

The beauty of holiness

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[0 : 00] Well, keep your Bibles in Exodus 26. Just to make a start, Christians can be very confusing, and the world can be a very confusing place.

Christians can be very confused because the world doesn't seem to revolve around any center place anymore. Everyone does kind of what they want to do these days.

So where must we draw the lines between being in the world but not being of the world? So, for example, you've got some Christians that will protest against homosexuality.

There's a group of Christians in America, and they've got a very strong statement to make about where they think they belong in the world, and they don't seem confused at all about what they believe.

But then, on the other hand, you've got Christians that don't stand against homosexuality, but that promote homosexuality as a place, and the church must be a place of welcome and acceptance and love, which, of course, it does need to be.

[1 : 07] But this raises the question, just where do we draw the line in interacting with the world around us? We must be holy and separate, but how does that look? Is it meant to look like that first group?

We are called to be the light of the world and to attract people into the church. How is that meant to look? Is that meant to look like that second group of people that we saw?

I would say that we could say many things about those two sets of Christians, but for our purposes today, just to make a point that the first group, I think, is trying to be holy, but they're not trying to be very attractive.

The second group is trying to be attractive to the world, but without giving any thought about being holy. And so we're going to look at that interplay between holiness being separate from the world today and being attractive to the world, calling the world to the beauty and attraction that is the God that we serve.

And in a surprising way, the tabernacle is going to help us work through that question. So we're going to look at holiness and separation as we start going through what the tabernacle is all about.

[2 : 22] So just to recap in our story in Exodus so far, God has called, he saved his people out of Egypt. He's made these incredible promises. He's calling them out.

He's saved them. But the point is that he's going to dwell with them, right amongst them in their journey to the promised land. They've met him on the mountain. They were scared as anything. Remember how God appeared on the mountain there? And then God says, don't worry. I don't expect you to come up here. I'm going to come down to you. There's got to be certain things in place if God is going to do that with his people, even the ones that he's saved.

But this idea of God dwelling with his people is to fulfill the whole purpose of creation, which for God is to be with his people, so that they can experience the sort of bounties of heaven, the beauty and the bounty and the blessings, and that they can be experienced to its fullest extent by his creatures. But, of course, there's a problem, and a problem that keeps us separated from God. And the tabernacle tells us what that problem is.

[3 : 31] And just in order for us to get a grip around that, we need to go over the details. Don't worry, we're going to go over them really quickly to see what we're talking about. So I've grabbed some screen grabs of...

This is a remake of the tabernacle. So just to make a note that... So this portion, verses 1 to 6, is about the curtain of the tabernacle itself.

I just want you to note, for example, in verse 1, really, that it's made of this beautiful woven linen of white. Probably white, that's the linen.

It's not just... It's white. And then there's blue and purple and scarlet, skillfully woven in with cherubs. And then these make ten curtains, and they'd be clasped together with blue loops and golden clasps.

It would look something like that. We don't know the design, but that's the tabernacle itself. And then this part is going to get covered by a tent.

[4 : 34] The tabernacle is a tent, but then there's another word that the Nava uses. Maybe the same word in your translation might have the same word, but it's a different word in the Hebrew. It's a tent of goat's hair that covers the tabernacle.

It would probably look like that. So that's the goat's hair over the tabernacle. That was made with bronze clasps. And then to cover that, you've got animal skin covers, a ram skin.

And then we don't know what the next one is, but it's probably a dolphin skin or a badger skin, depending on your translation. Okay, those are the two skins covering the tabernacle. But there's a...

Then there's wooden frames on the inside. They could be screens or boards. They've got poles to hold them in place. What's incredible is that these boards are covered in gold, similar to what we saw last week with the ark and the lampstand.

Well, the lampstand is pure gold. And the table... Okay, so that's how the inside of that tabernacle would have looked. Covered in gold. And then further down in our passage, they make a veil, another curtain, that will hang in front of the Holy of Holies.

