments, a larger compartment called the *holy place* that was 30 by 15. And then behind that, a much smaller area—15 by 15—that was called the *holy of holies*.

The first thing that you would experience when you walk through the gate is the *brazen altar*. This was the altar where animal sacrifices were offered all day, every day except the Sabbath. Anyone from Israel could enter through that gate into what was called the *courtyard*, but they would come with a sacrifice to be offered to, in some way, atone for their sin. Looking then ahead to the tent of meeting, right outside the entrance was a *laver*. It was a place where there were two basins of water: one for washing your hands, one lower for washing your feet. Only the priests were allowed through the entrance into the tent of meeting, and they would go through that every single day they had responsibilities to carry out there. So, they would wash their hands; they would wash their feet, and they would enter into the holy place. On the north wall was a *table of showbread*. On the south wall was the *lampstand* that was required to burn 24/7, and straight ahead against the wall that separated the holy of holies was an *altar of incense* that filled this space with a wonderful aroma. Behind that was the holy of holies. The veil that separated that area was not like a curtain. It was a woven fabric wall, and woven into the fabric were two cherubim that essentially guarded that space. No one was allowed in that space where God dwelt except the high priest, and the high priest could enter that space one time a year on the Day of Atonement.

In the holy of holies, was the *ark of the covenant*. The ark was covered with gold and had two cherubim on top that faced one another. In between them, on top of the ark, was what was called the *mercy seat*. It is the place where the high priest, once a year, would go behind the veil and would pour the blood of an animal on the mercy seat in order to atone for the sins of the people over the last year. So, with that in mind, we pick it up then in verse 36:

Throughout all their journeys whenever the cloud was taken up from over the tabernacle, the sons of Israel would set out; but if the cloud was not taken up, then they did not set out until the day when it was taken up. For throughout all their journeys, the cloud of the LORD was on the tabernacle by day, and there was fire in it by night, in the sight of all the house of Israel. (Vs. 36-38)

So the very presence of God, seen in this cloud, would fill the holy of holies. And as long as He was there, they would remain, and they would go through the prescribed protocols. But when that cloud would lift, it told them it was time to move, to head closer to the Promised Land. So, God was in charge of the timetable, and God was in charge of the direction. Can you just imagine how magnificent this would have been? The cloud would come up, and they had very strict orders about how the tabernacle was to be taken down, how it was to be folded up, how it was to be transported. They would follow the cloud and the fire until it stopped. Then, once again, they would set all this up with the tribes on the four sides. Then when everything was ready, the presence of God would drop back into the holy of holies, and they would remain there until God determined it was time to move on. God's promise, "I will be with you!"

I find it just stunning that God wanted to be with these people! Ever since they've left Egypt, they have been nothing but trouble. They have grumbled every step of the way. They have accused God of all kinds of terrible things. They have engaged in pagan idolatry and sexual immorality. And yet, God wants to be with His people. When you look at verse 34, it opens with the word, "**Then**". There's a lot of scholars that believe that there shouldn't even be a paragraph break here. Others even go so far as to say there shouldn't be a sentence break here. The Hebrew word that's translated **then** could just as easily be translated *and*. There's kind of a sense of urgency in the grammar of this part of the text, which gives this feeling of anticipation, of eagerness. God couldn't wait to dwell in the midst of His people, so He put together this complex way in which He as a holy God could dwell with His people. Literally, the last line of the book of Exodus in the Hebrew Bible is **in all their journeys**, that God was with them; God was faithful; God was with them every step of the way...**in all their journeys**. But of course it's obvious that, at the end of the book of Exodus, the story is not resolved. They're in the wilderness; they're enroute; they have quite a way to go...but that's where Exodus ends.

It's also a reminder that the book of Exodus is just part of the greater story of the Bible. We have mentioned several times in our study of Exodus, that there are many connections, allusions, in Exodus back to the book of Genesis. This is one ongoing story within the tabernacle itself. Looking at the fabrics, the colors, the skins—all the details—there's no question there is a reference back to Genesis chapters 1 and 2 of an understanding of the world as God intended it to be. We go back to Genesis 1 and 2, and we are reminded that God made Adam and Eve in His image, in order to be with Him, in order to experience relationship with Him. The description in Genesis 1 and 2 is very interesting as it relates to the tabernacle. You have a large area that seems to be defined by Eden. Within that you have a smaller area that is the garden. At the center of that you have the tree of life. You have a courtyard; you have a holy place. You have the holy of holies. We are told in Genesis chapter 3, that in the cool of the day God would come to Adam and Eve, and they would stroll through the garden, just enjoying being together. It was the world as God intended it to be. But in Genesis chapter 3 is the great rebellion—we refer to it as the Fall. Adam and Eve sin against God, and the consequence of that is they are evicted from the garden. They are marched out of the

garden, and the text specifically says that they are driven east of Eden. Literally, from that moment on, the story of the Bible has been the story of an exodus—an exodus out of bondage, an exodus out of exile, headed back to the Land of Promise, the world as God intended it to be. Literally, before you can turn a page in the Bible, God has already made a promise that He will do something through the seed of a woman to make it possible for sinful men and women to once again experience a relationship with Him. So the story advances, then, to the book of Exodus.

