

SIMPLE TALKS ON THE TABERNACLE

by

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CHAPTER FOURTEEN

THE CURTAINS AND COVERINGS OF THE TABERNACLE

“And thou shalt make a covering for the tent of rams' skins dyed red, and a covering above of badgers' skins” (Exodus 26:14).

WE have been meditating on the boards overlaid with gold sunk deep into the sockets of silver. The bars taught us that each one of us, though we have to come personally to the Saviour as individuals, are also closely united together: one faith, one hope, one baptism, one throne of grace where our prayers meet, one bread we break, one bond of perfection, the bond of love.

The middle bar, although hidden from our eyes, teaches us:

We have one Holy Spirit who sanctifies us, who reminds us of our Lord, who teaches us all truth, and gives us the power to become fruit-bearing branches of the vine.

On this foundation a roof of curtains and covering is resting. God's children have a roof over their houses although the Master Himself often had not where to lay His head (Matthew 8:20).

The roof of the tabernacle consisted of four different coverings: fine twined linen, of goats' hair, of rams' skins, and an outside covering of badgers' skins. With willing hearts the men had brought them as an offering to the Lord (Exodus 25:4, 5).

The women did not want to be left behind. They gave their time and their skill. Women whose hearts had been stirred spun goats' hair. Wise-hearted women spun with their hands and brought that which they had spun: blue, purple, scarlet, and fine linen (Exodus 35:25-26).

It was no easy work; the stitching was hard. Their hands, like Paul's when making tents and sails, must often have hurt them, but where love has stirred the hearts, no task is difficult. A busy scene in which our Father in heaven must have been delighted.

The covering which could be seen from the inside was of fine linen embroidered blue, purple and scarlet. There were ten curtains each fourteen yards long and two yards wide; five curtains were joined together for one large curtain, and the two were joined together by fifty loops which were joined by fifty golden clasps.

They were joined over the veil which separated the Holy of holies from the sanctuary. The one curtain covered the sanctuary; the second, the Holy of holies on the west side of the tabernacle.

This beautiful inner curtain was covered by one of goats' hair. You will notice that each curtain was one yard longer than the curtain it covered. The linen curtain did not quite reach to the ground, but the one of goats' hair covered all three sides, and the extra length was folded double and hung over the outer veil at the east end. A third covering was of rams' skins dyed red, and above this was a covering of badgers' skins.

It has been suggested by some students that the tabernacle had a sloping roof to prevent the rain from falling into the sanctuary. I cannot agree with this. God gives us the most minute description of the construction of the tabernacle.

I find no mention whatever of the pole on which the curtains had to rest and how this pole had to be fixed. I take it that the skins were impervious to rain, and when these skins were stretched over the boards so as to provide a flat surface, hardly any rain would remain on the roof, and this in the hot climate would quickly evaporate.

I am sure it will be clear to every reader that the roof on the tabernacle points to our blessed Lord.

Jesus is our roof. We are living in ominous times, the child of God is safe under this roof.

Have you ever meditated on the 57th Psalm? Is your heart troubled? Are you wondering what the future holds in store for you? Look up at that beautiful roof of white, blue, scarlet and purple.

Look at the cherubim. They give glory to the blessed Trinity. Cry unto the most High. His ears are always open to the cry of His people. He will perform all things for you and in you. His twin-angels, mercy and truth, will be your companions even in a lion's den.

“Be merciful unto me, O God; be merciful unto me: for my soul trusteth in thee: yet, in the shadow of thy wings will I make my refuge” (Psalm. 57:1).

Christ is the head in whom all the building is fitly framed together (Ephesians 2:20-21). There should be no empty space between the boards and the roof. Chrysostom knew this when he said, “Nothing should come between head and body; they are closely united together.”

Each of the four curtains, as the four Gospels, presents a different aspect of our Saviour. His personality is too manifold to be fully represented by one type.

“In him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily” (Colossians 2:9).

