

**Sacred Furniture**  
**Exodus 37:1-29**  
**November 25, 2007**  
**FBC Waynesboro**

Most of us have something like this in our houses: that piece or pieces of furniture that have special, almost sacred significance. In some cases it may be structure of the piece that makes it special but in most cases it is the stories behind them. We have those pieces of furniture in several places in our house and behind each one of them is a story that is rich in importance to us. Four pieces of furniture in our family have been handed down through multiple generations to the eldest son. One of those pieces is our dining room table that is by now tattered and torn but I never sit at that table without having memories both made and made up from experiences around this table. Made from what I can remember and made up from people from the past that sat at this table whom have not seen and do not know. We all have something like that in our homes that are part of who we are here and now but tie us to what has come before us. They remind us that we are not the first ones to perform upon this stage nor will we be the last; those items in our dining room will be passed on to our son.

Each of the pieces of furniture in the Holy Place and the Holy of Holies has special and sacred significance. They tell the story in visual form of who our God is to us and who we are to our God when we are living in a right relationship to Him. This story begins inside the Holy of Holies and the only piece of furniture that was inside the Holy of Holies: The Ark of the Covenant. If we do not understand the significance of the Ark of the Covenant, then the three items in the Holy Place do not matter. When we understand the significance of the Ark of the Covenant, it is the three items in the Holy Place that reveal the validity and the integrity of our understanding. It is this piece of furniture that makes all the difference.

It is where we will begin our examination of this chapter and it is where we will spend most of our time. And I want to begin by setting its importance in both a biblical and a theological context. Biblically the Ark of the Covenant is to the Old Testament what the Cross is to the New Testament. Ask anybody what is the central symbol that reveals the center of the Christian faith and they will say, "why, it is the cross." Ask anybody who understands the covenant relationship that God had with these people during this period what was the central symbol that reveals the center of their faith and they would say, "why, it is the ark of the covenant." Yet, what these two symbols represent are not two different realities but one singular reality. The ark of the covenant is simply under the Old Covenant what

the cross is under the New Covenant. It is the cross in a different form. We will see this clearly as we examine it. But I want us also to see the theological context because what happens in the Holy of Holies and on the Hill of Calvary was the act of God that would enable people to right with Himself. He was doing what was necessary to make us right with Himself. God's doing what is required to make us right with Himself is called justification. But those who are justified show it in the world as we live as lights in the world, bringing the bread of life to hungry souls and living for the praise of His glory filled with the Spirit and offering our lives as an acceptable sacrifice to God. All of this is spelled out plainly in this passage. So, let's dig in.

The ark is so special and so sacred that God delegated its construction to the one He had chosen. Remember that Bezalel is the first person in the Bible about whom it is said that he was filled with the Spirit of God. So, He is chosen to make the ark. Read verses 1-9 and you will see that there are six elements that are a part of the ark: acacia wood for tenacity and durability, gold for the sovereign rule of God, four rings for the world, two poles to transport the ark, the two cherubim watching over the mercy seat so that what happens here glorifies God and advances His purpose in the world. Six which is one short of seven which is the number of imperfection which is a reminder that what happens here though ordained of God is just short of fulfilling ultimately what is required for the wrath of God to be fully satisfied and for people to be saved forever from the guilt and punishment of sin. Although it was imperfect, this piece of furniture represented for the people of God the presence and the power of God. And they understood both in a way that we do not.

Only one person once a year ever saw the ark. The High Priest on the Day of Atonement when he went behind the curtain to offer blood on the mercy seat for his sins and the sins of his people. He washed twice before he entered; he washed again after coming out. He was fully robed. He fasted and prayed before entering this sacred place. When the ark was transported from place to place it was wrapped in the veil through which the High priest entered. The people knew what was being transported when it was being moved but they could not see it. They had this perpetual visual reminder that their God was so awesome and powerful, so holy and great that He came to them and made Himself known to them on His terms and on His terms alone. They knew that He was among them but not to do as they desired Him to do, but for them to do as He desired them to do. They understood His Holy presence in all the magnitude of both its majesty and its mystery.

But they also understood His power. They knew that He was not a God to be trifled with or treated as they wanted to treat Him. So that when the ark was

being transported to Jerusalem on a cart and it began to rock back and forth when the oxen hit a mudhole and Uzzah did what he thought was the right thing and touched the ark to keep it from falling in the mud, God killed him. I don't like what R.C. Sproul says here but it is so true, "Uzzah made the tragic mistake of thinking that the yuk of the muck and mire of the earth was dirtier to the symbolic presence of God than his own sin." And the great mystery of that day was not that Uzzah died but that by God's grace the rest of them lived since transporting the ark on a cart was an act of disobedience as well. The ark of the covenant represented for the people the holy awesome power of God right alongside the graceful merciful presence of God.

The focal point for the ark was the golden mercy seat that covered the entire top of the ark. The word that is used for this mercy seat means "covering" in the sense of covering our sins so that we can be acceptable to a Holy God. And it happened there once a year as the High Priest poured the blood of the unblemished lamb upon the mercy seat signaling the satisfaction of the wrath of God so that sinners could be saved from the guilt of sin. And it happened as the writer of Hebrews puts it once for all on Calvary's tree when the blood of Jesus was shed for you and me. What can wash away my sin, nothing but the blood of Jesus. What can make me whole within, nothing but the blood of Jesus. He is the lamb without spot or blemish. He is the holy child of Bethlehem offered up to the holy God as the acceptable sacrifice. He is the one who turns away the wrath of God so justly deserved and justifies us freely through His blood. To be justified means that you recognize that Jesus through His cross is the only one who can save you from your sin, from God's wrath and from much deserved judgment and hell. Because you sense that God is showing you this truth, you turn in faith to Jesus and you beg for His mercy, "Lord, be merciful to me a sinner." And as you turn to Him in faith, He is faithful to hear your plea, to forgive your sin and to set you free. You are justified.

