

A Look at the Court of the Tabernacle

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Exodus 26, 27

The outer court

As an Israelite, how glad you would have been to wake up each morning, look out of your tent and see the tabernacle, God's dwelling place among His people. The first thing to meet your eye would have been the pillar of cloud ascending from the holiest place. It reminded you that God was there, dwelling among His people.

You could just see the top of the tent of meeting (comprised of the holiest and the holy places) rising above the long line of linen hangings which formed a fence around the court of the tabernacle. This fence formed a rectangular court with sides of about 60 metres by 30 metres in length. You knew that the priests were able to serve in this court of the tabernacle and in the holy place. You were also reassured by the fact that the high priest could enter into the Holiest of All once a year to make atonement for his own sins and those of the people.

If the Holiest of All represents the very presence of God, then we know that Christ (our great High Priest), by virtue of His sacrifice, is there as a glorified Man. He is set at the right hand of the Majesty on high. Through Him and the perfection of His sacrifice, all Christian believers have access to the very presence of God. Hebrews 10:19 tells us: 'Therefore, brethren, having boldness to enter the holiest by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way which He consecrated for us, through the veil, that is, His flesh'. We are free to approach the very throne of God through prayer.

All Christians form a 'holy' priesthood which offers up spiritual sacrifices to God (1 Pet. 2:5-10). One such sacrifice is that of praise, which is the giving of thanks to His name. Christians also form a 'royal' priesthood, which is to display His praises in this world. It was the original purpose of God that all Israel should have been a kingdom of priests, but they failed. Therefore, the Old Testament priesthood was limited to Aaron and his sons. But the work of Christ has reversed this in the Church. Every Christian is a priest. Amazing grace! Each believer is able to exercise priestly functions in their personal lives. However, this does not give license for all to use these functions when assembled in public gatherings. In the public sphere of service, the

Lord notes the creatorial distinction between men and women. He appointed the man as head of the woman. Therefore, the men have the responsibility to serve publicly.

As a result, we might say that:

- (1) The Holiest of All is marked by the worship of the Father;
- (2) The Holy Place is marked by communion;
- (3) The Court of the tabernacle is marked by testimony (this will be seen in its furnishings as we continue).

Before we can understand how the tabernacle sets forth man's approach to God, we must appreciate how it represents the Lord Jesus Christ. It is a material type (or representation) of the glories of God's Son. Significance is found, not only in the materials used, but also in the dimensions which are set out.

The hangings

First, we find the hangings of the court were of fine-twined linen. In Revelation 19:8, we read that fine linen is the righteousness (or better, righteousnesses) of saints. The works done by Christians here on earth which are good (that is to say, they glorify God) are symbolised by this fine linen, clean and white. Where this linen is mentioned in Exodus, then it represents in the first place the One who was the Perfect Servant, the Lord Jesus Christ. He went about doing good. He could say to His Father, 'I have glorified thee on the earth. I have finished the work that thou gavest me to do' (John 17:4). In Exodus 21:5-6 we read of the devoted Hebrew servant who said, 'I love my master, my wife, and my children; I will not go out free'. He had served for his allotted time. He could now go free. But he had married and had children. They, by law, still belonged to his master. But this servant was willing to give up his freedom because of love. Having plainly stated his love, he was then taken and, at the door or doorpost, his master bored his ear through with an awl. The blood from the piercing was a token that he would serve the master for ever.

Christ took upon Himself the form of a Servant (Phil. 2:7). He was devoted to God not just to death, but to the awful death of the cross. There, pierced and hanging upon a tree, He was, as the Scripture says, made a curse and forsaken by God. Oh, how He loves! He loved God (His Master). He loved the Church (His wife). He loves each believer individually (the children). We read of the Lord Jesus as the Servant in many Scriptures. The Gospels, particularly that of Mark, speak of Him as the Servant-Son. Isaiah 42:1-9 present the first of four songs relating to Christ as the Perfect Servant. (The others are found in Isaiah 49:1-13; 50:4-11; 52:13-53:12.)