A covering of badgers' skins.

Commentators differ somewhat in their opinion about the material of the outer covering and what is exactly to be understood by it.

The Septuagint translates the Hebrew word “*Achah*” by “*skins of blue leather.*” Shoes were made out of it (Ezekiel 16:10). A Moabite looking down from his hills on the tabernacle would fail to understand why the Israelites thought so much of it. To him it looked like a huge black coffin. He knew nothing about the splendor of its interior. He saw only the badgers' skins.

Is it not the same today? The world considers Christ's teaching impractical. Christ tells His disciples to “**seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness; and all other things shall be added unto you**” (Matthew 6:33).

The world says, “Push your way to the front by whatever means you can.” The weak have to go to the wall. You must have room to live for yourself, for might is right. No, the present world stage has no room for a Christ who was willing to give His life on the cross to save His enemies. If His principles were to prevail, it would upset all their plans, but looking around them they feel sure they do not and never will. They do not think about Christ; they are indifferent to Him; they see no beauty in Him. They see only the badgers' skins.

That badgers' skin speaks to us of a Saviour who emptied Himself of His glory and took the form of a servant (Philippians 2:7), of One who had come “**not to be ministered unto, but to minister, to give His life a ransom for many**” (Matthew 20:28).

It speaks of a high priest, who on the day of atonement put aside His garment of glory and put on the linen coat (Leviticus 16:4). It speaks of the Son of man, who less than foxes and birds, had not where to lay His head (Luke 9:58).

Need we wonder that His gospel was to the Greeks foolishness and to the Jews a stumbling-block? (I Corinthians 1:23).

They were expecting a Messiah who would deliver them out of the hands of the Romans; they wanted the curtain of white linen, of blue, purple and scarlet, and forgot that the curtain of badgers' skins had to come first. He had no form nor comeliness for them; and when they saw Him, they saw no beauty that they should desire Him (Isaiah 53:2).

One of the most pathetic statements in John's Gospel, one that brings tears in our eyes as I am sure it did in the eyes of the aged disciple, one that made our Saviour weep as He was bearing His cross to Golgotha, is: “**He came into his own, and his own received him not**” (John 1:11).

Who stands highest, can stoop lowest.

“**Jesus knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he was come from God, and went to God; laid aside his garments and took a towel and girded himself, and washed his disciples' feet**” (John 13:3-5).

It is the king's son that can do the slave's work. He is not afraid to lose his dignity. The royal motto of the Prince of Wales is: “I serve.” This too is the best motto for the children of the King. May the Holy Spirit open our eyes to see the beauty of the badgers' skins.

“**May this mind be in us which was also in Christ Jesus**” (Philippians 2:5).

The Master went to Gethsemane, to the valley of shadows, with a song on His lips. It is also the way His disciples have to go if their life is to be fruitful and a blessing to others.

“If Christ died for all, we are dead; and He died for all that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves but unto him which died for them and rose again” (II Corinthians 5:14, 15).

Not live for ourselves, but for others. The corn of wheat has to fall into the ground and die if it is to bring forth much fruit (John 12:24).

Covering of badgers' skins, teach us again and again that a lack of humility, a protruding of self is the greatest hindrance to a fruitful ministry. The servants the Master can use best are those who have discovered the preciousness of the badgers' skins.

You will learn it in the school of Jesus.

He says: **“Learn of me, for I am meek and lowly in heart”** (Matthew 11:29).

A covering for the tent of rams' skins dyed red was beneath the covering of badgers' skins. The ram was a clean animal. At the consecration of the priests two rams were offered. The one was a burnt-offering, the other for consecration.

Of its blood, Moses put upon the tip of the right ear, the thumb of the right hand, and upon the great toe of Aaron's sons at their consecration (Leviticus 8:24).

