

Growing Toward Maturity 5 - Worship in God's Presence Part 2

1. Introduction

Good morning!

In my last message as part 1 of "Worship in God's Presence," we learned through stories of Cain and Abel, and Abraham and Isaac. Abel sacrificed the best of the first born from his flock, and Abraham sacrificed his beloved son Isaac, and through their sacrifices, we learned what we need to offer and how we should get close to God. And the four things we learned are as follows:

- 1) Worship is to get close to God and be with God.
- 2) In Old Testament days, in order to get close to God, people needed to offer sacrifices.
- 3) Through Jesus Christ's salvation, we no longer need to offer sacrifices.
- 4) Our ministries are our worship of God and our offerings to God.

We also learned that there is a possibility of worship becoming just a ceremony since understanding what worship is itself wouldn't make our lives as Christians and worship better. The purpose of worship is not to carry out a ceremony called "worship," but to meet God. In Old Testament days, one worship place was called "Tent of Meeting" taught in Exodus 29:42.

Read Exodus 29:42

It is very important for us to know that God gave the Jews worship in the purpose of meeting God. Worship is not a ceremony but time to meet God and listen to His words. We were transformed into those who can meet God at any time and any place.

God's blessings given to the Jews were very big, but the blessing we received were even bigger. The author of Hebrews compares what the Jews were given and what we were given in Hebrews 8:5.

Read Hebrews 8:5

If Tent, as in Tent of Meeting, is "a copy and shadow" of what is in heaven, we can see that what we received is the real thing. It's not "a copy and shadow." In a couple of messages, I'd like us to think about what "Tent of Meeting" is for us. **In other words, we will be learning what it means to meet God in several different perspectives.**

2. The Son as the "Tent of Meeting"

Read John 1:14

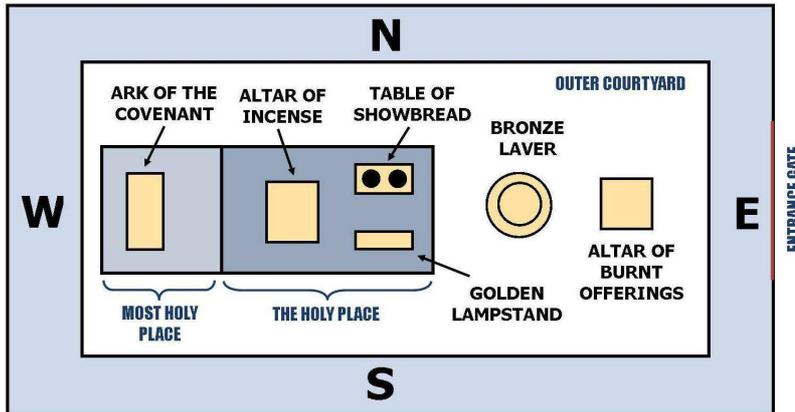
Later in the message, we will be learning about God becoming man, but let us think about "dwelling."

"Dwelling" means that God's Son appeared in flesh and lived in this world. In Greek, this dwelling seems to mean, "one who had pitched a tent among us" or "pitched a tent called Jesus' flesh." Let us read Hebrews 8:5 again.

Read Hebrews 8:5

God ordered Moses to build a tabernacle, and inside the tabernacle, to make the bronze altar, the bronze basin, the Holy Place and the Most Holy Place. The following blueprint is of the tabernacle. Various rules and rituals set in Old Testament may be interesting to those who are interested, but most people probably haven't even given a thought to it at all. Let us take the time to take a look at the blueprint and think about those rules and rituals.

THE TABERNACLE OF MOSES (EXODUS 35-40)



They teach us that this tabernacle is a copy and shadow of what exists in heaven. According to John 1:14, this tabernacle is actually Jesus Christ himself, and a form of Jesus. As Hebrews 8:5 teaches us, the actual tabernacle is in heaven and Moses built a replica on Earth as a copy. I'd like to take more time to study about the tabernacle, but for now the main point taught in Old Testament is Jesus.

In order for us to meet God, the most important thing God did for us was to create the world.

John 1:14

John taught us that God, whom we cannot see, not only became flesh and dwelt among us, but God came to have a relationship with us. Now we'd like to focus on the tabernacle.