This Servant is chosen. He is the Messiah. The Spirit of God is on Him to enable the work to be done. Jesus spoke of His own body as the temple of the Holy Spirit. In a day of so much injustice, it is good to read that this Servant will finally bring justice to the nations. Yet in these verses in Isaiah He is seen in His meekness. As a Servant, He makes no public display of Himself. He works tenderly and quietly seeking no selfish gain or fame. A bruised reed represents those harmed from without, those who were persecuted or held captive. The Lord Jesus came to set at liberty those who were bruised. He preached deliverance to the captives. On the other hand, He did not despise a smoking flax. This describes those who are harmed so much from cares and anxieties on the inside that they may be at the point of giving everything up — even life itself. He came to heal the broken-hearted. Are you feeling bruised? He is able to both support and strengthen you. Are you a smouldering wick? He is able to give you an abundant life of testimony. An example of the Lord's service is given in Matthew 12:10-21, where these actual words of Isaiah are quoted.

The total length of these hangings, excluding the gate, was 280 cubits. (A cubit was just over half a metre). This number may be represented by seven times forty. Seven speaks of completion, perfection and rest in Scripture. Christ is the perfect Servant of God. Forty is the number of probation. With wild beasts threatening Him and hunger gnawing at Him, He was tried by Satan for forty days and forty nights in the wilderness (Matt. 4:1-11). But, relying upon the Word of God, He was triumphant.

The hangings were five cubits high. The number five in Scripture denotes the grace of God meeting the needs of human responsibility. In the fifth psalm we find an expression of God's favour to His own people. This and other Scriptures speak of five as representing God's grace. However, in the parable of the talents, we see a test of stewardship linked with the number five (Matt. 25:14-30). In the parable of the five wise and five foolish virgins we again see the thought of human responsibility (Matt. 25:1-13). As the responsible Servant Christ was obedient. He fulfilled His responsibility perfectly. At the same time, He was full of grace and truth.

The pillars

Let us move on to a consideration of the pillars which were the supports for the hangings. In Scripture, pillars are noted for two things: supporting strength and witness. Christ is called the faithful and true Witness (Rev. 3:14). Here, in the court of the tabernacle the witness is in the materials used. Strictly speaking, Scripture is silent as to the material from which the pillars were made, but if it were of the same as the others then it would have been shittim wood. This wood was extremely durable. It is called in the Septuagint translation 'incorruptible wood'. Trees in the Bible often represent men. This wood speaks of the incorruptible humanity of Christ. He was a Man of spirit, soul and body just as we are, however, there was no sin in Him. He knew no sin. He did no sin.

The fastenings and hooks

The fastenings and the hooks of the pillars were made from silver. This was the metal used in the atonement money in Old Testament times. 'Atonement' means 'covering' as in respect to God dealing with sin. It was this 'atonement' silver which was used for these fastenings and hooks of the pillars (Ex. 30:16). Therefore, we may conclude that silver speaks of the 'glory of redemption'. It reminds us of Christ who is our Redeemer. It is to Christ that this glory is given and we are privileged to share in it (John 17:22). He is pre-eminent as the Redeemer, we are the redeemed.

Peter reminds us of the cost of our redemption when he writes: 'Forasmuch as ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, from your vain conversation received by tradition from your fathers; but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot' (1 Pet. 1:18-19).

The sockets

The sockets of the pillars were made from brass. Brass is representative of the 'glory of divine righteousness'. Throughout the Bible, it symbolises a righteousness which tests mankind. Christ has met every claim of divine righteousness as a Servant here on earth. Satan could find no fault with Him. Pilate found no fault with Him (John 19:6). But this righteousness is seen in particular in His work at the cross. The hymn writer puts it like this:

*The perfect righteousness of God
Is witnessed in the Saviour's blood;
'Tis in the cross of Christ we trace
His righteousness, yet wondrous grace.
God could not pass the sinner by,*

*Justice demands that he should die;
But in the cross of Christ we see
How God can save, yet righteous be'.*

Thus, the salvation of men, women and children has a righteous basis. The glory of that righteousness is found in His name, Jesus Christ the Righteous (1 John 2:1). He is the Lord our righteousness (Jer. 23:6).

