

“God with us”

<u>Occasion</u>	Evening Service at Therfield Chapel
<u>Day, Date & Time</u>	Sunday 2 May 2004 at 18:30
<u>Basis</u>	Exodus 26
<u>Reading</u>	Exodus 26
<u>Hymns</u>	525, 89 from Mission Praise
<u>Songs</u>	123, 191, 50, 49, 219 from Mission Praise
<u>Author/Speaker</u>	Paul Rydon

Where do you think God lives?
The very question presupposes his existence.

Outside the Church,
the question seems a nonsense,
for to the secularist and the humanist there is no God.
Hence any gods that we or anyone else may worship
are figments or our imaginations.
Where such imaginary gods dwell merely requires a little more imagination.

So prevalent now is atheism
that there are moves to have it taught as part of the Religious Education
programme in our schools,
though what there is to teach is hard to contemplate.
“Some people believe there is no Living God” –
end of lesson.
Though admittedly if you choose to teach the reasons why people believe
there is no God,
you could spin it out quite a bit!!!

The common answer to the question, “Where does God live?”
is of course, ‘Heaven’.

That is hardly surprising
as the definition of the word ‘heaven’ is ‘the abode of God and his angels’.
Unsurprisingly,
if heaven is the abode of God,
then God must live in ‘Heaven’.
But we are no further forward.

You might just as well ask, “Where does Paul live?”
Answer: ‘In Paul’s house’.
What is Paul’s house?

Answer: 'The house where Paul lives'.

Long before Abraham,
the ancient Egyptians,
the Sumerians
and the people of the Indus valley civilisation in India
were building temples for their gods.

This is why many people assume that religion evolved from ignorance
to the present enlightened view.

As man emerged from his evolutionary development
(so the theory goes)

he began to worship the sun,
the moon,
the stars
and imaginations of his mind such as evil spirits
and the spirits of his dead relatives.

This primitive religion developed into the polytheism we find in civilisations such as
that of ancient Egypt.

As our thinking became more enlightened,
we developed the concept of loving one's neighbour as the main thing in
religion,
and the one who first taught that most clearly was Jesus Christ
who founded the Christian or higher form of religion.

Eventually we came of age intellectually
and we now know the origin of man
and we no longer need religion at all
for we know that there actually is no God.

But the Bible tells a very different story.

In the beginning,
God created Man in his own likeness.
At first,
man had a close relationship with his Maker,
but he rebelled
and was cast out of the beautiful garden into which God first introduced him
and the world became a harsh place
degraded by sin.

Initially,
Adam and his family worshipped only the living God who created them,
but we know from sources outside the Bible
that by the time we get to Abraham,
polytheism, the worship of many Gods,
both good and evil was rampant.

God called Abraham out of Ur of the Chaldees, the city where he lived,
to worship the one true God
and promised to make of him a vast nation.

In time,
his grandson Jacob took his family into Egypt
where they settled and grew into twelve tribes.

Egypt also was polytheistic.
They were an advanced civilisation
and many of the temples they built for their gods still exist
and can be visited today.

As we know,
the children of Israel (as they came to be known)
were oppressed by the Egyptians,
but eventually escaped into the desert
in pursuit of the promised land.

And here they are now
camped at the foot of mount Sinai
and God is spelling out the details of the portable sanctuary,
which they are to make,
where he can dwell among his people.

We have no idea how much their worship of God had been influenced by the multi-
god worship which was at the root of Egyptian culture,
but we get a clue from incidents like the golden calf
which we shall come to in Chapter 32,
and the fact that they were always tempted to revert to other gods
from time to time.

But God was determined that they should be a pure people
and that they should worship him alone,
for he is the only living God
the maker of the Universe.

That is the whole point of the first two commandments,
which we covered in Chapter 20.

‘You shall have no other gods beside me.’
‘You shall not make your self an idol, nor any image and you shall not bow
down to them, for I the Lord your God am a jealous God.’

So God’s desire is to dwell among his people,
but he will come on His terms and not on ours.

Think how many times God says;
‘If you do this and this,
I will be your God
and you shall be my people.’

Jesus updated this when he said:

‘If you love me, keep my commandments’.

If we glance back at verse 8 of Chapter 25, we read:

‘Then have them make a sanctuary for me and I will dwell among them.
Make this tabernacle and all its furnishings exactly like the pattern I will show you.’

Moses was up the mountain visiting God,

and God was talking to Him.

And God was telling Moses how to make the tabernacle

and giving him a vision of how these things were to look

when they were finished.

We saw last week in chapter 25 the descriptions of the Ark of the Covenant,

the Table,

and the Lampstand.

Now in Chapter 26 God is describing the Tabernacle itself.

It was in the form of a nomad’s tent,

but much more ornate and luxurious.

It was portable and would be carried in pieces by the Levites.

Verses 1-14 describe the fabric and leather coverings;

Verses 15-30 describe the framework;

Verses 31 to 35 describe the inner screen or veil,

which separated the most holy place from the holy place

and verse 36 describes the entrance curtain to the tent itself.

It was no mean structure.

Yet you could just about erect it inside this chapel.

It was 15 feet high –

this chapel is a little over 20 feet floor to ceiling.

It was 15 feet wide –

this chapel is about 30 feet wide.

It was to be about 45 feet long –

this chapel is about the same in length,

so the balcony might get in the way

if you were to try to put it up in here.

The structure was to be erected facing eastwards.

That is not clear from here,

but it is from other passages.

The north and south side walls

and the western end wall were made of acacia wood boards

covered with real gold,

with tenons at the bottom of each board

standing in silver sockets.

Gold clad wooden rods gave the structure rigidity.

No mention of guy ropes is made here,

but they would have been necessary to maintain stability.