3. God We Can See

In Old Testament, the first human, Adam, is described living in the Garden of Eden. How Adam and Eve were related to God isn't described, but they seemed to be able to hear God's voice directly. But they sinned and were evicted from the Garden of Eden and were unable to go back there as described in the book of Genesis. The Bible doesn't tell us if they were able to "see" God, but since the Garden of Eden seemed a place where they were able to communicate with God freely, we can assume they were unable to communicate with God any longer once they were outside the Garden.

Our communication used to mean communication with someone we could see. However, nowadays, our technology allows us to communicate without actually seeing anybody in person through letters and phones first, and now through the Internet and Social Network Services. Especially in the younger generation, communication with invisible people may be the main means of communication, and it may have become easier that way in our society.

At work, we also have several ways to communicate: in person, on the phone and via emails. However, we probably like to communicate something important in person. Among those means to communicate, there are merits and demerits to each. If we are unable to see each other in person when we need to, in order to accomplish something crucial, there is a possibility of a communication channel becoming disconnected somehow. In other words, if there's no problem communicating without seeing each other, the relationship might be a superficial one or a not very special one. Even if it started with communication without seeing each other first, it would be necessary to see that person in person when the relationship grows important.

In that sense, when God becomes very important in our life, it will become very important for us to be able to see God. Right now we may not be able to see God, but He made it possible for us to communicate with Him through the Holy Spirit. Many of you may have been able to feel God in the Bible, worship, and prayers through the Holy Spirit. The image of God you have may vary, but whatever the image may be, we will be able to be empowered, encouraged, comforted and guided by the Holy Spirit.

More than anything, by Jesus appearing as man, authors of New Testament were able to write what kind of being God was, what He did, and what He said. To us, it happened more than 2,000 years ago, but since those authors saw Jesus in person, we are able to feel very close and intimate to Jesus by reading the Bible. Because they wrote what they witnessed about Jesus, we are able to learn about Jesus intimately. We should rediscover the huge blessing of being able to be in the relationship with God again through Jesus, the Holy Spirit, and the New Testament the witnesses wrote in spite of Adam's mistake which severed the relationship with God.

Also God's son lived among us.

4. God Who Lived Among Us

There are things we can see but cannot reach. For example, we can see very valuable art work or artifacts, but we cannot hold or touch them. Celebrities can be an example, too. I assume there is nobody here who has actually met Prime Minister Abe or President Trump. Someone may have seen Mr. Abe somewhere, but probably not Mr. Trump.

By only seeing someone, it may make it easier for us to understand who he/she is, but if we can communicate with him or her, we will be able to understand that person better. Compared with someone we may see only once in a lifetime, we will be able to understand a person who lives in our community much better.

John told us that Jesus not only became man but also lived among us. In fact, Jesus was born to Joseph and Mary and lived with them for 30 years. When he turned 30, he started preaching in public and spent many hours with many people. John also teaches us in 1 John 1:1

Read 1 John 1:1

John believed Jesus Christ was God's son, not just a man, and he lived in Jesus' days and lived his life with Jesus. And John described Jesus in five perspectives.

First, he teaches us that Jesus "was from beginning," which means Jesus is God. John realized through Jesus that he was in God's plans from the beginning not when he met Jesus. John's life was limited but Jesus' is eternal. Jesus is the creator and existed before everything, and His existence is infinite.

Second, he tells us that Jesus is "which we have heard." John is one of the people who heard Jesus talk in person. But the way, he heard Jesus change throughout the time. First, when Jesus started preaching, he was a fisherman in the Sea of Galilee and was listening to Jesus preach from afar. But after Jesus talked to James and John there and they became the disciples, John listened to Jesus as his teacher. When Jesus was crucified, he was there with Mary and listened to Jesus' last word. After Jesus was resurrected, John meets him again and listens to him again. Over the time, John got closer to Jesus little by little, and eventually he got to the closest place to Jesus. He got closer to Jesus not only physically but also spiritually. He just didn't hear Jesus but learned to hear the depth of Jesus' stories and words and appreciated them.

Thirdly, John tells us about that "which we have seen with our eyes." The Invisible God appeared in front of John as what he could see, and John tells about witnessing Jesus with his own eyes. It's nothing extraordinary about a person seeing another person, but when John saw Jesus after He was resurrected and appeared, he realized He was God who became man and believed and accepted that fact. When John believed and accepted Jesus was indeed God's son, he was allowed to see God whom he wasn't able to see or allowed to see. He must have been very surprised when he realized he was able to see God whom nobody was allowed to see after Adam sinned.