The number of pillars

The number of pillars is also significant. There was a total of sixty pillars supporting the hangings and gate of the court. Fifty-six of these applied specifically to the fine twined linen and four to the gate of the court. If my times tables are correct: $8 \times 7 = 56$. Here, we again see completion or perfection in the number seven, while the number eight denotes a new beginning. The latter is indicated by Noah being the eighth person who stepped out of the ark to begin a new order of things on the earth (2 Pet. 2:5).

In a similar way, the tabernacle set up a new order of things. God was prepared to dwell among His people. There would be a new way of approach to Him. So the number eight speaks of Christ in resurrection. He now lives after the power of an endless life. He has provided a new and living way into the presence of God.

Pins and cords

Linked with these pillars we find pins and cords. The brass pins or nails served as tent pegs. With cords they kept the pillars and hangings upright. No matter what natural heat or storm came against the hangings, the pins held firm.

The pins may well express the steadfast purpose of Christ to do the will of God. This is expressed elsewhere in the words: 'He set His face as a flint' (Isa. 50:7). He would not be diverted from the purpose of God no matter what trials engaged Him. He remained firm in His endeavours. In Isaiah 22:20-25, we find Eliakim set up as a nail in a sure place. He was to bear the glory of his father's house. In a coming day, the Lord Jesus Christ, the BRANCH, will be a nail fastened in a sure place and He will successfully bear all the glory of His Father's house. He shall reign gloriously for a thousand years. Even now we know that all the promises of God are in Him Yes and Amen (2 Cor. 1:20).

The cords linked the pins to the crowns of the pillars. They remind us that Christ had to suffer before He could be glorified. We hear His words in Luke 24: 'Ought not Christ to have suffered these things and to enter into His glory?' So, where there are cords there is security and prosperity. The latter is indicated by Isaiah 54:2 where the cords may be lengthened to show an

increase in the size of a home. It is prophetically written of Christ that He shall see of the travail of His soul and be satisfied.

The gate of the court

This brings us to consider the gate of the court. This was formed by a hanging of fine twined linen embroidered with blue, purple and scarlet.

Numbers 15:38-39 gives us an indication of the meaning of the colour *blue*. There we find that the children of Israel were commanded to make fringes in the borders of their garments and to put upon these a ribband or cord of blue. This was so that they would remember and do all the commandments of the Lord. They were to be holy to God. The Lord Jesus was the Author and the Fulfilment of that law. And, as Man down here, He was the only One to successfully keep that law. Jesus is the second Man, the Lord from out of heaven. He is a completely new kind of Man — one who delights to do the will of God. The colour blue speaks of Him as the Holy One — the Son of God. This answers to the Gospel according to John, in particular.

The colour *purple* suggests the glory which followed Christ's sufferings. Once the ashes had been removed from the altar of burnt offering, a purple cloth was placed over it (Num. 4:13). He by the eternal Spirit offered Himself without spot to God. He is the One whose perfect offering brought pleasure to God. Once that work was completed, He was glorified. This colour also suggests His coming glory, because purple is the royal colour of the nations (Esther 8:15). It reminds us that the Lord Jesus is the King of kings and Lord of lords, who shall appear in glory one day. He shall reign over this world which will then be filled with the glory of God as the waters cover the sea. So in Mark 15:17 and John 19:2 where we see His suffering commencing under the hands of Gentile soldiers who dressed Him in purple as a King in order to mock Him. By contrast, the Gospel of Matthew ends with an expectation of the kingdom of God being set up. Nothing is written there about His ascension into heaven.

The *scarlet* speaks of all His dignity as the Perfect Man. Whether as the Firstborn, the Deliverer, the Sacrifice for sin, or as the King of the Jews, He is honourable and worthy of honour. Luke deals with Christ as the Perfect Man, but it overlaps with His right to David's throne which is emphasised in Matthew's Gospel.

