

SIMPLE TALKS ON THE TABERNACLE

by

D. H. Dolman, M. A., D. D.

Copyright @ 1954

CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR

THE ARK OF TESTIMONY GUIDING THE PEOPLE

“My presence shall go with thee, and I will give thee rest” (Exodus 33:44).

BEFORE closing our studies on the ark, let us follow for a few moments the story of the ark. Moses had prayed: **“If thy presence go not with me, carry us not up hence”** (Exodus 33:15). The Lord graciously heard the prayer of His servant: **“My presence shall go with thee and I will give thee rest”** (Exodus 33:14). As proof that the prayer was heard, God gave His people the Ark of the Covenant. It was a visible sign of the invisible presence of God.

In vain Moses had tried to induce his brother-in-law, Hobab, to be their guide during their wanderings in the wilderness. God did better for Moses. The Ark of the Covenant of the Lord went before them in a three days' journey to search out a resting-place for them (Numbers 10:33).

To many young missionaries going out to the mission field, I have passed on the promise: **“I will go before thee, and make the crooked places straight: I will break in pieces the gates of brass, and cut in sunder the bars of iron”** (Isaiah 45:2).

How often have I tried with my puny hands to break in sunder iron gates. I did only achieve to hurt my own hands. He gives an open door to people that have little strength (Revelation 3:8).

He never expects the impossible from us, and as the ark went before the children of Israel, so the good Shepherd goes before His sheep (John 10:4), and the best bits of food are for the sheep that keep closest to His side.

The Jordan separated the children of Israel from the promised land of Canaan. It was harvest time and the Jordan overflowed all the banks. Of course, that was no hindrance to God. The Israelites had to go to the banks of the river. God did the rest.

As soon as the feet of the priests dipped in the brim of the water, God made the waters stand that came from above, and those that flowed into the Dead Sea stopped (Joshua 3:16). The priests with the ark stood in the midst of Jordan till all Israel had passed clean over Jordan.

Not the holiness of the children of Israel, but God's presence kept the waters back. Have you gone clean over Jordan? You will never enter the land of rest unless you do. Are you buried with Christ? (Romans 6:6-11). God's children have looked up to the cross. There is life in a look to the crucified one.

Let us not only look up at the cross, but look down at it from God's standpoint. He sees on that cross not only His Son dying for us, but also all the redeemed through His precious blood, crucified with Him. **“Reckon yourself dead with Christ”** (Romans 6:11). God will make your reckoning true. Go clean over Jordan. Leave Egypt and the wilderness behind you and enter the Promised Land.

The host of Israel camped before Jericho. Its high walls had to fall before they could enter Canaan. It barred the way to a life of victory. No one could go in or out (Joshua 6:1). Jesus has the keys also of your Jericho (Revelation 3:7). The Ark of the Covenant went round about Jericho — the high walls fell down. The presence of Jesus brings victory (Philippians 3:21).

When there is a ban among us God cannot give us victory. Achan had taken of the accursed spoils of Jericho and the host of Israel suffered defeat. Then Joshua and the elders of Israel fell upon their faces before the ark from morning till evening. God showed them the transgressor and his sin. The ban was removed and God gave again victory.

The Philistines had defeated Israel. The elders suggested that the ark should be fetched from Shiloh. The Israelites shouted with joy when Eli's sons, Hophni and Phinehas, brought the ark. They thought the ark would be sure to bring them victory. Instead, they suffered a worse defeat and the ark fell into the hands of the Philistines (I Samuel 4:11). Was God not present? God stood in the midst of an unholy people and therefore He could not fight for them. **“I will go and return to my place, till they acknowledge their offence, and seek my face: in their affliction they will seek me early.”** (Hosea 5:15). That is a solemn word also for our times.

The Philistines took the ark and put it into the house of their idol (I Samuel 5:1-2). Where God is, there is no room for idols.

Our God is a jealous God. He wants whole-hearted devotion. They found Dagon fallen on his face. The Philistines experienced what it means to have a holy God in their midst. God's presence was for them a savour of death unto death (II Corinthians 2:16).

