

The only way in

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[0 : 00] A few months ago now, we had the opportunity to go watch a game between the Stormers and the Bulls rugby game for the United Rugby Championships.

And it was in Cape Town Stadium, Greenpoint Stadium. I don't know if you've been there, anybody been to watch anything at Greenpoint Stadium. It's a great stadium, it's a lovely, I really like it. And on that day, the Stormers were playing the Bulls and so everybody, seemingly everybody wanted to be there on that day. The stadium was sold out, it was capacity, it was a great atmosphere.

But because everybody wanted to be there, we didn't anticipate that it was going to take much longer to get there because it seems like the whole northern suburbs empties out on the N1 to go to the stadium when there's a rugby game.

And we were stuck in a lot of traffic. And so we only managed to find a parking place after the game started near the waterfront. And then we got out and the stadium was in front of us and only then did we realize that the entrance to the stadium is right on the other side.

[1 : 07] The game had already started, we could hear the crowds inside, but there was a whole lot of people still who needed to get inside. And we had to hike all the way around the big perimeter of the stadium to get to the only entrance that was open.

There was only one way in. And so we took this sort of half hike jog around the stadium, hearing the game progress from inside and with a whole bunch of people.

But there was only one way in to the place everybody wanted to be. Now we are reading in Exodus this section about the building of the tabernacle.

And the narrative really slows down and helps us to meditate on every single part of it. And this tabernacle, it was important and very important to the Israelites.

It's the one place that the Israelites wanted to be. More than any sports game at any stadium, they wanted to be here in this place, the tabernacle, because this was the place where God himself could be found.

[2 : 18] We read from Psalm 84 earlier, I just want to read to you again, just the attitude of someone coming to this place, this tabernacle.

Psalm 84, how lovely is your dwelling place, Lord of armies. I long and yearn for the courts of the Lord. I long and yearn for the courts of the Lord, because this was the dwelling place of God.

This was the place on earth, the one place on earth where God and people could be together in the same space. It was the place we've seen previously, where heaven and earth overlapped for a time.

And therefore, it was such an important venue, it was such an important place on earth. And every detail of it, as we've been seeing over the last few weeks, is meant to tell us something about God's relationship with humans.

God designed this place to tell us about how we relate to him, including today's passage in Exodus 27, about the details of the outer perimeter.

[3 : 30] That's what today's passage is all about, the outer perimeter and the significant detail that you may not have picked up on first reading, but I want us to meditate on and think about this morning.

And that detail is that there was only one way in. And it was deliberate. There was only one way in to this most special place where humans could come into the place where God dwelled.

And that was God's design. All of the details that we read here were God's design. And he designed it this way, not just to teach the Israelites about their relationship with him, but to teach you and I today.

That's why it's been preserved for thousands of years. That's why we have these designs in our Bible, because they're here not just to tell us how to build a nice little model of the tabernacle. They're here to teach us something, to teach you something about your relationship with the God who made you.

And in this passage, we're going to see two key truths. Firstly, that God wants to give you a way in. God wants to give you a way in to himself and the life that he wants and made you to live.

[4 : 49] But secondly, that there will only ever be one way in. And that's God's way. And it's not an easy way. So let's have a look at these two truths.

Firstly, God wants to give you a way back. Namely, a way back in to real life. And I say a way back. Because humans once did dwell with God and experienced real life in relationship with him. Perfect, without sin. And that was in Eden. We read about that in the first two chapters of our Bible. Where God and people dwelled in the same space.

And people, human beings, were living the lives that he made them. And designed them to live.

Where they're living under God's provision. Enjoying his presence and working.

Doing the work he's given them on earth to do. But doing it joyfully. And they were experiencing life from the giver of life itself. And there was no problems.

[5 : 56] And there was no curse. There was no brokenness. It was the joyful, God-filled life that humans were made to live.

And we once had that in Adam and Eve. In Eden. But sadly, our innate human desire to rule ourselves rather than to be ruled by the one who we're meant to be ruled by.

That innate desire broke our relationship with God. We thought we could do better without him. And so, he let us have our way. And we were banished from that place.

We were banished from that place of life. Where God dwelled. And we have been ever since. As a race of humans. But look where it got us.

You know, we banished from God. It turns out that we cannot run our world without him. And without being under his rule. And we can't run our lives even.

[7 : 00] And we bumble around and make messes of things. And then we live decaying lives where we eventually die. And the reason is because we were never made to live apart from God.

You. You were not made to live apart from God. Think about that. That's what we learn in the first chapters of our Bibles. If you open your Bible and read from the beginning.

