“Worship in the Outer Court”
Exodus 27:1-8; 30:17-21

The Tabernacle in the wilderness was the most unique and important structure that has ever been built. For more than 500 years, it was central to corporate worship in the life of Israel, before it later gave way to Solomon’s Temple. The Tabernacle is the richest and most symbolic shadow in the Old Testament that points to the substance of Jesus Christ in the New Testament.

Jesus Christ is the true Tabernacle, and every component of worship in the tabernacle points us to Christ and His finished work. Understanding this helps us as believers to better appreciate who Jesus is and what He has done for us, and how we are blessed as the church to worship Him.

The tabernacle complex as a whole was divided into three parts:

• the outer court
• the holy place
• the holy of holies

These three sections separated three different kinds of worshipers. We encounter something similar at Mount Sinai when God. Only Moses was allowed to go all the way up the mountain to meet with God, for he was the mediator, the man who represented the people before God. Seventy elders of the people were allowed to go halfway up. The rest of the people were to remain at the bottom and look on from a distance.

The tabernacle was designed in a similar way. Only the high priest could enter the holy of holies, the place where God’s presence dwelt. The other priests could go halfway, into the Holy Place. The rest of the people were kept outside in the outer court.

There were seven unique pieces of furniture that were located in these various parts of the tabernacle, each of which contain an important principle of worship for us. I want us
to imagine ourselves at the very threshold of the tabernacle, to put ourselves in the place of the Israelite who has come to worship and stands at the gate.

The tabernacle is a picture of Jesus Christ, but it is also a beautiful picture of the worshiper who is in Jesus Christ. Jesus is the true Tabernacle in whom the fullness of God dwells in bodily form. Yet the believer who is in Christ is also the dwelling place of God. What a profound mystery it is that we are “in Christ” and yet Christ is “in us,” the hope of glory.

The church is now the temple of the living God. You and me, together in Christ, we are the sanctuary of God. A person who has been saved is made up of body, soul, and spirit. These are the three components of you as a person.

**M.R. DeHaan** - “The redeemed person is composed of body, soul, and spirit. The body corresponds to the court of the tabernacle. It is the outer, the visible part of our personality. It is the place of sacrifice (Rom. 12:1-2). The soul answers to the holy place and is the place of worship and fellowship with other believers, feeding about the table, walking in the light, interceding for others. Finally, the spirit of the believer is the inner holy of holies, the deepest, hidden life of perfect, individual, personal communion with God beneath the blood. It is the place of spiritual victory.”

The tabernacle is a picture of Jesus Christ. It is a picture of you as a believer. It is also a picture of the plan of salvation.

Worship in the tabernacle consisted of some seven steps:

- Sinners on the outside had to enter through the only door and stop at the altar of sacrifice
- The priests who offered sacrifices on the altar had to constantly be cleansed from impurity at the bronze basin
- Priests presented 12 unleavened cakes upon the table of showbread each Sabbath and consumed the prior weeks’ loaves; We feed upon the Word at the table
Priests were to keep the wicks trimmed and the light of the golden lampstand burning; We learn to walk in the light as He is the Light

Priests offered up incense on the golden altar of incense; the worshiper’s power and communion with God comes through prayer

The High Priest entered behind the veil once a year to sprinkle blood on the mercy seat above the ark of the covenant; Through faith in Christ's finished work, we now enter into the holy of holies to the place of God’s manifest presence, where we experience close fellowship with Him in our innermost life

The worshiper now reaches perfect rest in Jesus at the blood-sprinkled mercy seat under the shadow of His wings

To begin with, there were only two pieces of furniture that were located in the outer court of the Tabernacle—the bronze altar that was just inside the gate, and the braze laver that was between the altar and the tent of meeting.

Both of these articles are a vivid picture of the atoning work of Jesus Christ on the worshiper’s behalf.