Nor is it clear how the coverings were to be supported.

Moses has given us insufficient detail for us to go out and build a replica.

Local knowledge of such structures is clearly assumed
and in any case Moses had his vision of what God had shown that it
should look like.

There were to be four coverings to form the tent itself.

The first covering,

which would be seen only from the inside
and would form the ceiling of the tent
was made of fine linen
exquisitely embroidered with Cherubim in blue,
purple
and scarlet yarn.

The next layer was to be of woven goats' hair

and would protect the delicate nature of the linen.

The next layer was to be of rams skins died red

and finally a layer of some kind of leather –

possibly porpoise or seal skins or something of that kind
to protect the whole tent from the heat of the sun,
wind,
sand
and dust,
and the occasional torrential rain.

How all this was supported on the structure is difficult to imagine

as it would be very heavy,
so clearly local knowledge was important.

Inside,

the space was divided by an ornate linen curtain
again embroidered in scarlet, blue and purple
with cherubim worked into the pattern.

This screen,

or veil was to be erected about 15 feet from the far wall
right across the tent hung
and on four gold covered posts on silver bases,
to create a specially sacred area called the Holy of Holies
or the Most Holy Place.

Finally the entrance curtain was to be made from embroidered linen,

And hung on gold covered posts standing in sockets of bronze.

Why these sockets were bronze

when all the others were silver

is a bit of a puzzle,

though as these would be exposed to greater traffic,
the greater strength of bronze would be an asset.

(silver, like most pure metals, is very soft)

Inside the inner sanctuary was placed the ark of the covenant.

This was to be the place where God was assumed to dwell.

It was most holy

and only once a year did the high priest,

and only he,

ever enter

and then only to make atonement for the sins of the people.

In the outer part of the sanctuary was the table for the shewbread,

a weekly offering of food placed in the presence of God,

the altar of incense,

and the Lampstand which was to be kept burning day and night by the priests.

Everything was portable

and rings were incorporated into the designs to take long rods,

which were used to carry the parts from place to place.

So that wherever the children of Israel were to wander,

when they set up camp,

they would set up the tabernacle in the midst of the people

and the visible presence of God could be seen by all.

When I was a boy,

there were two spinsters in our church, sisters, who lived together.

They were very Victorian ladies,

who always seemed to wear black

and my family would be invited to Sunday tea from time to time.

We boys were not allowed to play at all in their house

so we had nothing to do while the adults talked about boring things

like adults always do.

On the wall of their lounge was a large picture

and I didn't know what it was about,

but as I had nothing else to do, I studied this picture many times.

Later I came to realize that it was a picture of the tabernacle.

The flat roofed tent was there just as we have described it,

with a pillar of cloud standing over it.

The tent was in a large enclosure just like the overhead we showed earlier;

and camped around the enclosure in formal groups or sections

with all their tent doors facing toward the tabernacle

were thousands and thousands and thousands of tents,

surrounding the tabernacle enclosure on all four sides.

Truly a picture of God dwelling amongst his people.

At this stage in the story, Moses is being given the plans

and the instructions to build a sanctuary for God.

Later in the book we will see this structure actually being built

and a system of worship set up

which will carry the people throughout the forty years that they were

yet to spend

wandering around the Sinai peninsular
until the days of Joshua,
when they would cross the river Jordan
and enter the promised land.
Throughout that time they would carry this tabernacle with them.
They would set it up when they made camp
and they would take it apart when they moved.
It was a symbol of the presence of God
wherever they went
and a centre for worship,
sacrifice,
repentance,
atonement
and forgiveness.

Eventually in the glory days of King Solomon,
it would be replaced by the temple in Jerusalem
and then the sorry story of Israel's failures would unfold
and the glory would be lost.

But in that time,

God made another promise through the prophet Ezekiel ([Ezekiel 11:19-20](#))
"I will remove from them their heart of stone and give them a heart of flesh.
Then they will follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws. They will be my
people and I will be their God." declares the sovereign Lord.

That promise was fulfilled when the Jews returned from exile
and rebuilt the temple in Jerusalem,
long before the time of Christ,
but it was fulfilled again
when the Spirit of God descended on the disciples in the upper room
on the day of Pentecost
and it is fulfilled in each of us
as we submit to Jesus,
repent before his cross
and receive the Spirit of God
when we are born again.

In the new testament

the apostle Paul refers to the church, the body of believers as being the temple
of God and also of the individual believer's body as being the temple of God.
([1 Corinthians 3:16-17](#); [6:19](#); [2 Corinthians 6:16](#); [Ephesians 2:21-22](#))

So we see that when the spirit was given at Pentecost,
he was given both to the Church corporately
and to each Christian individually.

Through the death of Christ,

God can and does again dwell among his people.

Throughout history God has been preparing for this.

Not on our terms, but on his.
There is nothing automatic about God's presence.
He always comes on his terms.
His holiness demands that he can only come where sin has been removed by his
atoning grace and mercy.
In the case of the tabernacle
he dwelt in the Holy of Holies,
where the sins of the people were atoned for
both on a daily basis on the altar outside
and once a year when the high priest entered the inner
sanctuary and made propitiation for the sins of the people.

So where does God live?

Today he lives in his Church –
not in the building, but in the people.
But he also lives in each and every believer
by the power of his grace and mercy,
only because he has accepted the sacrifice of Jesus Christ on
our behalf
and raised him from the dead by his great power.

He lives here amongst us,
in you and in me,
if indeed we are his.

May all that we do
all that we say
and all that we achieve
yield glory to the name we carry
as we live pure and holy lives for him.

May it be so to the glory of his Name

Amen

Paul Rydon – 2 May 2004