One of the first things you'll realize is that you were not made to live apart from God. Just as a leaf was never made to live apart from the tree that it comes from.

You know what happens when leaves on the tree, they're green. And they're full of life. But they fall down. And if you pull one off or it falls down, then it turns brown and just eventually dies.

And as sinners, you see, that's exactly the state we're in. We need to realize that about ourselves.

By nature as sinners, we are leaves detached from the tree. When we think we're actually trees ourselves, we think we are the source of life and happiness for ourselves.

[8 : 15] But that never works because we were made to derive life from God. And so if you're not in any real relationship with God, then all you are is nothing more than a brown and dying leaf on the ground.

Disconnected from your purpose and disconnected from any real life. And that is, by the way, where all the problems in your life come from.

All the problems in your life, every single one is rooted in your default disconnection from God.

That's why you have marriage problems.

That's why you have financial problems. That's why you have anxiety. That's why you're not the person you know you should be. Because by nature as a sinner, you are that leaf disconnected from the source of life that you were made to be connected to.

So that's the state of humanity. But God doesn't want you to stay that way. That's the good news.

That's why the Bible doesn't end at the end of Genesis 3 after humans are banished from the garden.

[9 : 40] God doesn't want you to stay that way. And what God is declaring in Exodus, here in the section we're reading, is that He wants to give a way back to Him.

He wants to give humans a way back to the life we had but lost when we were banished. And we see that in one of the most simple but key features of the tabernacle that I'm almost certain that you missed as we were reading it earlier.

And that is the detail of where the entrance is. The direction of the entrance to the court of the tabernacle of God is very important.

It's described here in Exodus 27 from verse 13. The section is all about the entrance to the tabernacle. And I want you to notice the direction it faces.

Verse 13. And for the width of the courtyard on the east side toward the sunrise. 75 feet. Make hangings 22 and a half feet long for one side of the gate including their three posts and their three bases.

[11 : 01] And make hangings 22 and a half feet long for the other side including their three posts and their three bases. The gate of the courtyard is to have a 30 foot screen embroidered with blue, purple and scarlet yarn.

And finely spun linen it is to have four posts and four bases. That's the description of this elaborate entrance into the courtyard where the tabernacle, where God dwelled is.

And it's no mistake that the entryway, the only entryway is facing east. Does that have any significance for you?

Why is that significant? Well, I'll tell you why. Because that is exactly the same direction that humans were banished from Eden in Genesis 3.

Let me read to you. Genesis 3 verse 24. The last verse of Genesis 3. After the tragic fall, humans into sin and banishment from the garden, we read this.

[12 : 05] God drove them out and stationed the cherubim and the flaming whirling sword east of the Garden of Eden to guard the way to the tree of life.

See, the way into Eden and to the tree of life was to the east. But it was barred to humans because of their sin.

That was the tragedy. But here then we come to Exodus and we read about the construction of the tabernacle with its entrance on the east. And for God to construct it this way, to give command that it's constructed exactly that way with its entrance to the east.

And you would have noticed at the end of Exodus 27 with this lamp burning inside the tabernacle, which we know from previously was shaped to be reminiscent of the tree of life.

And so all of this, the entrance to the east, coming in that way and then coming close to this tree of life is all an unmistakable statement God is making that He wants us to come back into the place of life from which we were banished.

[13 : 22] That's what the tabernacle is about. God saying, I want you to come back. I want you to come back to the place that you were banished from.

Let me ask you, do you feel far from God today? Do you feel like a banished sinner? Cut off from the life you should have.

Do you? Do you? Well, you feel that because you are. But God here is saying that's not what He made you for. That is not what He made you for.

He wants you to have life in real relationship with Him and He's made a way back in. That's what we're reading right here in Exodus.

God has made a way back in for you and for me to have real life in Him. The life we were made to have. The life we don't by default have. And it's represented here in this tabernacle and the way it's designed.

[14 : 29] It's actually beautiful. When you understand the significance and how it fits into the story of the Bible, what God is saying in the design of this tabernacle, His invitation back into His presence for sinners.

It's beautiful. But that's not all we read about in Exodus 27. Because as we read about this courtyard and this entrance and the way in from outside into God's place, we notice that there's something in the way.

An altar. And that's the first thing that's mentioned here in this chapter. And it's very significant. From the beginning of the chapter, verse 1 and 2.

You are to construct the altar of acacia wood. The altar must be square. Seven and a half feet long and seven and a half feet wide.