[5 : 39] And that's to separate the Holy of Holies from the holy place. With blue and purple and scarlet, also with cherubs on it, overlaid with gold. And it would separate the mercy seat the ark.

That's the Holy of Holy place. From the holy place, with a table and the lampstand. And then finally, there'd be a screen or a second veil that would cover the entrance to the tabernacle, also made of blue and purple and gold.

So how does this tell us about how God is holy and separate? Isn't he there with his people, amongst them? Well, there's so many layers between God, who's going to localize himself in the ark, in that mercy seat.

There's so many layers of curtains and boards and covered gold and more curtains. And then they're covering over there. And then, we haven't got there yet, in the next chapter, they're going to build an outer courtyard so that you can't even get to the tabernacle as an Israelite.

It's very separate. God is there, but there's multiple barriers separating him from his people. Why all these barriers? Well, it's a bit like when the head of state visits.

[7 : 09] When they come along, I don't know if you've, maybe you've been to the parliament, starting of parliament each year. It's got really intense over the last few years. And it is, you know that they're coming because they put barricades and barricades and barricades and barricades down the road.

It's to tell us who they are and that we can't just easily get to them. I don't know what we think of that. They're supposed to be here to serve us. But it's a bit like that with God here.

He's going to be with his people, but he's putting all these barriers in place. Why is he doing that? Well, we need to understand that the separation between God and his people is totally necessary, but it's actually not ideal.

It's totally necessary, but it's actually not ideal. Why is it necessary for God to be with his people, but to be separate or different from them? Well, who are the people that he's going to be with?

They're not heavenly creatures. This is a God from heaven. They're made of earth and dust. Not only that, but they're not very good people.

[8 : 21] They're not very nice people. In biblical terms, they're not very holy people. And we've seen what God does to people in the book of Exodus.

What does he do to people that don't listen and follow him? Well, he sent all those plagues and he wiped them out. We've seen what he did in the Red Sea.

And we've seen what he's like on top of that mountain in the pillar and maelstrom of fire and darkness and clouds and lightning and loud, thunderous voices.

And now he's going to come and live amongst his people. He's got to be contained somehow. If this is the God that's going to interact with earth, you need him to be held at a bit of an arm's length.

That's why we saw last week those cherubim are facing inwards. Not so much to guard us, but to... Well, not so much to guard God, but to guard us from the God who is there and is totally holy, totally

powerful, totally pure, totally good.

[9 : 36] No created thing can stand in that presence and survive. He's going to say that a few chapters later when Moses asks to see him. The one person God has handpicked on planet earth will be friends. Cool, can I see you?

No, no. No, no. You will die if you have to see me as I am. You can't do that. So God is going to live with his people.

It's totally necessary that he's kept separate from his people. But it's also not ideal. There's still... There's this almost false sense of separation going on here.

It's needed, but it's not how God wants his relationship with his people to be. We get a hint of that in the material used. So you've got all these curtains that separate God from people.

Why did he choose curtains? Why not wooden doors? Why not metal doors? Why not concrete and bricks? That will come later in the temple. Well, the thing is, a curtain does bar.

[10 : 38] It does veil. But it's not a solid door. An indication that while God must be separate from his people, he doesn't want total separation.

He wants us to come and have access to him. The problem is, of course, not lying with him, but with us. The problem is our sin.

The problem is a broken and evil world that can't handle this divine, holy being. And so the tabernacle, although it was there to have God dwell with his people, it could never truly fulfill God's purpose.

It's always got to point towards another final solution. We know that that solution is Christ.

He's the one person that makes it possible for a holy God not just to dwell with people, but for God himself to live in people, in us.

[11 : 45] Now just to make a point before we turn to the New Testament and just dig a little bit deeper as to what Jesus has done for us, I want to tell you, if you haven't turned to Christ, you need to turn to Christ in your life.

If you're not a believer, you need to realize how much trouble you're in with a God that's this holy. These are people that he chose. The Israelites chose a nation that he saved, and he's keeping them at an arm's length.

