

## “The Tabernacle-Centered Community” (Exodus 25:8)

We’re in the series of “The Tree of Life” studying the Pentateuch. Today is the 6<sup>th</sup> message. The topic is “The Tabernacle-Centered Community.”

The tabernacle was called “the tent of meeting (Lev 1:1).” This indicates that it was the primary place of encounter between God and His people.

Whose idea was it to build the Tabernacle? Did the Israelites see Egyptians build it and imitate them? Or, was it Moses’ idea? No, right? God commanded Israel to build it through Moses. It was not a suggestion, but it was a commandment. The tabernacle is not something that doesn’t matter whether it is there or not. It is not like, “It’s great if you build it, but it’s all right if you can’t.” God commanded Israel to build the tabernacle. So, there was a definite intention of God. What is that?

### Exodus 25:8

Then have them make a sanctuary for me, and I will dwell among them.

The commandment to build the tabernacle is the invitation to set aside a place to fellowship with God in the center of their society. The tabernacle expresses the Presence of the Holy God. And his people specially experienced the fellowship with this Holy God there.

During their journey in the desert, wherever they went, the first thing Israel did was to set up the tabernacle. And the twelve tribes encamped around the tabernacle. Wherever they went, God’s Holy Presence was the center of their community. The tabernacle and all its utensils inside it were all consecrated. And the priests who served there were also consecrated.

The tabernacle was a physical place of holiness and the place where people who fell into the life of sin could come back to God and redefine their fellowship with the Holy God.<sup>1</sup>

Israel had been slaves in Egypt for 430 years. The slave mentality was engrafted in their mind. They were so used to their lifestyle in Egypt. They were released from slavery in Egypt, but it doesn’t mean they immediately recovered the mind and the lifestyle of God’s people. In fact, whenever they faced difficulty, they remembered Egypt and wished to go back there. They couldn’t wait for

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<sup>1</sup> Ari Kahn, *A River Flowed from Eden: Torah for the Shabbat Table*, (Kindle version, 2015), 100.

Moses any longer, while he was fellowshiping with God on the mountain, so they made a golden calf.

Please don't misunderstand me, Israel does not become holy by building the tabernacle, nor were they holy by having the tabernacle.

The tabernacle expresses the Presence of the Holy God. Each time they set up the tabernacle, they cleansed its utensils. In order to enter the tabernacle, they offered sacrifices and received purification. As the tabernacle was placed in the center of their society, they lived with a constant awareness of the Holy God. They would come to realize that they had sin and needed to be redeemed by the blood, the sacrifice of life. They would construct their community, remembering that they were the people redeemed and set apart for God.

At the Tabernacle, they experienced the fellowship with this Holy God. They learned how to live a life in holiness and how to build a community in holiness. Today, we will look at the tabernacle, and we will learn about "The Tabernacle-Centered Community."

## **1. The Presence of God**

During the years when the people of Israel were wandering in the wilderness, the tabernacle was moved with them from place to place (Ex 40:36-38). When the Israelites pitched camp in the wilderness, the tabernacle was to be placed in the center, by the Levites. Then the tribes were to be arrayed in specific order on the four sides of the tabernacle (Num 2). This shows what an important role the tabernacle played in the spiritual life of God's people.

### **(1) Committed to the assembly of the saints**

The Word of God teaches us to meet together.

#### Hebrews 10:25

Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another--and all the more as you see the Day approaching.

Jesus said "I will build my church" (Matt 16:18). This is his purpose of coming to the earth. He would build his church. It was not enough for him to call individual sinners to the Father only. He adds people to a flock of disciples (Acts 2:41, 47). He never keeps his followers away from one another, but he leads them to local churches and connects one another so that they can grow (Eph 2:21-22, 4:16).

If you are connected with Christ, you are taking part in His body, and you are supposed to be added to a local church, and be equipped through the teachings there, and function as a part of the church, and grow with the church (Col 2:19; Eph 2:21-22).

Now we cannot gather together physically. But we can still connect with one another mainly online, and being a community, and support each other.

## **2. The Devotion of God**

This is an amazing fact that God desires to live with humans. On Mt. Sinai, God showed his presence as a burning fire (Ex 19:18-20). People were not allowed to even come near the mountain (Ex 19:12-13). For them, God must have always been someone who was far away and unapproachable.

But, this God promised them, "Have them make a sanctuary for me, and I will dwell among them. (Ex 25:8)" Again, he said, "Then I will dwell among the Israelites and be their God. (Ex 29:45)"

God spent 40 years with them in the desert. He lived there with them. God was among the people of Israel. He was no longer a God far away, but He shared their fate.

