

The Discipline of Worship

Worship and the Tabernacle

Introduction

1. Worship is to be the priority of God's people, for God seeks "true worshippers to worship Him" (John 4:24).
2. The primary function of the Levitical priests was to "come near to me to minister to me" (Ezek. 44:15).
3. For the Old Testament priesthood, ministry to God was to precede all other work. And that is no less true of the universal priesthood of the New Testament.
4. One grave temptation we all face is to frenetically answer calls to service without ministering to the Lord himself.

Significance of Tabernacle

1. The Hebrews writer compares the accoutrements of the tabernacle with the ministry of Christ (Hebrews 9). This contrast is part of a larger argument in which the Hebrews writer demonstrated the superiority of Christ over the Mosaic economy. Since Jewish Christians apparently were being hounded by non-believing Jews (cf. Heb. 13:3-4, 14-15; 13:3), this point carried significant weight and was a much-needed confirmation of their legitimate faith in Jesus as Messiah.
2. Theological Significance of the Tabernacle
 - a. God's covenantal promise to Israel was: "I will take you from my people and I will be your God" (Exodus 6:7).
 - b. Mt. Sinai stands for the fulfillment of the first half of this promise. It was there that the encamped people of God gazed with trembling at the cloud covering the mountain (Exodus 19:16-22; Cf. Hebrews 12:18-21).
 - c. The Tabernacle represents the completion and climax of God's redemption of his people.
 - d. The whole structure of the tabernacle provides a visible summary of the central affirmations of the Bible: (1) God indwells his people; (2) God intends his people to worship him according to his will and not their own; and, (3) only by means of sacrifice and shed blood can sinners ever come to live with the Holy One.

Tabernacle Accoutrements and Yom Kippur

1. To gather at the Tabernacle, then, was to “draw near to God,” since it represented God’s residence among His people.
2. Since the Tabernacle was mobile, it indicated God’s continued and dynamic presence among Israel—God did not remain in a static place, but went with His people.
3. Drawing near to God was an exciting, though solemn, act.
4. Immediately inside the compound, at the entrance of the outer court, was the altar—the place sacrifices were made. Worshippers, then, were immediately confronted with the reality of (1) the Holiness of God, (2) the sinfulness of humanity, and (3) the grace and mercy of God.
5. Between the altar and the opening to the first room of the tabernacle (the Holy Place) was the bronze basin—the place where the priests would wash before donning their holy garments and entering the Holy Place.
6. According to the ceremony associated with Yom Kippur (the Day of Atonement), the High Priest entered into the Tabernacle with blood, securing forgiveness for his sins and the sins of the people.
7. Once he emerged from the Holy Place and into the presence of the people, the scapegoat was sent into the wilderness, signifying their sins being borne away.
8. For the details associated with this ceremony, read Leviticus 16.

Tabernacle and Dynamic of Worship

1. Eventually, the tabernacle took on a more permanent characteristic, and ultimately was supplanted by the Temple. Despite this external change, the worship associated with it remained the same.
2. The flow of Tabernacle/Temple worship and contemporary worship
 - a. **The call of worship:** horizontal in nature. Worshippers speaking to one another about drawing near to God. Excitement and holy expectancy describes this stage.
 - b. **In His presence:** the congregation is now in close proximity to God; it is at the very dwelling place of God. Their gaze is now vertical—they speak of God, not to each other. Holy Awe describes this stage.
 - c. **Conviction of sin:** the blood of the altar reminds worshippers of their need for atonement—they are sinners approaching a Holy God. Their gaze is inward—they confess and acknowledge their brokenness before Him. Solemnity, even heaviness, describes this stage.

- d. **Experience of Grace:** the blood is accepted by the Holy One. The scapegoat carries away their sin. They are embraced by the Holy One. Their gaze is returned to the Holy One, now with grateful eyes for his mercy. Gratitude and praise characterizes this stage.
- e. **Going with God:** the congregation returns home. They are changed by their encounter with the Holy One. The congregants now speak to one another, not of their Holy expectancy to encounter God, but of their transformational—and shared—experience of Him. They speak with joyous reverence of His mercy.

Some Questions to Ponder

1. These five moves are from my studied observations. Did I overlook anything?
2. Rather than specific acts to perform, these are movements—or even moods—of worship. In what way(s) can they inform our worship?
3. What are some ways that we can increase our Holy Expectancy in worship?
4. What rituals would help in exploring these different stages in our corporate worship? What about private worship?