In those seven months that the ark was with the Philistines, God had made it plain to them that He is a holy God and they sought as soon as possible to get rid of Him. The Philistines sought the advice of their wise men and they suggested that a new cart should be made and the ark and trespass-offering put on it. Two milch kine should be yoked to it who had never drawn a cart before and their calves kept away from them. If these milch kine should not take the road to Israel, all the disasters which had befallen them were only due to chance, but if they went towards Beth-shemesh the hand of Israel's God had been hard upon them; and the kine went towards Beth-shemesh followed by the Philistine princes.

The ark was received with shouts of joy. In frivolous curiosity the inhabitants opened the ark to look at its contents. God is not a respecter of persons. That day fifty thousand and seventy men of Israel fell (I Samuel 6:19).

God was too holy for the inhabitants of Beth-shemesh. They asked the inhabitants of Kirjath-jearim to take the ark. They consented and fetched the ark and brought it to the house of Abinadab. Twenty long years the ark of the Lord was in the little town on the borderland. How long has the Lord been waiting at your door for you to welcome Him as your King?

“Behold, I stand at the door and knock” (Revelation 3:20).

These words were not spoken to the unconverted, but to a church, the church of Laodicea. It took God seven months to subdue the Philistines, but twenty years had to pass before Israel yielded to their God.

God had chosen David to be king of Israel. He had to go through a hard training school before the Lord put him on the throne. David became a man of faith, trusting the Lord. The Lord gave him victory over his enemies. David wanted to give the Lord the first place in his kingdom. The Ark of the Covenant should no longer dwell in the borderland. With a guard of honor of thirty thousand men David fetched the ark from Kirjath-jearim. It should be a day of national rejoicing. It became a day of mourning.

David had ordered a new cart for the ark. Uzzah and Ahio, the sons of Abinadab, were to drive it. No doubt David meant well. He wanted to honor the Ark of the Covenant. God had decreed that the ark should be borne on the living shoulders of consecrated men. Obedience is better than sacrifice. We love new carts. We make new birthday carts full of good resolutions and place the ark on it. We conduct instead of being constrained, imposing our human thoughts on God's thoughts, whereas His thoughts are higher than ours. God looks to His children for obedience, simple obedience, not new carts. Obedience is better than sacrifice. There are new carts in our churches in the present time.

The oxen shook the cart and Uzzah stretched out his hand to steady it. No doubt Uzzah meant well. With the best of intentions, and yet presumptive, he stretched out his hand to steady the ark, but the hand dropped, it was a lifeless hand.

We too are often inclined to stretch out the hand to steady the ark. It often seems to me that God gave David the thirty-seventh Psalm especially for our times.

“Rest in the Lord and wait patiently for him: fret not thyself” (Psalm. 37:7).

God wants rested workers. Keep in harmony with the will of God.

“Commit thy way unto the Lord, trust also in him, and he starts doing” (Psalm. 37:5).

How we need to learn the art of committing and trusting Father.

Those who trust Him fully find Him wholly true. **“Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on thee: because he trusteth in thee”** (Isaiah 26:3).

When we live the life of faith we commit ourselves, our future to Him, leaving things alone, keeping our hands off. Resting in the Lord, we trust all will be well even when all seems to go wrong.

God smote Uzzah for his error and there he died. That day was not a day of rejoicing. David was displeased, I hope, with himself. He acknowledged how unworthy he was to receive the ark in the city of David, and carried it into the house of Obed-Edom, where it rested for three months. The Lord blessed the house of Obed-Edom because of the ark.

“If a man love me, he will keep my words: and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him” (John 14:23).

David heard this good news and it encouraged him to have the ark brought to Jerusalem, for he too wanted a blessing for him and his house. This time David had not a new cart made.

“David said, None ought to carry the ark of God but the Levites: for them hath the Lord chosen to carry the ark of God, and to minister unto him forever” (I Chronicles 15:2).

David had learned his lesson. The way of obedience is always a way of blessing. With great joy the ark was placed in the midst of the tabernacle which David had pitched for it (II Samuel 6:17).

The servant of the Lord, David's greatest desire was to build a house for the Lord. His wish, like Moses', was not granted. David's hands were stained with blood. God promised him, however, that after he had been called home his son Solomon should build the temple.

David acknowledged the righteousness and mercy of God's decree. He had the happy privilege to collect all the treasures needed for the building of the temple. When it was finished, **“the priests brought the Ark of the Covenant of the Lord unto his place, into the most holy place, even under the wings of the cherubim”** (II Chronicles 5:7).