### **(2) Devoted to Fellowship**

The Word of God teaches us to build up relationship.

#### 1 John 1:3

We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us.

### Acts 2:42

They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.

To attend a meeting and sit down in the meeting, and to join a church and have sincere fellowship with others are not the same, they are two different things. It is possible for you to attend Sunday service every week, without being connected with anyone, just come and go.

For example, a movie theater. People come there at the same time and go into the same room. They sit down side by side, looking at the same thing, listening to the same music, and thinking about the same story. They laugh together and cry together. Although they spend one and half or two hours together, they never come to know each other. Even if they often come to the same theater for many years, they still never know each other.

The church is not a movie theater. We devote ourselves to fellowship there.

### **3. The Commandment of God**

The tabernacle was built just as the Lord had commanded Moses (Ex 40:16). Moses didn't add anything to God's Word, nor did he take away anything from it. "The Israelites had done all of the work just as the LORD had commanded Moses. Moses saw that they had done all the work just as the LORD had commanded. (Ex 39:42-43 NRSV)" The tabernacle was made exactly as God commanded.

### **(3) Doers of the Word and Not Heares Only**

Even though people are actively involved in the church and have fellowship with others, if they just listen to the messages and teachings, and not

put them into practice, they cannot be healthy Christians, for God placed pastors there to equip His people and grow them into maturity (Eph 4:11-15).

### James 1:22

But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves.

To listen and understand the Word and to practice it are two different things. Those who just listen to the Word but don't put it into practice are deceiving themselves. I hope you don't want to deceive yourselves.

People who commit themselves to the church will do what they've heard and learned there.

This is a friendly reminder. Self reflection points are provided. They help you to be a doer of the Word and not a hearer only.

## **4. The Pattern of God**

The tabernacle consisted of various different parts combined. God showed Moses how to make each part (Ex 25:8-27:21).

God has plans and intentions for even small details. They may not seem clear to us. To human eyes, they may not seem significant and anything may seem fine. But God has plans for each detail. They don't function separately. They will make sense as a whole, when they are combined.

### **(4) Committed to a Life of Servanthood**

#### 1 Peter 4:10

Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God's grace in its various forms.

The church is the place where we serve each other.

Let's imagine you go to a restaurant. You choose a seat and sit down there. You order drink and food. If your drink and food doesn't come as you expect,

you would call a waiter, and ask him to check the kitchen. You would complain that the music is too loud or the air-conditioners are not working well. After you enjoy the meal, you pay, maybe give a tip and leave there. You wouldn't care about washing up the dishes and cleaning up the table. On the way home, you rate their food and service and price like a critic on a TV show. It's no problem to do so for restaurants. But the church is not a restaurant. It's the place where we serve each other.

Here is a pitfall. You can hide in the busyness of ministries, then you don't have fellowship with others. You are there working around people, but not connected with them. This is not healthy.

## **5. The Provision of God**

The tabernacle was made up of various different materials. God first showed the pattern. And people responded to it. All the materials needed to build the tabernacle were voluntarily offered by the people. It's never the other way around. It's not that God saw what people brought and suggested an idea of what to make with these. God gave the pattern, then people brought the necessary materials according to the pattern they got from God.

And, what they offered were all given by God. Do you remember they were slaves just several days earlier? How many possessions could they have? What they had, what they offered to build the tabernacle were the things God had given to them.

### Exodus 12:35-36

The Israelites did as Moses instructed and asked the Egyptians for articles of silver and gold and for clothing. <sup>36</sup> The Lord had made the Egyptians favorably disposed toward the people, and they gave them what they asked for; so they plundered the Egyptians.

This was happened just before they left Egypt. What they had were the things God prepared for them. Through Moses, God showed them what kind of materials they needed to build the tabernacle. And they brought those necessary materials from their possession, which God provided for them beforehand.

## **(5) Financial Support**

How much of our income actually belong to us? Some may say 100%. Some may say 90% because we give a tithe. But actually, everything belongs to God.

All we have is given by God. As God entrusts us with money, we must use them wisely for his sake (1 Cor 10:31). We use them in stewardship. As a faithful steward, we use 100% of our money which God entrusts to us. First we will return to God 10% of them. That is a tithe. Then we will use the rest of 90% asking wisdom from God. You surely use them for healthy food and healthy living. You may make a saving. You may offer more.

The Bible clearly mentions about a tithe. Jesus mentioned about tithe (Matt 23:23). We don't have to limit our offering to tithe. And it is not only those who are wealthy or who have money more than they need.

