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## THIS WEEK'S SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSON

### THE PEOPLE AT WORSHIP

Golden Text. — Take ye from among you an offering unto the Lord; whosoever is of a willing heart, let him bring it, an offering of the Lord.—Exod. 35:5

### THE LESSON AS A WHOLE

By J. C. Macaulay, D.D.

#### Approach to the Lesson

This past summer I had the privilege of spending two weeks with a group of university students from many campuses of the country. My assignment was to teach about the Tabernacle, the offerings, and the priesthood. Several of them came to me with such comments as: "I have always skipped that part of the Bible. It did not seem to have any meaning for us today." It was a joy to see their growing delight in this too-much-neglected portion of the Word of God. Here we have God's picture book of spiritual truth. Little children learn to read pictures before they can read letters, and even babes in Christ should be introduced to these wonderful pictures of the person and work of our blessed Lord Jesus. There is, however, this difference, that whereas picture books which children read are discarded in time for more mature things, these pictures that God gave in the whole Levitical system have so much depth and meaning that they continue to delight and instruct and feed the maturest saints. Just as astronomers rush to their telescopes at the time of an eclipse to observe the shadow of the earth as it falls across the moon, so we may learn much from these "shadows" concerning the spiritual realities which they represent. Observing them closely will keep us from many an erroneous notion as to how we may approach God, for here the way to God is wonderfully set forth.

I should like to suggest some helpful books dealing with these themes. Some of them are out of print, and must be sought in secondhand stores. For beginners I recommend D. H. Dolman's "Simple Talks on the Tabernacle," and I. M. Halderman's "The Tabernacle, Priesthood, and Offerings" (Fleming H. Revell Co., 316 Third Ave., Westwood N. J., \$3). In addition, the following are valuable: S. Ridout, "Lectures on the Tabernacle" (Loizeaux Bros., New York 10; \$3); H. W. Soltau, "The Holy Vessels of the Tabernacle of Israel" (Yapp and Hawkins, London); and Andrew Jukes' "The Law of the Offerings" (Nisbet, 1847).

#### Verse by Verse

Exod. 29:43.—"There I will meet . . . sanctified by my glory." While we do not attach the same importance to sacred places as in Old Testament times, some principles governing the Tabernacle should apply to our places of worship. "Church" is not a place for meeting each other, but for God to meet us. We often "dedicate" our churches, but they can be sanctified only by the presence of God revealing His glory to His people.

Verse 44.—"I will sanctify the tabernacle . . . also both Aaron and his sons." Not only the place of worship but those who minister in it must be set apart for the sacred office by God. A man may be "ordained" by a thousand councils, but if he is not God's set-apart man, his ordination is still invalid for all divine purposes.

Verse 45.—"And I will dwell among the children of Israel." Of what value would a church building and a corps of ministers be without the people? God wants to reach the people and bring them into abiding relation with Himself. So building and minister are but means to an end.

Verse 46.—"And they shall know that I am the Lord their God." The whole institution, be it Tabernacle or church, exists for the glory of God, to make Him known, and secure His rightful place in the hearts and lives of His people. The whole direction of the Church's work and worship must be Godward. Even when our testimony is addressed to men, it is to bring them to God in Christ.

Chap. 35:21.—"Every one whose heart stirred him up . . . brought of the Lord's offering." The motive behind the offerings of Ananias and Sapphira was envy, but God wants an offering from a heart stirred with holy eagerness and a spirit made willing. Not what is in the hand moves God, but what is in the heart. See 2 Corinthians 8:12.

Verse 22.—"Bracelets, and earrings, and rings, and tablets." For "bracelets" read "brooches"; for "tablets" "armlets." A great collection of gold jewelry. "The

indulgence of private luxury was thus given up for the honor of the Lord." Men and women alike shared in this grand offering. Verse 23.—"Blue, and purple, and scarlet, and fine linen." While the gold was used for the furnishings of the holy place, the valuable cloth here mentioned was used for the hangings (chap. 26:1), and the animal skins for the coverings (vs. 7, 14).

Verse 24.—"Silver and brass . . . shittim wood." The silver was used for the sockets, under the boards of the Tabernacle (chap. 26:19, 21, 25), and the brass for the furnishings of the court (the golden altar and the laver). The wooden parts were shittim, or acacia. The thorny wood of the desert. The word signifies "incorruptible."

Verses 25, 26.—"And all the women that were wise hearted did spin." Work as well as gifts was needed, and there was a place for the ministry of the women. So is the church today. No talent need go unused. Women may still sew for missionaries, and for the adornment of God's house.

Verses 27, 28.—"And the rulers brought onyx stones . . . and spice, and oil." These were the specialties—the stones for the priests' garments, and the spice and oil for incense and anointing oil. It was proper that the princes of Israel should bring princely gifts. Do we give in proportion to God's bounty to us?

Verse 29.—"The children of Israel brought a willing offering . . . every man and woman." Notice the emphasis on the willingness, and on the share of men and women alike. "God loveth a cheerful giver" (2 Cor. 9:7). He will not accept what is grudging. And, remember, how the Lord regarded the poor widow's offering (Mark 12:41-44).

#### The Heart of the Lesson

If kings may dictate the means by which their subjects may come into their presence, how much more is it the prerogative of God to declare how He may be approached in worship! God's requirements are not the arbitrary demands of a proud tyrant, calculated to inflate his ego, but are based on eternal righteousness and truth. The Levitical system was something more than a series of liturgical regulations. It was a kaleidoscopic picture of God's way of receiving sinners. God's insistence that everything in connection with the Tabernacle and its service be made according to the pattern (Exod. 25:9, 40; 26:30; 27:8) indicates that He had no small purpose in mind. It was a pictorial revelation of His way of salvation, presenting beforehand the character and work of His dear Son, our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Jesus said that Moses wrote concerning Him (John 5:46). In no place did Moses write more fully about Christ than in the ordinances of the Tabernacle, which testify the truth which our Lord spoke of Himself, "I am the way . . . no man cometh unto the Father, but by me" (John 16:6). This is the message of each curtain which hung between the Israelite in his tent and the Holy of holies; and the rending of the great veil of the Temple in the hour of our Lord's death (Matt. 27:51) announced that the way to God was now open to all (Heb. 10:19, 20). Moreover, all the blood that was shed in the service of the Tabernacle bore witness to the sacrifice of our Lord for the redemption of sinners. The Old Testament dictum, "It is the blood that maketh atonement for the soul" (Lev. 17:11) is fulfilled in "the precious blood of Christ." It is not as a teacher that He brings us to God, nor as an inspiring example, but as the Lamb of God, who took our place in death (1 Pet. 3:18). It is by Christ crucified that we draw nigh to God. Otherwise we come with our sin still upon us, only to be cast out.

The Children of Israel financed the building of the Tabernacle. That does not mean that they financed their way to God. The Tabernacle was only the testimony of the way to God. Access to God is nothing that man can pay for or secure by any merit of his own. It is opened by the grace of God, and the cost of it He only is able to bear. And He did so in the gift of His Son. Salvation is free to sinners, because God bore the cost. But redeemed sinners are expected to maintain the testimony of salvation, and that is where our giving comes in. Giving for the maintenance of the ministry of the church is the privilege and duty of the Christian, even as it was the normal thing for the Children of Israel, redeemed out of Egypt, to give of their wealth for the erecting of the Tabernacle of witness and the support of its ministry.

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