Holy Spirit, remind me of the blood on my right ear, when it was bored as I gave myself to the service of my Lord, as I knelt in the sanctuary and praying hands were laid on my head at my ordination fifty years ago. Holy Spirit, open my ears to listen to Thy voice, teaching me and sending me on Thy errands, and may the blood on my ear close it to the insinuations of Satan.

May the blood on my thumb direct me in my writing, and the blood on my toe keep my feet from going anywhere whither I am not sent by Thee! **“Blessed is the man that heareth me, watching daily at my gates, waiting at the posts of my doors”** (Proverbs 8:34).

The covering of rams' skins dyed red points us to our Saviour, who came not only to serve, but to suffer.

“Though he were a Son, yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered” (Hebrews 5:8).

He came to suffer, to suffer for you, for me. You may remember the picture of the young child helping His father in the carpenter's shop.

As the young boy stretched out His arms, the mother, watching, saw the shadow of the cross. The artist was right. All through life the cross threw its dark shadow before Him. He knew about the cruel mocking and scourging, Gethsemane and Golgotha. And yet He could say:

“The Lord God hath opened mine ear, and I was not rebellious, neither turned away my back. I gave my back to the smiters, and my cheek to them that plucked off the hair: I hid not my face from shame and spitting” (Isaiah 50:5, 6).

Many a time in His thoughts, He must have seen in the dark cypresses of Gethsemane the rugged cross at the end of the journey. He knew it all, and yet when the time was come, He steadfastly set His face to go to Jerusalem.

Do you wish to gauge some little of the meaning of those rams' skins dyed red? Go with me to Moriah.

Do you see that old man wearily making his way to the summit? Do you see that lad at his side full of life and vigor? God's precious gift after twenty-five long years of praying and waiting? Listen to his question: **“My father.”**

And he said: **“Here am I, my son.”**

“Behold the fire and the wood: but where is a lamb for a burnt-offering?”

“God will provide, laddie.”

I do not think many words were spoken between these two. Watch those two when they stood near the altar, those two who were bound together in such close love. What they said to each other no human ear ever heard.

“Child, can you trust me and love me still, even when you do not understand me? God has spoken to me. He told me to take you, my only one, my beloved one.”

His voice became halting and soft. *“He — told me to offer you!”*

Do you see how those two in silence embrace each other and how the lad laid himself on the altar?

“Father, you need not bind me. I shall lay quietly and not move.”

Do you see that outstretched hand with the knife ready to slay?

Listen, there is a voice from heaven: **“Lay not thine hand upon the lad — now I know that thou fearest God, seeing thou hast not withheld thy son, thine only son from me”** (Genesis 22:15, 16).

Abraham's son was spared, but God did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all (Romans 8:32). That is the rams' skins dyed red.

Rams' skins dyed red!

Here we shall never fully understand thy meaning; we shall know hereafter.

You point us to that lonely one in the garden kneeling down and whose sweat was as it were great drops of blood falling down to the ground. Not even an hour His disciples could watch with Him. He trod the winepress alone.

“Father, if thou be willing, remove this cup from me: nevertheless not my will, but thine be done” (Luke 22:42).

Rams' skins dyed red, you tell me what it cost my Saviour to redeem me, to bring me out of darkness into His marvellous light. **“Redeemed not by corruptible things, as silver and gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot”** (I Peter 1:18, 19). You teach me what immeasurable value a single soul has for our Lord. He reckoned no price too high to pay to save a soul from destruction. Remind me each time I am brought together with unconverted men and women that the burden of their souls may be laid on my heart.

Rams' skins dyed red! You humble me, for my sins too have given thee that red color. I feel ashamed that even after my conversion, through my fault, thou hast been drenched with blood. What are those wounds in Thy hands? **“Those with which I was wounded in the house of my friends”** (Zechariah 13:6). Master, I know such wounds hurt most. I know such scars take longest to heal. Teach me to hate sin as Thou dost hate it; teach me to love the sinner with Thy seeking love!

~ end of chapter 14 ~

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