It must be four and a half feet high. Make horns for it on its four corners. The horns are to be of one piece, overlaid with bronze.

[15 : 37] This was the description of the altar. This was actually the biggest piece of furniture in the tabernacle. And it was to be placed here in the courtyard outside between the entrance to the

courtyard and then the tabernacle itself where this tree of life and God's presence is.

And so it's right between the tabernacle and the entrance. If you were an Israelite coming in to the entrance and you wanted to see this tabernacle, which it was beautiful.

We've already been seeing the last few weeks gold and purple and scarlet. And inside, you know, when the entrance is open, you've got this light and this gold shining out. And everybody in the wilderness would want to come and see this place.

And they would come in the entrance to the east of the altar court and they would look at this. But right in their eyeline, as they're looking at this tabernacle, would be this imposing figure of the altar, a place of death.

With these horns, which would be filled with blood. This would be the place, the most gross place to see. As you're looking at the most beautiful place, in between you and it is this place of death.

[16:54] And it's deliberately designed that way. It's not quite like the ticket gate at Cape Town Stadium as we came around that corner and looked at the stadium.

But then in between us and the stadium and going to watch that game was this ticket gate.

Obviously, we had to show our ticket. It was a reminder you couldn't get into this game unless you've paid the price.

Well, in the same way, as an Israelite came into the courts of God and they looked at the tabernacle, the place that God dwelled, where the tree of life was, they had this unmistakable reminder that a price must be paid to get there.

And God set it up this way to tell people the very important truth that we all need to take on board this morning, that the way into life first requires death.

The way into life first requires death. It's set up this way to remind people of the cost of sinners entering into God's presence.

[18:06] In Genesis, that reminder was a flaming sword at the east of Eden. And here it's this altar of death. But it's the same message.

Both the flaming sword in Eden and the altar in Exodus, it's the same message. If you want to come into God's presence, you can. All you need to do is die first.

If you want to come into God's presence, you need to die. That's this unmistakable message that the Hebrews would have got. Looking at this tabernacle.

See, that altar was there, this place of death. You know, it would have been much nicer if it wasn't there. It would have been much nicer if God just designed the tabernacle that you could get into the Holy of Holies without this altar being in the way and spoiling the atmosphere.

But the altar had to be there to show us the terrible reality of our sin and God's uncompromising holiness.

[19:14] And God's hatred of sin and His justice in punishing it. That altar there could not be removed because it reminds us of the law that is written into creation.

And it's a law that will never be repealed. Which is that the wages of sin is death. Romans 6.23. And Hebrews 9.

Without the shedding of blood, there is no forgiveness of sins. That law will never be repealed. It is written into creation, to the fabric of creation itself. Without the shedding of blood, there is no forgiveness of sins.

And that is true for your sin. And my sin. Your sin must be paid for in blood. That is the law. And there is no getting around that.

There is no avoiding that. Most people want to kind of, you know, access the life of God, but then conveniently avoid looking at the altar of blood.

[20:20] But there is no getting around it. There is no getting around the truth that your sin must be paid for in blood if you are ever going to have life in God. And not by some animal sacrifice either.

Which the Bible tells us later never actually was meant to take away human sin. No animal sacrifice could take away human sins. They were only there in the Old Testament as signposts to point to the true sacrifice to come.

Which was when the Son of God, Jesus Christ, came to this earth for the express purpose of dying on the cross and shedding His blood.

And therefore becoming the very sacrifice that His own law demands for human sin. So that for all who have faith in Him, that death that Jesus died becomes their death.

And as He died on the cross, on the altar, those who are truly in Christ also there die.

[21 : 36] Romans 6 puts it this way. Romans 7.

Romans 7.

My brotherhoods. My brother... société... Whoever wants to come to Christ, on the cross, you weat what He trustworthy as well. My brother... Thy friend... Have a fruit, love, God... Say...

Let theek... Don't spell anything... For the ADTH, yeah. When the Holy of Christ is TRIV... Life will be revealed that bay.

that the only way into life is through death. That is what we're learning here in Exodus 27.

[23 : 20] That is, do you see how, and I love this about this tabernacle, as we're reading in Exodus, every single part of it points to Jesus. Do you see that?

It's all designed and meant to point to Jesus and to explain to us what is death on the cross at G. And as we, therefore, meditate on these truths that we've got from Exodus 27, I think there are at least two things we need to take from this.

The design that we've read about this morning of the tabernacle with its one entrance on the east through the altar. That's the picture I want you to have in your mind. That's what we learn here, but what can we take from it?