The fourth thing is that "which we have looked at." John not only saw Jesus and was able to see Jesus, but also looked at Jesus. Another translation also says "stared at" Jesus. This "looking" must have had intention. What kind of intention did John have when he looked at Jesus?

John was a fisherman. Jesus' other disciples included a tax collector, a zealot, other fishermen, and they were not teachers of the law like Paul or Nicodemus who became disciples later. We don't know how much of the law Jesus' disciples knew at that time, but Jesus was preaching with disciples who didn't have respected backgrounds in their time. What Jesus taught often caused troubles with teachers of the law, and

they even conspired against Jesus' life. Of course Jesus' disciples were in danger, too. Still John needed to know who Jesus was after hearing His words and teachings and also the arguments that the teachers of the law had.

In order to understand Jesus and His words, John always needed to "look at" Jesus. He needed to "stare at" Jesus. John must have wanted to insist that he understood Jesus that well.

The last one is "our hands have touched." Just like the third one, "which we have seen with our eyes," a person can touch another person how much ever he/she wants, but we are not allowed to see or touch God. However, John confessed that he had an intimate relationship with Jesus so much that he could touch Jesus. He not only expressed their closeness in the relationship but also the distance. John must have wanted to show us that God is actually near us, not somebody whom we couldn't see or touch or who are far away from us. Isaiah 59:1-2 tells us this paradoxically.

Read Isaiah 59:1-2

Isaiah tells us if without iniquities and sins, God is close enough to save and to hear Israel's voice and cries. God is always with us, but there is a barrier separating us from God. With this in mind, if we read John's confession in 1 John 1:1, we realize John wanted to tell us that God is within our reach and touch because our problem with sins have been solved and we are in an intimate relationship with God who is within our reach now.

Through John's confession we can see that God lived among us and he personally experienced it.

In order for us to meet God, the most important thing God did for us was sending God's only son to this world, which John 1:14 teaches us. Because God's son came into this world, we got to see God and live with God. Let us look at John 1:14 again.

John 1:14

In Old Testament days, especially an era of the law, only chosen people by the rules were allowed to come forward and hear God's voice. But in modern days, because we received salvation through Jesus, anybody can go to God freely and meet God through the Holy Spirit. Jesus opened the way for us. Although Jesus is God, He came to us and showed Himself to us and lived among us.

What's requested from us is not to try to do something special but to accept Jesus' way and live accordingly. We need to understand the fact that this wonderful grace and blessing is not something we try hard to receive, but something already given to us.

5. The Goal of who is seen and who lived among us

Today we learned that God became visible and lived among us. If the goal were God becoming visible and living among us, God wouldn't have needed to do anything else. However, Jesus became flesh and lived among us and then He himself ended it. The way he ended it was the cross.

Jesus is the tabernacle which is in heaven and He came to live among us, but still a problem remained. And that problem is mentioned in Hebrews 9:1-10.

Read Hebrews 9:1-10

Also read Hebrews 10:1-4

It is taught that at the tabernacle in Old Testament, worship people offered to God wasn't complete and the problem with sin wasn't solved. In that sense, 9:8 is particularly important. In the part "that the way into the Most Holy Place had not yet been disclosed as long as the first tabernacle was still functioning," "disclosed" has another meaning, *opened*, in the Greek Bible. So we could say the way into the Most Holy Place had not yet been "opened" as long as the first tabernacle was still functioning

Then what do we need to do? What solves our problem of sin? The answer is quite simple. We just get a rid of the tabernacle in Old Testament and move onto the complete tabernacle. Then what is the complete tabernacle? The Bible teaches us this complete tabernacle is Jesus Christ Himself. Therefore, instead of continuing to live on Earth, Jesus needed to get a rid of the Old Testament tabernacle. Where did he do it? On the Cross.

Read Matthew 27:45-51

This is about Jesus' being crucified, and v.51 tells us "the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom." This "curtain of the temple" is the curtain between the Holy Place and the Most Holy Place of the tabernacle, but God promised that in the Most Holy Place He would meet the high priest. Indeed, God promised Abraham's children He would show himself through Tent of Meeting, but it was only once a year and only to the high priest. Unless the tabernacle is gone, the way to free worship given to us in modern days wouldn't open.

Today's message ends here, but next time we'll be learning about Jesus Christ's Cross together. The Cross was very important for our sins to be forgiven, but there were other purposes to it.

Let us pray.