You can't think, don't think that you can deal with that level of holiness on your own. It's a barrier that you can't cross and live. Just like when the presidents come and visit a city, they come down to Cape Town, if you decide you're going to go and they put all those barriers up, just see what happens if you try and cross that barrier.

The Blue Light Brigade. We've seen it on TV recently. They were just thugs, weren't they? Guys weren't even doing anything wrong. But you try and cross that barrier by yourself, on your own authority, because you want to go speak to this president.

It's the same with God. You can't do that by yourself. There's barriers that God has put in place. You can't just cross them and decide for yourself you're going to relate to him on your own terms.

[13 : 06] You need someone to be able to handle that kind of power and holiness for you. You need a representative so that you can, in a sense, cross that boundary, cross that barrier, cross the thing that separates you from God and live together in harmony.

The good news is that we do have someone that has done that for us. There's an important account in all three Gospels, the Synoptic Gospels, Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John.

Do you remember what happened as Jesus died on the cross? Do you remember what happened in the temple? This veil that we've been, veils, multiple veils that we've been reading of? The veil that separates the Holy of Holies from the holy place deep inside the temple where the Ark of God is gets ripped in half from top to bottom.

It's a divine act that indicates that God's time of being separate from his people is now over. because of what Christ has done on the cross.

That payment for sin is the way that God has constituted not just to get into the Holy of Holies like it used to be but in relating to him in a whole new way.

[14 : 27] That's what we read from Hebrews chapter 9. So you might want to turn there. I'm just going to make this point. When Christ came as a high priest, I'm reading from Hebrews chapter 9 from verse 11.

When Christ came as high priest of the good things that are now already here that have started that have begun he went through the greater and more perfect tabernacle that is not made with human

hands that is to say not a part of this creation.

He did not enter by means of the blood of goats and calves but he entered the most holy place once for all by his own blood thus obtaining eternal redemption.

Now the blood of goats and bulls and the ashes of a heifer sprinkle on those who are ceremonially unclean sanctify them so that they're outwardly clean. That's the old way of doing things. But look at the sacrifice that Jesus made and the writer says this, how much more then will the blood of Christ who through the eternal spirit offered himself unblemished to God cleanse our consciences from acts that lead to death so that we may serve the living God.

There's only one way to draw near to God now and to serve him in a new way and that's through the death of Christ. It's the only thing that can make us clean.

[16:03] It's the only thing that can make us fit for purpose in this world. And his sacrifice makes us acceptable to God. Not just like just, just, just acceptable.

Completely. Totally. A hundred percent acceptable. Not just acceptable but actually lovable.

Actually likable. we become God's friend. We become his family. We become his sons and daughters. And so if you're a Christian here today, you've got this assurance of what God has, what Jesus has done for you.

This whole section in Hebrews continues into Hebrews chapter 10. I'm just going to read from Hebrews chapter 10 from verse 19. Therefore, brothers and sisters, since we have confidence to enter the most holy place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way open for us through the curtain, meaning his body that was torn, so that we can get entrance to God, access to God.

And since we have a great high priest over the house of God, it says this, let us draw near to God with a sincere heart and with the full assurance that faith brings, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience having our bodies washed with pure water.

[17:34] So if you believe in Christ, there is nothing stopping you from drawing near to God, except maybe your own fears and your own doubts. But here God is saying he doesn't want you to have any of those.

Faith drives out fear. Trust in what Christ has done for you. Now there's so many Christians who doubt that God really does love them. That he really has paid for their sins.

We suffer doubt and worry, often overwhelmed with our guilt. Friend, God is wanting to reassure you today.

Through his word, through this idea of the tabernacle, but through what Christ has done, that he's the one that totally breaks through those barriers that has been separating us from God all these centuries.

He's literally ripped it up. And started something brand new. We can come into the presence of God, and not just that, but God himself can dwell with us.

[18:39] So this holiness and separateness is there in the tabernacle, but it's undone by Christ. We've got this new, open access to God.