It's interesting how much within the tabernacle connects to Genesis 1 and 2, to such an extent some theologians even refer to the tabernacle as a portable Eden. So, we get to the book of Exodus and we find ourselves at Mount Sinai. If you think about the description of Eden and the description of the tabernacle, and you just move it vertical, you have Mount Sinai. You have the people at the base of the mountain. You have Moses and Aaron partway up, and you have only Moses all the way to the top. What defined Genesis 1 and 2, was it was a place where heaven and earth came together as one. Now you have the courtyard, the base of the mountain, and you have the holy place partway up, but only Moses goes to the top of the mountain, which is a place where heaven and earth once again come together. And Moses radiates the glory of having been with God. If you then think of Mount Sinai and make it horizontal, that's what the tabernacle is. It's why a lot of scholars refer to the tabernacle as a portable Sinai. You have the courtyard, you have the holy place, and you have the holy of holies. You can't miss the detail that, when this was all set up, they were to set it up with the entrance facing the East. So when we, as people made in the image of God, were driven out of the garden, which way were they driven? East of Eden! So the journey now is an exodus; we are enroute back. So we enter from the East, through the courtyard, through the holy place into the holy of holies.

But the story goes on. We're reminded in the New Testament that there was no way for the blood of bulls and goats to actually atone for sin. They were just symbolic. They were a foreshadowing of the Promised One who would come and finally make atonement for sin. In John's gospel, he identifies Jesus as the eternal Son of God. He's referred to as the Word. Then in verse 14, he tells us the Word became flesh and dwelt among us. But literally the Greek is this: the Word became flesh and *tabernacled* among us. Jesus now is the fulfillment of the tabernacle. Jesus, now in His flesh, is the Son of God coming to dwell in the midst of His people.

John the Baptist calls the people out into the wilderness. Why the wilderness? Because that's where repentance takes place. Why the wilderness? Because this was the beginning of a second exodus. It was a new journey under a second Moses. He would identify Jesus as the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. Jesus then would identify Himself with the pieces of the tabernacle. He would identify Himself as the *water of life*. Through Him, we can be cleansed from our sin. He would walk into the holy place, and He would identify Himself. "I am the *bread of life*. I am the *light of the world*." And through Jesus, instead of the stench of our sin, God smells the sweet aroma of Christ. It would be Jesus who would pass through the veil. Jesus would go past the cherubim who are on guard. Jesus would go to the mercy seat, and Jesus would offer His own blood on the mercy seat.

Both Paul in Romans chapter 3 and John in 1 John chapter 2 refer to Jesus as **the propitiation for our sin**, the payment for our sin. But that Greek word translated **propitiation** is the same word translated *mercy seat*. Jesus would be the mercy seat where His blood would be shed, once for all

time, to finally make atonement for sin. The Cross would in a sense be the Tree of Life where Jesus would shed His blood that we might live. Then there is this amazing moment in Acts chapter 2 where, once again, you have the drama of the fire and the smoke and the cloud. Only this time the Spirit of God descends not into a temple made with human hands, but the temple of His people, as the very presence of God would dwell within His people. When Jesus died on that cross, that massive veil was torn in two, symbolic of the fact that that which separates us from a holy God had now been taken care of by the blood of Jesus. And we now have access directly into the presence of a holy God, to be with Him.

But make no mistake, the exodus is not complete. Revelation chapters 21 and 22 tell us there is coming a day when once again, heaven and earth will come together as One in the new heaven and the new earth. It is then and only then when the exodus will finally be complete. And for the first time in our lives, we will know we are finally home—the world as God intended it to be.

The story of Jesus, on one hand, is very exclusive. There is only one gate. There was only one gate into the tabernacle. There's always only been one gate. Jesus was very clear that there's only one way. But, on the other hand, it's very inclusive. As a matter of fact, it's the most inclusive message possible. Because God has done the work through Jesus on the cross, His salvation is offered freely to anyone who is willing to receive it. It doesn't matter who you are, doesn't matter what you've done, doesn't matter what your sins are, doesn't matter what's been done to you—it doesn't matter! God makes His offer freely as a gift of His grace to anyone who chooses to receive it.

To me, it is absolutely staggering what God has been willing to do in order to be with you. I have a lot of people in my life that love me, and on most days, they want to be with me. But nobody, nobody wants to be with me like God wants to be with me. So now we're back to our question: “Is it possible that God wants to be with you more than you want to be with Him?” I'd really encourage you not to be dismissive of that question. Don't just toss it aside with, “You know, me and Jesus, we have an understanding. Everything's okay.” Don't do that! It's an honest question. I can imagine a couple sitting down with a marriage counselor and the wife says, “You know, I don't think my husband loves me anymore. I don't even know if he likes me because he certainly doesn't want to ever be with me.” And the husband is dismissive. “Of course I love her, but there's so many other things I have to do.” Don't do that to God. It's an honest question, “Do you really want to be with Him?” Do you really want to know Him? Do you really want to pursue Him as one would pursue a lover? Do you want to serve Him? Do you want to worship Him? Do you want to experience His glory? It's a good thing to think about this Easter season because this is what Easter is all about. I have no doubt that God really wants to be with you. The only question is whether or not you really want to be with Him.

