

The Service of the Tabernacle

by Robert Murray M'Cheyne

The sermon explains the significance of the Tabernacle and its ordinances, highlighting the daily ministrations of Christ and the need for blood to enter into the holiest of all.

Scripture: Hebrews 9:6

Topics: "The Tabernacle", "Christ's Atonement"

Description

Robert Murray M'Cheyne emphasizes the significance of the Tabernacle's service, illustrating how the priests performed their duties in the holy place and how the high priest entered the holiest of all once a year with blood for atonement. He draws parallels between the Old Testament practices and Christ's ultimate sacrifice, highlighting that the way into the presence of God was not fully revealed until Christ's death. M'Cheyne urges believers to recognize the daily ministry of Christ in their lives and the necessity of His blood for salvation. He warns against neglecting the great salvation offered through Christ, stressing the importance of being taught by the Holy Spirit.

Transcript

Hebrews ix.6-8.--"Now, when these things were thus ordained, the priests went always into the first Tabernacle, accomplishing the service of God : But into the second went the high priest alone once every year, not without blood, which he offered for himself, and for the errors of the people : The Holy Ghost this signifying, that the way into the holiest of all was not yet made manifest while as the first Tabernacle was yet standing."

WE have seen, dear brethren, in the first verses of this chapter, that the Mosaic covenant had two things : It had a worldly sanctuary, and it had ordinances of divine service. We have already gone over the first of these briefly. We have considered the worldly sanctuary made up of two apartments,--the holy place and the holiest of all ; and we have considered the vessels of these apartments. We now come to consider the ordinances of the Tabernacle--what was done in these places--what was done in the holy place--and what was done in the holiest of all.

I. What was done in the holy place.--This was the outermost of the two chambers. We are told this in the 6th verse--"Now, when these things were thus ordained, the priests went always into the first Tabernacle, accomplishing the service of God." We have here two things,--the persons who went in, and the work

which they accomplished. The persons were the priests, Aaron and his sons--none other. There was a law of the God of Israel, that none should enter the holy place but the priests. The people were freely allowed to enter the outer court ; they could come to the brazen altar ; they could lay their hands on the head of the lamb that was upon it ; they could stand by the side of the brazen altar as the priest slew the sacrifice ; they could look to the priests washing their hands at the brazen laver ; they could even look at them entering the holy place : But none durst enter. When the priest drew aside the curtain, and entered where the golden altar of incense, and the candlestick, and the table and the shew-bread were, none dared to look in. You will see this distinctly mentioned in the 18th chapter of Numbers, 1st verse--"And the Lord said unto Aaron, Thou, and thy sons, and thy father's house with thee, shall bear the iniquity of the sanctuary ; and thou and thy sons with thee shall bear the iniquity of your priesthood." Verse 4--"And they shall be joined unto thee, and keep the charge of the Tabernacle of the Congregation, for all the service of the Tabernacle ; and a stranger shall not come nigh unto you." And then, verse 7--"Therefore, thou and thy sons with thee shall keep your priest's office for everything of the altar and within the vail ; and ye shall serve : I have given your priest's office unto you as a service of gift ; and the stranger that cometh nigh shall be put to death." The privilege of coming into the holy place was granted first to all the priests ; but in the days of David they were so many, that he divided them into twenty-four families, and they did the work by rotation ; and yet even then the command was as binding as ever that no stranger must come nigh.

But next let us inquire what they did. The service was three-fold. The first duty was to dress and trim the golden lamp. Exodus xxx. 7,8--"And Aaron shall burn thereon sweet incense every morning : When he dresseth the lamps, he shall burn incense upon it. And when Aaron lighteth the lamps at even, he shall burn incense upon it ; a perpetual incense before the Lord throughout your generations." You will notice that the work of Aaron and his sons was in the morning to dress the lamps, and in the evening to light them.

In the morning, he had to clean the lamp ; and then, as the sun was going down, he went in with a lighted taper to light it, that it might burn till the morning. The second work of the priests in the holy place was to burn incense. You will see this in that passage we have already quoted--"Aaron shall burn thereon sweet incense every morning : When he dresseth the lamps, he shall burn incense upon it. And when Aaron lighteth the lamps at even, he shall burn incense upon it ; a perpetual incense before the Lord throughout your generations."

Observe, brethren, that in the morning,--that was, about nine o'clock,--they offered up the lamb for a burnt-offering ; and then Aaron, or one of his sons, took a censer and filled it with burning coals from off the altar, and he took it into the holy place and set it down, and then he took his hands-full of sweet incense, and put it on the fire, so that there was a smoke of incense going up continually. This was the second work of the priest. And then, when he went in, in the evening,--that was about three o'clock,--he did the same as he had done in the morning ; He took the censer full of burning coals and the sweet incense, and entered into the holy place ; and then he put the incense on the fire, and the smoke of it ascended up all the night, so that it is called a perpetual incense.