As we have seen previously, the fine twined linen reveals Christ as the Servant-Son. This aspect of Christ is highlighted in the Gospel according to Mark. Every aspect is brought together by the craft of the embroiderer. This suggests to me that all of these attributes and glories are skilfully blended in Christ by the Holy Spirit of God Himself. Christ was conceived

by the Holy Ghost as to His manhood and, later, anointed by that same Spirit as to His ministry.

The gate was twenty cubits by five cubits. Twenty is the number of expectancy in the Scriptures. For example, Jacob waited twenty years to get possession of his wives and property (Gen. 31:38). Five, as we have seen speaks about the grace of God meeting the needs of men in responsibility. At the present time, Christ is seated at the right hand of God waiting for His enemies to be made the footstool of His feet (Ps. 110). Then He shall come to reign. Prior to that, He will come for His Church in order to claim her for Himself.

However, when we consider the gate as a means of men approaching God, then we remember the words of the Lord Jesus recorded in John 10: 'I am the door, by Me if any man enter in he shall be saved; and shall go in and out and find pasture' (John 10:9). There is, as Scripture states, no other name under heaven, given among men, whereby we must be saved. The gate took up most of one side of the court. There was to be room for all. Jesus invites every individual to come to Him and find rest for his soul.

The brazen altar

If we were to enter through the gate, then we would be confronted immediately by the brazen altar. It was made from shittim wood, which speaks of the incorruptible humanity of Christ, and the brass which speaks of the glory of divine righteousness.

The altar is one of burnt offering. This means that the testing fire of God's judgment upon the offering brought out the perfection of that offering. This ascended as a sweet fragrance to God. In Ephesians 5:2 we read: 'And walk in love, as Christ also has loved us, and has given Himself for us an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling savour'.

The purpose of the offering was twofold: first, it was to give God pleasure; and, second, it was to cause the offerer to be accepted in all the worth of the offering. So we read in Ephesians 1:6 that God has made us accepted in the Beloved, namely, His beloved Son. Just think of that! The Christian today stands in all the worth of God's beloved Son! The aim of this acceptance by God's grace is that we should be holy and without blame before the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ in love. The blood placed on the horns of that altar shows us that the power of the

sacrifice is active for us at all times. This altar was five cubits in length and breadth and three cubits high. We have seen that the number five suggests the grace of God meeting the needs of responsible man, while the number three denotes an abundant witness of the Trinity to Christ's finished work.

The brazen laver

The final item in the outer court was the brazen laver. The dimensions of the laver are not given; but it was made from the brazen mirrors which were used by the women. So the polished brass that had been used for women to see reflections of themselves, symbolises the glory of God's righteousness whereby we can see true reflections of ourselves. When we compare ourselves to Jesus Christ the Righteous, then our failings are seen immediately. We are found wanting. Hence, the need for moral cleansing.

This basin was filled with water. Now the priests had to wash their hands and feet in this water before entering the tabernacle. If they failed to do so then they were in danger of death. The Lord Jesus, in John 13, took a basin of water and a towel and in true servant character washed the disciples' feet. He said that they had to allow this if they were to have part with Him. Later, He said to them, 'Ye are clean through the word I have spoken unto you' (John 15:3). In Ephesians 5:26 we read that Christ is cleansing His Church by the washing of water by the Word.

The laver, therefore, speaks of the cleansing power of the Word of God. It is not only required to cleanse us from the defilements of this world and to keep us in the way of God, but also to prepare us for His service. Of course, one of the major purposes of the Scriptures is to reveal Christ to our hearts. Remember His words to those on the Emmaus road: 'O fools, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken: Ought not Christ to have suffered these things, and to enter into His glory. And beginning at Moses and all the prophets, He expounded unto them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself' (Luke 24:25-27). As He is revealed to us by the power of the Spirit, then our hearts must burn within us and our voices must be raised in thanksgiving to God our Father, because when Christ is shown to us by faith, then we are privileged to see the Father who sent Him. Hallelujah!