

FIVE FORKS BRETHERN IN CHRIST CHURCH

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SCRIPTURE: *Exodus 40:20-34*

DATE: *August 25th, 2019*

LOCATION: *Auditorium (Bill)*

SERMON: *“Intimacy – God With Us”*

(Acknowledgment to Tim Keller for his series titled “The Language of Salvation” and Harvey Sider for his paper on “Following Jesus”.)

This morning we wrap up our sermon series titled ***From Slavery to Intimacy***.

Back during the first week of this series, I said that for the Israelites, all they knew of God were the stories that had been passed down to them, generation after generation after generation. He was known as “The God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob...the God of our Fathers” because He had been silent for hundreds of years.

But then everything changed, and for the month of August, we’ve been reading about how God went from being “the God of our Fathers” to a God who became actively involved in the lives of The Israelites.

The first week we found the Israelites in **slavery** in Egypt, and God called Moses to lead them out. The second week we read of their **salvation** as God delivered them by parting the Red Sea. Last week we read of how they began **working out their salvation**...God leading them through the desert, humbling them, testing them, bringing what was in their hearts to light.

All of this because of His desire for **intimacy**...to become personal, intimately involved in their lives.

We've come to see that the story of the Israelites is our story in many ways. Slaves to sin...saved by the person and work of Jesus...then Jesus teaching us how to live now that we are saved...all because of His desire to be intimately involved in our lives.

All month we've been in the book of Exodus, and this morning our Scripture text is found in the very last chapter where we find Moses setting up the tabernacle. This tabernacle is really a tent of sorts, and it is very significant, because it is in this tabernacle that God's presence will come down and reside *with* the Israelites. But before we get there, let's see....

1. WHAT'S HAPPENING

...as God goes about this process of bringing the Israelites into a far more personal relationship with Him.

When we left off last week, the Israelites were just starting to learn what it meant to be free, and it wasn't going all that well. In the midst of a lot of grumbling, complaining and even a longing to return to their old way of life in slavery, you might remember that God graciously provided bread from heaven and water from a rock.

After this, they continued on their way to Mount Sinai, eventually arriving at the base of the mountain.

After a period of time Moses left the Israelites at the base and went up the mountain to meet one-on-one with God. He was there for a total of 40 days and 40 nights, and while there, God gave Moses numerous instructions, including instructions for a box – a chest - to be built.

But this wasn't just any chest, as it was to be overlaid with gold inside and out. This chest would be called the Ark, same name as the boat that Noah built, but something completely different...this is not a boat but a beautiful chest that we are talking about.

God then gave these instructions to Moses...

Exodus 25:16 “Then put in the ark the Testimony, which I will give you.”

“The Testimony” will be the Ten Commandments that God will soon be providing to Moses on tablets of stone.

God not only give instructions to Moses on how to build this ark, He also gave Moses instructions when it came to the construction of this tent - the tabernacle - that would become God’s dwelling place among the Israelites.

The **image** up on the screen will give you some idea of what this tabernacle was to look like.

There were these outer curtains the whole way around, with **the entrance** to the tabernacle being found on the far right. After entering through these outer curtains, you would make your way into the courtyard, you would eventually come to another smaller, covered tented area, and pass through another curtain, entering into what was called **The Holy Place**, containing a table with bread, a lampstand and altar of incense.

Finally within this tented area there would be yet another curtain leading into what was called **The Most Holy Place**. Here were God’s instructions to Moses regarding this third and final curtain...

Exodus 26:33 “Hang the curtain from the clasps and place the ark of the Testimony (the chest containing the Ten Commandments) behind the curtain. The curtain will separate the Holy Place from The Most Holy Place.”

God is establishing a way – a path - to enter into His presence, first through the outer curtain, then across the courtyard, through the second curtain and then to the third.

Now it’s important to know that only one person - the High Priest – would be permitted to pass through this third and final curtain and enter into The Most Holy Place. And he would do so only once a year, to enter into God’s presence *on behalf of all the people* and to make atonement for their sins.

It may not seem like much, but for the Israelites, to have God’s glory and His presence actually dwelling with them, it was so much more than they ever had before. And it was portable,

meaning that as the Israelites would go from place to place, God's presence would – in a very tangible way - go with them.

So, up on the mountain, God has given many instructions to Moses, including the building of the ark and the construction of the tabernacle. Finally, before Moses descended down the mountain to rejoin the Israelites, God gave Moses the Ten Commandments which He had written on tablets of stone.

Now, how long did I say that Moses was up on the mountain with God? 40 days and 40 nights. That seemed like a long time for the Israelites down at the base of the mountain.

Exodus 32:1 When the people saw that Moses was so long in coming down from the mountain, they gathered around Aaron and said, “Come, make us gods who will go before us. As for this fellow Moses who brought us up out of Egypt, we don’t know what has happened to him.”

It would almost be comical if it weren't so tragic, The Israelites took their jewelry, melted it down and made it into an idol shaped like a calf, looked at it when it was done and declared that *this* was the god that had brought them out of Egypt.