This was the second constant work of the priest. But I said there was another work still : It was to set the bread in order on the pure golden table. This he did at the beginning of the Sabbath. You know the Sabbath began in the evening. You will see this in Leviticus xxiv. 5-9,--"And thou shalt take fine flour, and bake twelve cakes thereof : Two tenth-deals shall be in one cake. And thou shalt set them in two rows, six in a row, upon the pure table before the Lord. And thou shalt put pure frankincense upon each row, that it may be on the bread for a memorial, even an offering made by fire unto the Lord.

Every Sabbath he shall set it in order before the Lord continually, being taken from the children of Israel by an everlasting covenant. And it shall be Aaron's and his sons, and they shall eat it in the holy place : For it is most holy unto him, of the offerings of the Lord made by fire, by a perpetual statute." Observe then, brethren, that every Sabbath the priests carried in twelve loaves of bread, and placed them in two rows upon the golden table, and then they poured pure frankincense on the bread.

They then sat down and ate the twelve loaves that were removed. This was the work of the priests in the holy place. You will observe that it is said they went in always into the first Tabernacles : They went in at least twice a-day--"They went always into the first Tabernacle, accomplishing the service of God." Now, we are not exactly told what the meaning of this is ; but I think there can be no doubt that the Holy Spirit intended it to represent the daily ministration of Christ.

Just as the high priest going into the holiest of all showed Christ's complete sacrifice, so I believe this was intended to show the daily ministration of Christ for his body the Church. I believe it was intended to show what Christ is doing every day to Israel : Every day he is supplying the golden lamp with oil ; every day he is supplying the nourishment of the Church on the pure golden table : Just as the thousand lambs offered up in flame were intended to show the one lamb offered up, and consumed by the divine wrath, so the thousand priests were intended to represent Christ, who is "the chiefest among ten thousand, and altogether lovely."

And, O brethren ! this teaches a solemn lesson to you and to me. Do you make daily use of Christ ? Are you daily filled and lighted up by his hand ? Are you one of the lamps that Christ lights ? Do you put your prayers daily into the golden censer that stands on the pure golden altar ? Are you fed every day by the bread that Christ puts on the golden table ? Ah ! these are searching questions.

II. I come now, brethren, to the second point ; and that is, What was done in the holiest of all.--Verse 7--"But into the second went the high priest alone once every year, not without blood, which he offered for himself, and for the errors of the people." Now, there are three things we might attend to here. There is the person--the high priest. There is the work which he accomplished--"He entered not without blood, which he offered for himself, and for the errors of the people." And then there is the time--"Once every year."

1st. There is the person.--The high priest, and none but he, was allowed to enter in. You remember I described to you last Sabbath the holiest of all. Now, none were allowed to enter into it but the high priest : And just as the people were allowed to come into the outer court (but they were not allowed to look into the holy place, where was the altar, and the candlestick, and the table and the shew-bread), so, in like manner, none were allowed to enter into the holiest of all, but he alone : No one was allowed to be in the Tabernacle at the time when the high priest entered--he went in alone, where was the golden censer, and the ark of the covenant overlaid with gold, in which was the golden pot that had manna, Aaron's rod that budded, and the tables of the covenant. His feet stood in the holy place, and of the people there were none with him. You will see this in the 16th chapter of Leviticus, 2d verse--"And the Lord said unto Moses, speak unto Aaron, thy brother, that he come not at all times into the holy place within the vail, before the mercy-seat, which is upon the ark, that he die not : For I will appear in the cloud upon the mercy-seat." Verse 17--"And there shall be no man in the Tabernacle of the Congregation when he goeth in to make an atonement in the holy place." Observe there was to be no man in the Tabernacle when Aaron went in to make atonement. This is exactly what the Apostle Paul means when he says in the 7th verse--"Into the second went the high priest alone every year." And, O, brethren ! which of you can fail to notice that this represents Christ, who is the great intercessor for the transgressors, and none but Christ ? Of the people

there was none with him--with him there was no fellow : he made atonement alone--he sprinkled the blood alone. Friends, either Christ must do all for us, or nothing at all. Either he must be all your atonement or none : He will have all the glory.

2d. And then notice farther under this head, The work which he accomplished--"He entered not without blood, which he offered for himself, and for the errors of the people." I believe, if you study the 16th chapter of Leviticus, you will notice that he entered in at least three times on the day of atonement. He did first of all, as I described to you last Sabbath--he took the censer and filled it with burning coals from off the altar, and his hands-full of sweet incense beaten small ; he then pulled aside the curtain, and as he entered he cast the incense over the coals, so that the cloud of incense covered the place. He then went out again, and filled a bason with the blood of a bullock, which was for an atonement for himself and for his house, and went in a second time within the veil ; and as he entered he sprinkled the blood seven times upon the mercy-seat and before the mercy-seat. He then went out again, and brought in a bason of blood--the blood of a goat, slain for the errors of the people ; and he dipped his finger in the blood, and sprinkled it on the golden mercy-seat and before the mercy-seat seven times. He then went out again, and put his hand on the head of the scape-goat, and confessed over it the sins of the children of Israel. This was the work he accomplished in the holiest of all. Ah, brethren ! there can be no doubt what this meant : It represented Christ, our great high priest. You will observe he did not need to offer for himself--he was sinless ; but before the high priest could typify Christ, he had to offer for himself, and then he entered within the veil. This typified Christ's entering in within the veil. And I think his coming out and confessing the sins of the children of Israel on the head of the scape-goat, shows the pardon of sin.