Jesus is like a backstage pass, if you will, to a rock concert. You get to be with God in a way that no one has ever been before in the history of the world. It's an incredible privilege. But there's another important lesson from the tabernacle, and it does the opposite of what holiness does.

It attracts us. We find that in the order and the symmetry and the beauty of the tabernacle. And so I'm going to talk about the attractive beauty of holiness, which is not something we often think about.

Holiness is often something that keeps us separate. But this tabernacle, it contains God, but it's beautiful. So did you notice the tabernacle isn't just plain old tent cloth, brown like all the other tents scattered around, sort of blending in with the landscape?

Remember, they're in the desert. The tabernacle is a representation of heaven and sorry, the tabernacle is a representation of heaven on earth.

[19:52] That's the whole point of the cloths and the gold and the silver and even the bronze. There's that beauty of the woven material.

It's repeated three times in that passage. The curtains of the tabernacle in verse 1, the veil separating the holy of holies, verse 31, and then the curtain for the entrance, verse 36.

You know, this is the finest linen in the world at that time. It was made by the Egyptians. They still make it to this day. And these colors are beautiful, blue. And there's lots of interpretations of what all these colors mean.

Blue, likely to talk about heaven. heaven. Remember when Yahweh met them at Mount Sinai? When they looked up, they saw a pavement of sapphire, that blue gemstone. Purple, everyone knew what purple meant in the ancient world. It's royal status. Only emperors and kings get to wear purple, so God is their king and lord. And then the red color, perhaps indicating his richness and his blessing.

[21 : 06] But perhaps to indicate something of blood. That's the color of blood. The red color comes from crushing a certain type of tree worm that has laid eggs, which is interesting.

The other colors come from seashells. And you've got silver, or gold, silver, and bronze. Even the clasps that tie the tents together are made of gold.

It's like a golden zip. So imagine as they constructed this tabernacle. And you saw those colors. You saw the gold panels going up. You saw the beautiful colored tent covering over it. Imagine if you were able to be inside there. I mean, you'd be transported to heaven.

By the way, the tabernacle would fit inside our church. The church is just about the same size as the tabernacle. It's just a little bit bigger. Not that there would ever be that many people inside it.

[22 : 04] We're going to see next week who gets access to this place. If you were inside there, you'd have shimmering gold running around down the sides. And this beautiful red and purple and blue kaleidoscope of colors.

We're given this dazzling, beautiful, reflective kaleidoscope. It would be dazzling and calming at the same time, I think, as the sun filtered through.

But then you'd see that, you'd be like, oh, that place looks amazing, and then slowly it gets covered by this white goat hair thing, and then some more skins, and then there would be the outer court, and then you'd lose sight of it.

You'd just caught this glimpse almost of heaven, and then it's gone. Notice in verse 30, I'm back in Exodus now.

God says, set up the tabernacle exactly according to the plan shown you on the mountain. It's God's design. This tabernacle is God's design.

[23 : 14] So why does God want this beauty and order in our world? It's perfectly ordered. It's got beautiful dimensions. It's not ostentatious, it's not over the top, but it's not leftovers either.

It's neat, it's clean, it's crisp. There are meanings in the numbers, just so that you know, I'm not going to go into them now, but remember all the numbers we saw in Revelation? They actually start here in Exodus.

They probably start earlier, in fact they do start earlier, they start in Genesis chapter 1. But all the numbers, the symmetry, the order, speaks to us about a heavenly place that is coming to dwell on earth.

Why does God want this beauty and order in our world? Well, the problem with holiness is it keeps people too separate.

There are boundaries that are too big for people to cross. It keeps people away, but God wants them to come close. So the tabernacle is there to remind people that God wants them to come into a relationship with him.

[24 : 22] He wants to attract them. And like Adam and Eve, Old Testament Israel were meant to take that order, that beauty, the skill that was required to make the tents, they were to take that and to fill the world progressively more and more with God's beauty, God's order.