And immediately, instantaneously this Holy God through the power of His Holy Spirit for the glory of His Son and His church begins to sanctify you. He begins to work in you because He is in you to shape you for His own and to use you for His own glory. When He saves you by His grace, you become a part of His bride the church as He is the bridegroom. What bridegroom does not desire his bride and bride his bridegroom? So, Jesus through His Spirit begins to woo you to Himself in relationship and to His work which is your assigned responsibility to be fulfilled in and through the church. **THOSE WHO ARE JUSTIFIED ARE BEING SANCTIFIED AND THOSE WHO ARE NOT BEING SANCTIFIED HAVE NEVER BEEN JUSTIFIED. THIS IS NOT**

## NEUROSURGERY.THIS IS BASIC BIBLE 101. BUT IT IS THE BIGGEST PROBLEM IN OUR CULTURE IN OURDAY.

Just as the ark stands as the sacred symbol of justification, so the three main elements in the Holy Place stand before us as the representative elements of sanctification. Look at them in turn in terms of what they represent: A table with bread on it, a lampstand, and a prayer altar. The prayer altar is in the middle. Look first at the table with the twelve loaves of bread, one for each of the tribes of Israel. This table reminds us of God's provision. God gives us the bread that we need. And what are we to do with what God gives us? Why is it that God gives us what we need? So that we can take that which we have received at His hand and give it to others. And what is the most important bread that we have ever been given? Jesus says to us, "I am the bread of life and the one who eats of this bread will never be hungry again." We who have eaten of this bread want others to receive it just as we have, so we give it away. Someone has said that evangelism is simply one beggar telling another beggar where to find bread. How do I know that I am truly justified; I have received the bread of life and as I feed upon this bread, I am faithful to distribute this good bread to others.

But then there is the lamstand. Six lights with one in the middle raised above the others. Each branch has symbols of almond leaves bearing its fruit. The lamps remain lit all the time in the Holy Place. It was dreadfully dark in this place without these lamps due to the density of the curtains around and overhead, but when the lamps were shining the darkness was dispelled. This one is not hard to see, is it? Jesus is the light of the world who illumines our lives with His light so that we become shining lights in a dark world and the evidence that we are is seen in the fruit that we produce. And it would be nice if we could make the jump here to say that the fruit here is the fruit of the Spirit, but that is unlikely. The fruit of a shining light is dispelling the darkness by lighting other lights. As Vance Havner puts it, "the real fruit of a Christian is producing another Christian." In my home, in my workplace, in my church, in my neighborhood. How do I know that I am saved? I am a shining light in a dark world and other candles are now shining because of the light that God has shone in my own heart.

Power and perspective is given to the sharing of bread and the shining of the lights through the prayer altar that is in the middle. Located right in front of the Holy of Holies with two handles on each side gives perspective to prayer. Why two handles? Because when we come into the presence of a holy God we hold on to be held up because we know we do not deserve to stand. And when you pray peering toward that which represents the greatness of this God, I don't think you pray about yourself; I think you pray about simply being the kind of person that

will bring Him praise and fulfill His purpose no matter what. Cleanse me. Fill me. Use me. Glorify yourself through me. This is the prayer in the presence of God. And your prayer would lead you to where this text is led.

The anointing oil represents the presence and power of the Holy Spirit flowing down upon us and over us without which no person can be pleasing to God. And when we are filled with the flowing power of His Spirit, our lives are offered up as sacrifices to God. This is Paul's point in 2 Corinthians 2:14-17. I want you to see three things in this text as we close today. First, I want you to notice the end. Paul says that there are those who use the Gospel for profit or they buy into it for what it can bring them in bringing them a better life as they define better life; Paul says that believers live life in Christ with God being the source of that life that is lived out before God. We know that God is watching, and we are glad. Second, the middle where Paul says as believers we create a smell and for those who do not know Jesus is the kind of stink that they want to eliminate. For those who are being saved, it is the kind of smell they want to emulate. Be careful about your life when unbelievers are overly complimentary; if you smell good to them you may well be a stench in the nostrils of God. Third, v. 14. The phrase "triumphal procession" is a term that pictures a "chain gang." Men held together by a common cord for a common cause. The picture here is of men and women who have been so captured by Christ that we controlled by Him because we are consumed with Him. He is all we want because He is all we need. Now, I don't think you get here as soon as you are saved. It is the goal. And the goal is only realized through the sanctifying process in which our passionate worship of God with the people of God for the glory of God causes us to live as shining lights in a dark world where day by day we are delivering bread to hungry people. I do know this: if the Bible is true and these realities are not the chief characteristic of the desire of your heart, then you don't need to work harder at doing better, you need to look seriously at your heart to discern if in truth you have ever been saved. Justification always leads to sanctification. Salvation always leads to service. The blood always leads to bearing witness. Those who have been washed in the blood of Calvary walk as children of light bearing witness to Jesus in the world.