

Our life in the tabernacle (Part 2 of 3)

In the first part of our study we looked at life lived outside the courtyard, relating it to the tribes (nations) of the world. The majority of people continue to live in the world, completely unaware that in the centre of the camp (in the centre of the world) is God with His plan and purpose. But a few recognize that they are sinful and that they need to humbly approach God. The only way of approach to God is by entering the door (gate) of the tabernacle – symbolic of Christ.

In the original tabernacle, this door really stood out from the rest of the courtyard walls. Whereas they were white, the door was made of material that was red, purple and blue, representing sin, royalty, and heavenly things, respectively.

But if we had entered the courtyard we would have found that we could not just walk straight into the tabernacle where God dwells. There were a number of things to do before we could be admitted. In other words, the courtyard was a place for preparation. It allowed a time for reflection. Only those who prepared correctly could enter the tabernacle.

To enter the courtyard, one thing was needed – a sacrifice. Nobody could enter without one – it was prohibited under the Law:

“Speak unto the children of Israel, and say unto them, If any man of you bring an offering unto the LORD, ye shall bring your offering of the cattle, even of the herd, and of the flock. If his offering be a burnt sacrifice of the herd, let him offer a male without blemish: he shall offer it of his own voluntary will at the door of the tabernacle of the congregation before the LORD.”

(Leviticus 1:2,3)

The sacrifice to be brought was dependent upon the sin that had been committed and the situation of the offerer. As he approached with his animal, the offerer had to put his hand on its head:

“And he shall put his hand upon the head of the burnt offering; and it shall be accepted for him to make atonement for him.”

(verse 4)

In other words, to enter the courtyard there was self-recognition of sin – your personal sin. Imagine the sobering effect of killing an animal because you had sinned!

And there in front of the offerer, lifted up on a mound of earth, was a large bronze altar (see Exodus 27:1-8). Under the altar a fire burned day and night. The animal to be sacrificed was killed, cut up and burned on this altar by the priests.

We know that the blood of bulls and goats does *not* remove sin. If it could, would God have allowed His Son to die? No. However, the altar and all the sacrifices were pointing forward to the perfect sacrifice of our Lord Jesus.

The writer to the Hebrews makes this clear in the following statements:

“It is not possible that the blood of bulls and of goats should take away sins.”

(10:4)

“We are sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.”

(verse 10)

And so on our journey to meet God we need to enter the spiritual courtyard – a time when we recognise our sin but also the requirement for sacrifice. We then realise that we can do nothing of ourselves to remove sin but have to depend on the sacrifice of Christ. Therefore the altar of burnt offering in front of us is symbolic of our understanding and accepting the atoning work of Christ.

If we think through our own journey, is this not exactly what happened? We started by being in the world. We then realised our position before God as a sinner and came through Christ (the door or gate) to approach to God. We then spent time having instruction, examining the sacrifice of Christ

and understanding what it means. This is like being in the courtyard, watching our animal being sacrificed on the altar. We were moving away from the world but had not yet entered the tabernacle (the ecclesia).

There was yet one more thing we had to do – *Wash!*

Just beyond the altar of burnt offering and in front of the tabernacle itself, there was a large bronze bowl called a laver. This bowl was full of water:

“And he set the laver between the tent of the congregation and the altar, and put water there, to wash withal.”
(Exodus 40:30)

So what was happening here? With the understanding and appreciation of the sacrifice of Christ there was one thing necessary for us to do before entering the ecclesial tabernacle – that was to wash ourselves in the waters of baptism. It was essential for us to wash ourselves. The priests who entered the tabernacle, perhaps for practical reasons only washed their hands and feet, but we were required to wash our whole bodies by total immersion. If the priest entered the tabernacle without washing he would die:

“When they [the priests] go into the tabernacle of the congregation, they shall wash with water, *that they die not.*”
(Exodus 30:20)

As we will see, the tabernacle is symbolic of Christ’s ecclesia. We were completely immersed in water to wash away our sins and only then could we enter the ecclesia. As Ananias said to Saul:

“And now why tarriest thou? arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord.”
(Acts 22:16)

Again we follow in the footsteps of Christ himself who was baptised as an example for us all.

And so our time of preparation and separation having been completed, we were ready to enter the tabernacle, to join the tent of ‘meeting’ and be part the assembly of faithful Christians – the ecclesia.

Before we entered we were within the courtyard with all its sights, smells and sounds. It was a place where we would have seen the burning animals, the splattered blood, the bronze altar and the bronze laver. There, we would have smelled the stench of death. Everything there was to remind us of *sin*. But all this is left behind on entering the tabernacle. Within the tabernacle there is no death, no stench, no bronze (a symbol of sin). By complete contrast, inside there is light, sweet incense and fine gold. We have arrived within the ecclesia. Only a veil separates us from actually seeing God and dwelling with Him.

We find out in the final study what is in the room and what it symbolises. We learn that *everything* we see in the ecclesia of Christ is here in the tabernacle.

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