Well, I think there's two things that we need to take from this chapter this morning before we finish. And the first is the truth that there is no back door to God.

This is very important for us to take away. There is no back door to God. There is no way to approach God through any other kind of religious system or through your own works or through your own setup that you've convinced yourself, well, this is the way I have a relationship with God.

[24 : 40] This is how I approach God. This is how I relate to God. Well, nobody cares, okay?

Because there's only one way in, and it's God's way. No other way in.

This whole chapter is about the walls of the perimeter of the courtyard, and you couldn't... There was no other way in. There's only one way in. The way that God has made.

You can't climb over the wall by your own effort. And the way for a sinner to access God is through death. And you can't get around that.

And that means that if you want real life, you need to be in Christ to pass through the altar of death in order to get to life on the other side.

That's what Paul has said in Romans 6. I'll read it to you again. Now, if we died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with Him.

[25 : 47] It's only if you've died with Christ that you are in Christ, and His death counts as yours. It's only then that you can live. It's only then that you can reach life.

The only way to life is through death. You need to be in Christ to pass through the altar. You need to fully embrace and trust in Christ.

And I don't mean just come to church on a Sunday. I mean, submit your life to Him. Trust fully in His way. Listen to Him.

Obey Him. And if you haven't yet, be baptized into Christ as one of His people. There is no other way in to life. If you have not done that yet, come speak to me and do that.

So that is the first thing we get from this chapter. There is no back door to God. Secondly, though, I want to speak to you if you have done that.

[26 : 52] If you have come into Christ and you've trusted in His death on the cross for you, for your sins to be taken away so that you can access life. Well, if you have and if you've trusted in that death, then the Bible teaches us that you are then to participate in that death.

And that's something that many Christians like to avoid. They love the truth that Jesus' death has paid for our sins, but then they ignore the many passages in the Bible that teach us, well, this is what it means then.

You've got to participate in that death if you want to participate in His life on the other side. And so what does that mean? What does that mean to participate in His death?

Well, it means dying to your old life. Because you see, this tabernacle design is always going to stand, which means death is always required to enter life.

And it still is. Even if you're a Christian, death is still required to enter life. the death of your old life, the death of your own ways, the death of your self-centered ambitions.

[28 : 06] And this call to die, this call to go through the altar in order to have life, is all over the New Testament. Here's some verses.

Romans 12, verse 1. I urge you to present your bodies as living sacrifices, as a living sacrifice. Galatians 2.20.

Paul speaks of himself and says, I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. And Ephesians 4, verse 22, says, Take off your former way of life, the old self that is corrupted by deceitful desires, to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, and to put on the new self, the one created according to God's likeness, in righteousness, in purity of truth.

This is saying the exact same thing as we're reading in Exodus 27. In order to have life, you need to go through death. You need to take off your former way of life.

You need to die to your old ambitions, and your old desires, and your old wants, and your old way of living. The old self. You've got to die to that to be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and to put on the new self, to live the life that God has called you for.

[29 : 27] You need to die first. That is a consistent teaching throughout Scripture. And by the way, this Ephesians 4, verse 22, is a verse that's coming up in our daily devotions this week.

And so meditate on it as we read it, and as we continue the next few weeks in our daily devotions, which I hope you're doing, because they're vital for us to feed on these truths every day, as we continue in our daily devotions in Ephesians, we're going to see over the next two weeks what it looks like to leave this old life at the altar as we head to our real life.

So will you do what it says? Because God desires, wants you to know His life.

He's always wanted that for you. He wants you to know real life, not this passing away, corrupted, frustrating life.

He wants you to know real life in Himself, now and forever, and one day without limit. death. But there's only one way in, and it's through death.

[30 : 47] Have you taken that way yet? Let's pray. O Lord, we are amazed when we read these passages in Scripture and when we unpack them and you lead us to understand them, just what you are saying to us, and we thank you that you want us to have life again, and that you've made a way in for us.

But Lord, we also thank you for the reminder that it is only through death. Because we're sinners, it is only through death that we can have life, and so we pray.

Lord, would you help us to embrace the death of Christ in our lives once more? For those who are here this morning who have not yet come to Christ, who have not given their lives to Him, who have not come into Him, Lord, would you call them, would you draw them to trust fully in Christ and submit to Him as their King, so that they can participate in His death to have life.

And for those of us who have done that, Lord, we pray that you would help us to know how to participate rightly, how to put off our old self, to die to our old life properly, so that we can live the new life you've called us to.

And we pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.