The ark remained in the temple till Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, conquered Jerusalem and led the Jews into captivity in Babylon. The temple was burned down and with it its costly vessels and, no doubt, also the ark became a prey of the flames.

Tradition says that in the second temple a large stone was placed on the spot where the ark had stood, that the ark was buried under the temple and will be found again when the new temple will be built.

God's children look forward to a different future. They look forward to the coming of their Lord, meeting the Lord in the air, being together with the Lord and with their dear ones who have gone before (I Thessalonians 4:16-20).

They look forward to the time when our Lord's feet will stand on the mount of Olives (Zechariah 14:4); when God will pour out the spirit of supplication and prayer on His people, Israel; when they will see Him who they have pierced; when the great battle of Armageddon will be fought and the Lord will come to the rescue of His people (Zechariah 12:10); when Jesus Christ will reign victorious and all the earth shall own His sway; when swords shall be beaten into ploughshares and spears into pruning hooks; when nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more (Isaiah 2:4). Then we shall want neither ark nor temple, but Jesus Christ will be our King for ever and ever.

“Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you” (John 14:27) is one of the most precious promises of our Saviour. Peace He left us when He suffered for us and died for us on the cross. The peace He gives us comes into our heart through a living fellowship with our high priest in glory. It is a peace like a river, inexhaustible, it is Jesus-peace. Even amongst the severest trials and afflictions, that undisturbed peace was His; *“semper idem,”* He was always the same.

The voice of Jesus whispers:

Peace, perfect peace in this dark world of sin?
The voice of Jesus whispers: “Peace within!”

This deep inward peace is the happy part of God's children who live in the Holiest of holies. I am not at all surprised that an old Scotch shepherd, being asked on his sick-bed if he was going to heaven, answered: “Brother, I have been living there for the last ten years.”

There are wilderness-Christians and Canaan-Christians. The old man lived in Canaan. Jesus has come not only that we might have life, but have it more abundantly (John 10:10). Genesis 1:26 shows us a transformation in His image and likeness.

Our first step was the entrance through the gate into the court. I trust each of my readers has taken that step.

- The altar of burnt-offerings speaks of a whole-hearted consecration and full surrender.
- The laver of daily cleansing, the golden candlestick of the fullness of the Holy Spirit; the table of shewbread of fullness of power of joy and peace;
- the altar of incense of a daily life of prayer in partnership with our High Priest.

Reader, do you know all these precious gifts of a loving Father through His Son and Spirit by happy experience?

There remains only one step more to take and God only knows when that step will be taken. It is the last step here on earth and leads into Father's mansion with the many rooms.

The tabernacle speaks of a life on earth, the temple of Solomon of a life in glory. The pot of manna and Aaron's blooming rod are no longer in the tabernacle. There nothing will remind us of our murmuring and ingratitude.

There was a time when I believed we could only enter into Canaan through the valley of the shadow of death. Now I know that here already we can enter into that rest.

Reader, if you have followed me through the court into the sanctuary and into the Holiest of holies, you have made that happy experience.

Some time ago we read in our family worship that wonderful first page of the Bible. It shows us seven steps. It begins with God. It finishes with God. He is the beginning and the end. It speaks of emptiness and darkness; how empty the heart is without Jesus. We see how the Holy Spirit gives light in the dark soul and illumines it. In the seventh verse we find division and separation as a second step. At the altar of burnt-offering we leave everything that would not please the Master. The laver cleanses feet and hands from daily coming in contact with sinful earth.

Genesis 1:7 speaks not only of growth but fruitfulness. Genesis 1:7 shows us that heaven rules the earth and that we have taken Jesus not only as our Saviour but crowned Him as King.

Genesis 1:22 speaks of life abundant — Jesus. All our sins are blotted out. God has cast them behind in the depths of the sea of His unfathomable love. All our sorrows will be forgotten, there is no night, only day — eternal day. **“The lamb is the light thereof.”**

“Now we see through a glass darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known. And now abideth faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these is love.”

And I shall see Him face to face
And tell the story: Saved by grace.

~ end of book ~

<http://www.baptistbiblebelievers.com/>