3d. Let us notice the time. Verse 7--"Once every year." It was in the seventh month and the tenth day of the month--it was on that day that the priest entered so solemnly into the holiest of all. It was the most solemn of all Israel's solemn days ; and it is said he entered in "once every year." That means one day in the year ; but this is no objection to his entering in more than once on that day. It was but one service showing Christ's complete sacrifice : It was intended to show to all, that Christ is the daily minister of the Church : It showed Christ's one entrance into the holiest of all after his complete sacrifice.

III. Let us come, brethren, to the third and last point. Verse 8--"The Holy Ghost this signifying, that the way into the holiest of all was not yet made manifest, while as the first Tabernacle was yet standing." Now, brethren, I observe, first of all, that the Spirit was the great teacher of the saints long ago. We are told that the Spirit strove with the people before the flood : It was also the Spirit that taught Abraham, so that he saw Christ's day, and was glad : It was also the Spirit that taught Eli to tremble for the ark of God : It was the Spirit that taught Moses and Aaron of the good things to come. We are here told that the Spirit signifies by means of these ordinances, that the way into the holiest of all was not yet manifest. Ah, brethren ! you see we can do nothing without the teaching of the Spirit. The Spirit must teach now as well as then : It is his first work to take away the scales from the eyes, so that we may see. Brethren, it is very interesting to remark how little difference there is in the experience of the saints long ago, and the saints now @ And why is this ?--The reason is, it is the Spirit that teaches now, that taught then. It is all one whether he teach them by a book or by a board--it is the same Spirit. The saints are saved now as they were then. Ah, friends ! all that are before the throne of God are justified in the same way. Are you taught by the Spirit ? "A man can receive nothing except it be given him from above." And the Gospel feast is now so plain, as that a fool cannot mistake ; but is the same Spirit that is the teacher. Yet I fear there are some sitting here who are as blind as a carnal Jew, who see no farther than the boards and curtains--than the outward form. Remember, it was the Spirit that had to teach them, and it is the Spirit that must teach

you. See, then, that the same Spirit teach you.

But there is a second lesson that Paul here draws--that the way into the holiest of all was not yet made manifest. Paul does not say there was no way that was not true ; but it was not plain, and this was what the Spirit intended to teach by this--"The Holy Ghost this signifying, that the way into the holiest of all was not yet made manifest." There can be no doubt that the holiest is here intended to signify the presence of God. Just as Paul says in another place, "Having boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus." Paul means, that the way into the favour of God was not made manifest, and the reason was two-fold. Christ was not yet dead : It was true he was promised ; but he had not yet died, so that the way into the holiest was not and could not be manifest. They could not see the work of a Saviour as we now see it. And another reason was, that the Spirit was not yet given,--that is to say, was not yet given in abundance, as it is said, "The Spirit was not yet given, because that Jesus was not yet glorified." The Spirit was not given until after the ascension of Christ. Then the Spirit was poured out abundantly ; and now we live in the days of the ministration of the Spirit : But, before Christ's ascension, the Spirit was given, if I may so speak, by measure--"The way into the holiest of all was not made manifest ;" but now the Spirit us given without measure--the way into the holiest is made manifest.

We now come to another lesson ; and that is the last of all--the way into the holiest is now made manifest. You remember, when Christ died, that the vail of the Temple was rent in twain from the top to the bottom. The moment that Christ died the way into the holiest of all was made completely manifest ; and this is the glory of the Gospel above the Jewish dispensation. The freeness--the completeness--the all-sufficiency of it--is made manifest. It is made so plain that a child may understand it. That which was taught to Israel by types and shadows is no so plain that a wayfaring man, though a fool, shall not err therein. The high priest, his work, his entering into the holiest of all, &c.,--all these are so plain that even a little child cannot mistake them. It is plain,--so plain that he that runs may read. Now, dear friends, what will you guilt and mine be, if, when God has so manifested the way into the holiest of all, in the last day, you and I are still found ignorant of it ? "How shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation ?" "If he that despised Moses's law died without mercy, under two or three witnesses, of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worth who hath trodden under foot the Son of God, and hath counted the blood of the covenant, wherewith he was sanctified, an unholy thing, and hath done despite unto the Spirit of Grace ?" Ah ! surely, if they died without mercy under Moses's law, surely you shall die the second death. Brethren, I cannot imagine a greater argument than this for your not escaping punishment, if you despise the Gospel. If an unbelieving Jew died without mercy, what will you do ?

O ! learn how impossible it is to enter into the holiest without blood. Some say, "I'm a decent man:" But have you blood ? Without it you cannot enter into the holiest--you cannot be saved. And those who have much guilt, you may have it taken away by the blood of Christ. Amen.

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