Because beauty and order go together. Beauty, order, and function go together. Do you remember in Genesis 1, after God finished making everything, he says?

It's good. It's an interesting word. We just mean good. When we say good, it means, yeah, how was your day? It was good. It was good. It's got a much richer idea in the Bible.

It means that the thing that God has made is working properly, but it's also been set in place properly. It's given boundaries and functions. And then it's not just night and day and animals. Remember all the gold and the jewels that were lying around in the Garden of Eden. It was a beautiful place. And then Adam and Eve were to take that beauty, that order, and spread it over the world. So part of the problem of the world is this disordered place.

[25 : 34] It's not beautiful. It's ugly. But Israel failed to take this beauty, this order, into the world.

God, they're no different from the world around them. They might have chosen beauty to look beautiful. Later on they did.

They chose money to make themselves, they preened themselves, doled themselves up with all kinds of rich jewelry, rich clothes, and God says, you know, I'm not interested in that if you're not living a godly life.

So like those people at the beginning of our introduction, you've got some who are holy and they think they're holy and keeping people away, and you've got others who want to attract people to God, but they look the same as the world.

The tabernacle is saying we need to have both. You need to have holiness, but not total holiness. You need to have a holiness that is attractive, and that's why we need Jesus.

[26 : 46] He's the first person to show how attractive holiness can be. You know, Jesus was holy. We know he was holy. He had no sin. He always did the right thing, always said the right thing, but what did his holiness do?

Did it push people away from him, or did it draw people to him? Well, do you remember the encounter with the woman at the well? We read from John 4 earlier, how he breaks.

Jesus breaks that taboo, that barrier of talking to a Samaritan woman. Yes, he's holy. He's not being unholy. He's still holy. He still tells her truths about her life. He knows she's living a sexually impure life, sexually immoral life, and he still offers her this clean, pure water of regeneration, of God coming to live in that person's life.

And for a Jew, it was totally unthinkable. The Samaritans were unclean because they were Samaritans. And this is a woman who's got how many different partners? Jesus said to her, everyone who drinks the water that I've got, sorry, everyone who drinks the water from this well is going to be thirsty again.

You can drink from the well from the waters of life, try and fill yourself with that. But he says, whoever drinks the waters that I've given them, that I've got, they will never thirst again.

[28 : 09] The water I give them will become in them a spring of water welling up to eternal life. And the woman's response, sir, give me this water so I won't be thirsty. Jesus was known for hanging out with tax collectors and sinners.

But there was something attractive in him that they would also seek him out. In Matthew chapter 9, Jesus says, Matthew records, while Jesus was having dinner at Matthew's house, Matthew was a tax collector, many other tax collectors and sinners came and ate with him and his disciples.

They sought him out. They knew he was holy. They had heard about what he had said, the Sermon on the Mount, how he had interacted with the Pharisees. Oh, but when they saw him, the Pharisees saw this, why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?

They're the kind of people that want to keep holiness as a guard against people finding God. And Jesus says, no, it's not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick.

Go and learn what this means. I desire mercy, not sacrifice. I haven't come to call the righteous, but sinners. And so Jesus was able to be both holy, but attractive at the same time.

[29 : 22] He didn't let holiness repel or keep people away. People were drawn to him, even ones that were sinful. And I think, friends, this is a challenge for us today, to get this balance between holiness and beauty or attractiveness right.

We must be holy, but we must make sure our holiness doesn't repel, but instead attracts people like Jesus did. Because here's the problem with being too holy. It stops people from getting access to God.

You can actually chase people away if you're trying to be too holy. And of course, none of us is really good at being holy. It's always going to be a pretense. But this idea of being so holy and then stopping people from finding God because for some reason you're trying to keep them separate, Jesus hated that attitude.

He said this in Matthew 23, Woe to you! Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You shut the kingdom of heaven in men's faces. You yourselves don't enter, nor will you let anyone enter who wished to.

So, some things to watch out for in your endeavor to be holy. Of course, we are meant to be holy, but be careful of holiness that takes offense easily.