Tithe and offering come from giving ourselves to the Lord (2 Cor 8:5). It's the same for everyone, rich and poor. The Word of God encourages us to give tithe and offering in any circumstances, as we demonstrate our trust in God (cf. 2 Cor 8:2-5).

I really appreciate all your generous giving for the church.

## **6. The Boundary of God**

The Tabernacle teaches Israel that God sets the boundary.

The Tabernacle was built in the partitioned garden in order to keep ordinary people away. Only those who were allowed by God could enter there. And they could only enter after they had been consecrated by the way God showed them. And to the Most Holy Place, only the high priest could enter once a year. And he had to offer a special sacrifice. And even then his life was at risk.

There were only things God commanded them to place at the Tabernacle. And, God also showed them various different regulations about how to offer sacrifices. Those regulations about the Tabernacle, each piece of furniture, about priesthood and sacrifices, all taught Israelites in a tangible way that there are

boundaries and places which people can't touch. They knew there was the boundary God set.

Among twelve tribes of Israel, God chose the Levites to serve for the Tabernacle (Num 18:23). Other Israelites were not allowed to come near the Tent of Meeting (Num 18:22).

One time, Korah opposed this. God punished him. Then, the whole Israelite community grumbled against Moses and Aaron. God didn't allow those people to oppose them. "14,700 people died from the plague, in addition to those who had died because of Korah." (Num 16:49)

Different roles were given to each clan among the Levites (Num 3-4). The Levites were offered to the Lord as a wave offering, they were set apart for the Lord to do the work of the Lord (Num 8:13-14). The service of the priesthood was given to Aaron and his sons as a gift (Num 18:7). It was not people's nomination nor approval.

## **(6) Biblical Oversight and Accountability**

### Ephesians 4:11-13

It was he [Christ] who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, <sup>12</sup> to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up <sup>13</sup> until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.

Christ gives pastors for churches. Pastors have roles and responsibilities God entrusts. And God gives them the authority to practice their roles and responsibilities. For salvation, there is no one who can mediate for you before God, except Jesus. However, the Lord gives churches pastors to lead them and to build them up. And, they will have to give an account to God for what God has called them to do (Heb 13:17). The Bible teaches us to respect their authority, because that would be beneficial to us. (1 Thess 5:11-12, Heb 13:17)

## **7. The Love of God**



The Tabernacle expresses the presence of God. What is God like?

### Deuteronomy 7:8

But it was because the Lord loved you and kept the oath he swore to your forefathers that he brought you out with a mighty hand and redeemed you from the land of slavery, from the power of Pharaoh king of Egypt.

It was because God set them free from the bondage of slavery that they had the Tabernacle and they could freely worship Him. And it was because God loved them and rescued them. To live a life centered around the Tabernacle, worshipping God freely. That is to live a life in the love of God. God doesn't just love me alone, but he also loves my neighbor in the same way.

## **(7) Committed to be Bonded Together in Love**

### Ephesians 4:16

From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.

The strength and growth of the church depend on how people are joined and knitted together with one another. Gossiping and backbiting break the relationship among people. Here is a simple application. Let's think about how you can show the love of Christ in each situation. It's simple to think about it, but hard to do it. We definitely need the help of the Holy Spirit.

For closing, I'd like to share what David Watson said:

"In today's world, feeling of loneliness and alienation are everywhere to be found, leaving a flood of depression and despair. What is at the root of this tragic state of affairs? A fundamental cause is that there is little or no sense of 'belonging'." "In contrast, the heart and core of God's message to man through the Scripture is that he desires a people – a community – to share in his life."

"In an age of isolation, the joy of really belonging to God and of being a part of his people throughout the world – a belonging which depends not on

earning acceptance, but on receiving freely of God's love – is one of the most relevant features of the Christian message of good news."<sup>2</sup>

### **For self-reflection**

1. The tabernacle teaches us, God's community some aspects of God: His presence, devotion, commandment, pattern, provision, boundary, and love. How can we apply these teachings into our church life? (Please review the message.)  
- Which one are you doing well? Which one are you not doing so well? How would you improve?
  
2. Some Christians come to a church and expect it to be like a movie theater or a restaurant. Where does this concept of a church come from?
  
3. How would you describe the life of a person who belong to God and His people? Think about concrete examples or situations.  
- Share your experience of joy in belonging to God and His people.

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<sup>2</sup> David Watson, *I Believe in The Church*, (Hodder and Stoughton Ltd., 1978), 74-75.