When Moses came down from the mountain and saw the calf and the idol worship, he threw the stone tablets to the ground, breaking them into pieces. 3000 Israelites ended up losing their lives as a result of this great sin. But God eventually had Moses bring to Him new stone tablets, and once again He wrote out His commandments for the people to have.

It was now time to begin the construction of the tabernacle...material was gathered, craftsmen were selected and they went to work. We do not know how long it took to fashion the curtains, build the altar, the table...I read anywhere from 4 to 6 months...but after the work was done, they brought everything to Moses for him to inspect.

This brings us to the final chapter of Exodus, where Moses takes what has been given to him, and begins setting up the tabernacle.

Exodus 40:20-34 He took the Testimony and placed it in the ark...Then he brought the ark into the tabernacle, as the LORD commanded him.

Moses placed the table in the Tent...outside the curtain and set out the bread on it before the LORD, as the Lord commanded him.

He place the lampstand in the Tent...and set up the lamps before the LORD, as LORD commanded him.

Moses placed the gold altar in the Tent...in front of the curtain, as the LORD commanded him. Then he put up the curtain at the entrance to the tabernacle.

He set the altar of burnt offerings near the entrance of the tabernacle...,as the LORD commanded him.

He placed a basin between the Tent of Meeting and the altar and put water in it for washing...as the LORD commanded Moses.

Then Moses set up the courtyard around the tabernacle and altar and put up the curtain at the entrance of the courtyard. And so Moses finished the work.

Then the cloud covered the Tent of Meeting, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle.

The glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle.

Now I realize that what I've just read may sound like a lot of unnecessary detail, especially after all of the action found in the first half of Exodus...the burning bush, the plagues, the night of Passover, the parting of the Red Sea...but this is actually the climax of the Exodus story, for God's presence is now dwelling with His people.

Our story – we all have one - our spiritual journey reaches its climax when – like the Israelites - we come to experience the presence of God, only in a far more intimate way. Let's talk then, about how intimacy with God comes about for you and I.

2. INTIMACY COMES THROUGH JESUS

Did you notice that when God had Moses set up the tabernacle, He had him do it from the inside out, and that there were these curtains...3 in all. In a way they served as barriers,

especially the third and final curtain. Only the High Priest could enter through this curtain and even then only once a year.

Do you have any idea what the High Priest was required to take with Him into the Most Holy Place? He had to take a sacrifice...something had to die, in order to atone for the sins of the Israelites. And it would be an animal, the blood of an animal was shed.

All of this however, what just a foreshadowing of the coming and the work of Jesus. Because while today there is no tabernacle, there are not curtains that you and I must pass through in order to experience the presence of God, the barrier of our sin still remains. We are no different than the Israelites in our sin.

What *is* different is what God has done so that you and I can experience not just His presence dwelling in a tent, not just when we gather here on Sunday morning, but experience His ongoing presence as He dwells in our hearts and lives. Again, this is what God desires...what we desire.

If you have read John's gospel, you may know that John begins with a powerful statement...words that resonate with us and have stuck with us: *"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God."* John is talking about Jesus, and he is establishing the fact - as he does throughout his gospel - that Jesus is God.

Just a few sentences later, John writes these words which again are familiar to many of us:

John 1:14 The Word became flesh, and made his dwelling among us.

In the original language, the word that John used here was "tabernacled". *God – Jesus - became flesh, and tabernacled among us.* John does not do this by accident.

He wants you and I to know that – more than a cloud - the actual presence of God came down and dwelt among us.

And while here, He offered Himself as a sacrifice, a final sacrifice, once and for all. You see, the Scriptures tell us that those annual animal sacrifices offered by the priest were nothing more than...

Hebrews 10:4b “...an annual reminder of sins, because it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sin.”

The Scriptures are right of course. It's why John goes out of his way to make clear that Jesus was and is God. He came, not just so that we could be saved, but to open that 3rd and final curtain, and make a pathway for you and I to be able to experience the presence of God. Not just salvation as great as that is...but intimacy with God.

The coming and the work of Jesus in bringing this about is also foreshadowed by how the Scriptures describe Moses completing his work when setting up the tabernacle.

Exodus 40:33-34 Then Moses set up the courtyard around the tabernacle and altar and put up the curtain at the entrance of the courtyard. And so Moses finished the work.

Then the cloud covered the Tent of Meeting, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle.

It was when Moses “finished” the work that the presence, the glory of God came down.

Are you aware of Jesus' last words before He died on the Cross?

John 19:30b “It is finished.”

When Jesus spoke those words, it really *was* finished...You and I – everyone in here – can know not just about God, but know Him personally and intimately...because of the work of Jesus.

And to drive this home, when Jesus cried out “It is finished”, something really remarkable happened at a location not that far away, at the temple located inside the city of Jerusalem.

Matthew 27:50-51 And when Jesus cried out again in a loud voice, he gave up his spirit. At that moment the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom.

*“Almost as if two great big hands took it, and said, ‘We won’t be needing this anymore.’”
(Keller)*

The writer of Hebrews says it best...

Hebrews 10:19 Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place (God’s presence) by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near to God...

Let us draw near to God. With confidence.