Our Father, we were a bit stunned when we rehearse what you have been willing to do to make it possible to be with us. God, I pray that we, as Your people, would be defined by a true passionate pursuit of You. In Jesus' name, Amen.

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WINTER 2024 // WEEK 10

Life Group Questions

Exodus – The God Who Is With // March 16/17, 2024

The God Who is With Us // Exodus 40:34-38

Introduction

Throughout our study in Exodus, we've seen the many ways God has committed Himself to dwelling among this people. Now as we close out this series, we see God's glory fill the Tabernacle to travel with them wherever they might go.

To think through the main ideas in the sermon and prepare for your discussion together, we invite you to look over all the questions on the following pages and write your thoughts down before you meet with your group. Due to preferences over a wide range of groups, we do not expect you will cover every question each week.

Warm Up *(Suggested time: 30 min)*

- 1) What was the last concert you attended? Share your experience.
- 2) **Would you rather** be an extra in an Oscar-winning movie **or** the lead in a box office bomb?
(increase the fun by naming your movie of choice)

Getting Started

Transition into group discussion.

- 1) Open group discussion with prayer. Here are a few potential prayer items:
 - a. For the Spirit of God to lead you in truth
 - b. For the fruit of the Spirit to be cultivated in your lives
 - c. For grace to hear and apply what the Spirit says to you
 - 2) Choose someone to read the passage aloud for the group.
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Study Questions *(Suggested time: 40 min)*

- 1) What have been your take-aways from the back half of the Exodus story about God being with His people?

- 2) God made Himself real to the Israelites by providing for them in tangible ways. List out as many manifestations of God as you can in this second half of Exodus (see Ex. 15:22-25, 16:11-13, 17:5-6, 17:8-13, 23:20-22, 34:29-35).

What message was God trying to communicate to His people through these manifestations?

How has God shown Himself to you – in big or small ways? Share something you learned about Him through those experiences.

- 3) Chapters 25 – 40 of Exodus contain specific details about how the Tabernacle was prepared and set up. Read a short summary in Exodus 40:17-33. What was the purpose of the Tabernacle in the community of God's people?

Read Hebrews 9:11-15 together. How is Jesus described in terms related to the Tabernacle?

In Hebrews 9:14 a “lesser to greater” comparison is used to emphasize how much better Jesus is as the sacrifice for sin. How would you explain in present day terms that Jesus is much better? (pro tip: read the passage in The Message or New Living Translation)

- 4) Pastor Bryan explained how the narrative arc of scripture shows what we were made for (Genesis 1-2), what happened to change things (Genesis 3), what God was willing to do to restore us (Gen 3:15 – the Cross), and what the ultimate fulfillment of His plan looks like (Revelation 21-22). Consider how Easter fits into this narrative. What did we learn about in Exodus that foreshadows Jesus and His work on the cross.

Think about your own faith journey and how the story of Easter fits into your life. How well do you understand the depth of Jesus' love for you on the cross?

How are you now living as an expression of Jesus' resurrection into a full and free life with Him?

If you have questions about what it means to fully put your faith and trust in Jesus Christ, we encourage you to ask your Life Group leader to explain it to you. It's also good to let your group know to pray for you as you grow to understand the love and sacrifice Jesus made for you on the cross and how His resurrection fulfilled God's plan to restore you to Himself.

Personal Spiritual Exercises

Just like physical exercises help strengthen and stretch our bodies for healthy living, these spiritual exercises are meant to move us spiritually in ways that may be new so we might experience inner growth. Since God longs for us to experience Him with our whole selves—mind, body, spirit—we invite you along each week to strengthen your souls with suggestions and prompts.

Prayer Focus: Learn and recite this prayer in Revelation 4 as a way to enter into the praise of the glory of God that we've learned about in Exodus:

*"Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God, the Almighty—
the one who always was, who is, and who is still to come." (vs. 8)*

*"You are worthy, O Lord our God,
to receive glory and honor and power.
For you created all things,
and they exist because you created what you pleased." (vs. 11)*

Scripture Focus: Psalm 63 was written by David in response to God's presence during his own wilderness experience. Read or listen to this Psalm throughout the week, paying attention to the images and feelings that come as you experience the Words washing over you. The point is not to gain "head knowledge" but a stirring in the heart as the Holy Spirit brings the Word to life in you.

Prayer *(Suggested time: 20 min)*

A significant part of “coming together” is being open and honest with our lives. Sitting in a group of people for prayer may be new or it may be familiar to you. If you would rather not pray aloud when it is your turn, feel free to pray silently and then say “Amen” aloud signaling the next person in the group to pray. Whether or not you choose to verbalize your prayer, everyone is a participant in sharing this time before God together.

Take a few moments to prepare a prayer request. What did the message, working through the above questions or the discussion cause you to notice about your own relationship with Jesus? Would you be willing to share your prayer request with the group?