[30 : 40] Be careful of being so holy that you take offense easily. That you get angry quickly, with no sign of patience. A holiness that's totally offended, and ready to boil over at any time, at the slightest whiff of an offense.

holiness that's constantly upset when people say a word that you don't like, or wear some clothes you don't think is appropriate, or a lifestyle that isn't godly.

Now, I need to know, I need to say, please note, I'm not saying you must accept and be okay with ungodly lifestyles. I'm not saying that. But your holiness shouldn't make you so visibly upset that you keep people away from coming to God.

So, be careful of holiness that takes offense easily. Be careful of holiness that gives offense easily. That confronts sharply with no sense of love or compassion.

Jesus could have chased that woman at the well away. You're a Samaritan. I've got nothing to do with you. Oh, you've got, oh, your lifestyle. It's disgusting.

[31 : 49] Stay away. We don't even have to say that. You know that attitude, that cold-hearted, cold shoulder, looking down your nose at people. Be careful of a holiness that gives offense.

A holiness that must be right and are other people totally wrong. You must be totally right and everyone else is totally wrong. A holiness that is judgmental. Instead of helping people where they are, where they're at, and make them feel like, you know, if you make them feel like they don't belong.

A holiness that attacks and blames and piles up guilt and leaves it on the post with no way of getting rid of it. But, at the same time, we can't have a beauty that looks and sounds like what the world considers attractive.

We've got to be careful about how we look and what we wear. We can't look and sound the same as the world. We've got to look and sound different. But, we need to nurture and grow the attributes that made Jesus attractive.

That's why people liked him. That's why they went to him. Things that made him beautiful and allowed him to break through that barrier even though he was holy and then draw people to himself.

[33 : 08] His grace, his love, his mercy, and his kindness, and yes, his truth. But, you get heard if you're gracious and kind and patient and accepting.

I guess we're doing that more and more in our growth groups. We're trying to promote, we're trying to help each other grow in this nurture of who Jesus is for us.

But, I'll end here with that last section in Hebrews chapter 10. It talks about how we've been saved by God, how we can get this confidence, this full assurance that Jesus has saved us.

Hebrews chapter 10 verse 19, brothers and sisters, since we have confidence to enter the most holy place, let's draw near to God with a sincere heart, with full assurance, having been cleansed from a guilty conscience, we can be washed clean, and it continues.

And, let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. Not giving up meeting together, as someone in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another.

[34 : 29] All the more as you see the day that is Jesus coming back, approaching. So just think a little bit. How inviting, how inviting is your holiness?

How attractive are your words and actions to Christians and to outsiders? How easy is it for people to see your love and your mercy and your patience?

And the kindness, not just of you, but of Jesus in your words and actions and attitudes. Friends, we've been filled by Jesus. We're, in a sense, little tabernacles now on earth.

Because if you're a Christian, you've got the Holy Spirit living inside of you. We are places of God's holiness and beauty. But our holiness should be kind of boundary-breaking holiness.

It's an attractiveness that maintains holiness, but then draws people in. And when you live like that, you'll be living the most beautiful life that you can. That's the most useful life and a rewarding life.

[35 : 30] We'll be kind of outposts of heavenly beauty in a world that desperately needs to see that there's something beyond the ugliness and the pain and the disorder and the confusion and the chaos.

If they look at us, they need to see both holiness, but an attractiveness that draws them in and gives them a lifeline to Jesus. Let's pray.

Dear Lord Jesus, thank you for your word. Lord, thank you for what you've done. You've crossed that boundary, you've crossed that barrier between us and God that broken down the sin that is in our lives so that God can take residence in our lives.

It's such a huge privilege, Lord. And not only that, but you work from the inside out. You make our lives beautiful from the inside out by us becoming more like you.

Lord Jesus, will you please do that? Help us to be kind and gracious and patient and loving and merciful and truthful.

[36 : 33] And so build your kingdom here. In Jesus' name. Amen.