Here’s what this looks like for me: I come in here and praise Him and worship Him, I worship Him singing along with some song while I’m driving down the road...*and I know that He’s receiving it.*

I wake up in the morning and some things that lie ahead of me that day fill me with anxiety and stress, and I go to Him and experience His peace. I go to Him when I have sinned, and I experience His forgiveness. I look to Him for guidance and direction and know that I can trust Him completely.

It’s all because of Jesus, making a way - a path - so that I can experience this relationship with a personal God that is becoming increasingly intimate.

And while making that pathway to God is something only Jesus could accomplish, what I’ve been trying to make clear throughout this series is this continual dynamic that takes place in our relationship with God where He has His part, and we have ours.

And so now, after 4 weeks, we finally come to ours. Jesus has done so much, in fact, He's done His part, all He can do to bring intimacy with God about. What must we do? What is our part?

And again, from my personal experience, it can all be boiled down to one word: **Obedience.**

3. INTIMACY THROUGH OBEDIENCE

You see, Jesus can cut through all the barriers so that I'm able to experience intimacy with God, and without His work nothing would matter...but if I choose not to obey Jesus in this area or that area, I'm just setting up barriers of my own...barriers that – in spite of what Jesus has done – will keep me from experiencing intimacy with God.

How can I knowingly and willingly disobey Him in this area or that area and then go before Him as if nothing is wrong? I may not lose my salvation, but it absolutely sets up a self-imposed barrier between myself and God.

Quick question...When I read our main scripture text found in Exodus 40 earlier this morning, did you happen to pick up on a phrase that kept emerging time and time again? It was...

“As the Lord commanded him.”

Moses placed the ark in the Most Holy Place “as the Lord commanded him.” He placed the table where it went, the altar where it went, the lampstand where it went, and on and on...and in every instance the words that followed were: “As the Lord commanded him.”

Not “*close*” to what the Lord commanded...not “*some*” of what the Lord commanded...*exactly* as the Lord commanded. And so what Moses did is what I need to do. What all of us who are followers of Jesus need to do. Obey Him. Because if we pick and choose, if we obey in some areas or even most areas but not in this one area....It's going to have an impact on the relationship we have with Him.

So let's wrap this series up by looking at 3 different passages where Jesus talks about the importance of obedience...and how, if we obey Him, we will come to experience two things we long for...no longer slaves to sin...and intimacy with God.

In the first passage Jesus says...

John 8:31-32 “If you continue in my word, you are truly my disciples; and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.”

To “continue in His word” means to be obey His word. Jesus is saying, *“Look, if you want to experience what it feels like to live free, it's as simple as this: you need to obey me.”*

In order to get from slavery to intimacy, we need to continue in His word...we simply need to obey Him. I have found that I need to do this whether I want to or not...I just have to be committed to it. My old sin nature wants me to embrace this and dabble in that. No! And through the years I've discovered a consistent pattern... His way was best all along.

In the second passage Jesus says:

John 14:23 “Those who love me will keep my word, and my Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them.”

This is the language of intimacy. When we hear Jesus saying, *“Those who love me will keep my word”*...He's talking about obedience. To keep His word means to obey Him. If this is you, look at what Jesus says: We will come and make *our home* with you.

God's moving in. Moving into your life, rejoicing with you when it's good and coming along side of you when it's bad. His presence, His peace, His comfort, His listening ear, His guidance...when you walk in obedience there is nothing – no barrier – that can come between you and Him.

In the third and final passage, Jesus says...

John 15:9-12 “As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you; abide in my love. If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father’s commandments and abide in his love. I have said these things to you so that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete. This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you.”

Jesus says something here that really stands out. After talking about commandments - plural...He seems to put all others aside and zeros in on one.

And what is the one commandment Jesus gives here...the one commandment that He singles out if we want to abide in His love? What does Jesus refer to as “my commandment”?

“Love one another...as I have loved you.”

And so, I ask myself, “How has Jesus loved me?”

He loved me when I was a slave to sin. He loved me in my brokenness. And so rather than be disgusted by, annoyed by the brokenness of others, I want to love them as Jesus loved and continues to love me in all of my brokenness. Otherwise I’m setting up a barrier that will keep my from experiencing intimacy with Him.

He loved me as I’ve been working out my salvation. He has loved me as I’ve grumbled and complained...and so I want to love others who are also working out their salvation, and not judge them or feel contempt towards them if they grumble, complain and quarrel. Otherwise, I’m erecting a barrier.

And so let me ask you that same question I ask myself: “Are you loving others as Jesus loves you?” He loved you when you were a slave to sin. He loved you in your brokenness. He loves you as you’re working out your salvation...when you’ve grumbled, complained...He loved you.

Jesus calls us to a life of obedience, simply obeying His commands, starting with loving one another as He loved us.

And one more time, He does not command us to do anything without making provision for us to obey it. His provision is His presence and His power.

And so it all comes down to this: Obedience.

If we look to Him to help us obey and keep His commands, we will find that we are no longer controlled by sin...that He has, in fact, brought us **From Slavery to Intimacy**.