1. Bronze Altar—the JUSTIFICATION of the worshiper (27:1-8)

“You shall make the altar of acacia wood, five cubits long and five cubits broad. The altar shall be square, and its height shall be three cubits. And you shall make horns for it on its four corners; its horns shall be of one piece with it, and you shall overlay it with bronze. You shall make pots for it to receive its ashes, and shovels and basins and forks and fire pans. You shall make all its utensils of bronze. You shall also make for it a grating, a network of bronze, and on the net you shall make four bronze rings at its four corners. And you shall set it under the ledge of the altar so that the net extends halfway down the altar. And you shall make poles for the altar, poles of acacia wood, and overlay them with bronze. And the poles shall be put through rings, so that the poles are on the two sides of the altar when it is carried. You shall make it hollow, with boards. As is has been shown you on the mountain, so shall it be made.”
Jesus Christ is our only access to God. Remember, in the Old Testament, the tabernacle was the only place where access to God could be found. The worshiper’s first step was to walk through the entrance and into the courtyard.

The outer court was always a busy place. It was full of Israelites who had come to worship, priests who were offering sacrifices, as well as sacrificial animals.

The true worshiper loved to go into God’s court. This was as close as they could come to God’s presence. This desire to be in the courts of God is reflected in the Psalms, the Hebrew hymn book:

**Psalm 84:1-2** - “How lovely is Your dwelling place, O Lord of Hosts! My soul longs, yes, faints for the courts of the Lord; my heart and flesh sing for joy to the living God.”

**Psalm 84:10** - “For a day in Your courts is better than a thousand elsewhere. I would rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God than dwell in the tents of wickedness.”

To be in the outer court was to get as close to God as the worshiper could get. It was to be in the place of fellowship with God and God’s people. Even more so, to be in the outer court was to be in the place where forgiveness could be found.

There in the courtyard stood the bronze altar of sacrifice. It is not coincidental that the altar of sacrifice was located in the court of the tabernacle just inside the gate. It was the altar that gave them access.

Of all the items in the tabernacle, and later the temple, the bronze altar was the largest. It measured more than seven feet wide, seven feet long, and four feet high. Its shape was square, with four protruding horns in its four corners. The horns of the altar more than likely were an allusion to the horns of Abraham’s ram that God provided at just the right time that was offered as a sacrifice in the place of Isaac.
Psalm 18:2 - “The Lord is my rock and my fortress and my deliverer, my God, my rock, in whom I take refuge, my shield, and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold.”

The horns of the altar were symbolic of strength and salvation. Later on in Israel, when accused lawbreakers were pursued by justice, they would sometimes flee to the altar in the outer court and take hold of the horns for protection.

illus. of Adonijah in 1 Kings 1:50

When the Israelite worshiper came through the entrance and into the outer court, the first place he went was the altar where he brought a sacrifice that was to be made for his own sin. The altar shows us how in order for worship and access to be possible, a sacrifice has to be made so that our sins can be forgiven and we can be reconciled to God.

You cannot circumvent the altar and worship God at the same time. The bloody altar of sacrifice cannot be avoided. It is the key component that makes worship a reality.

Leviticus 17:11 - “For the life of the flesh is in the blood: and I have given to you upon the altar to make an atonement for your souls: for it is the blood that makes an atonement for the soul.”

There is an altar where forgiveness can be found and access into God’s courts can be granted, and the altar is the cross of Jesus Christ.

1 Peter 1:18-19 - “Knowing that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot.”

When I survey the wondrous cross, on which the Prince of Glory died, my richest gain I count but loss and pour contempt on all my pride!

Jesus, keep me near the cross! There a precious fountain, free to all a healing stream, flows from Calvary’s mountain!
At the foot of the cross
Where grace and suffering meet
You have shown me your love
Through the judgment you received
And you've won my heart
And you've won my heart, now I can
Trade these ashes in for beauty
And wear forgiveness like a crown
Coming to kiss the feet of mercy
I lay every burden down at the foot of the cross!

The bronze altar in the outer court is all about the justification of the worshiper. Justification is the most humbling and soul-thrilling doctrine in Scripture. It means that the death of another has secured my freedom and paid the price for my sin. Now I am free, just as if I had never sinned.

If the Son has set you free, you are free indeed! Now, you can shake off those heavy chains of bondage that have held you captive. Now as a worshiper, you can live in the grace of God and experience true freedom in your spirit. Your sin has been paid for on the altar, and the court of God’s presence is now open for you to enjoy and find lasting satisfaction.

2. Bronze Laver—the SANCTIFICATION of the worshiper (30:17-21)

“The Lord said to Moses, You shall also make a basin of bronze, with its scant of bronze, for washing. You shall put it between the tent of meeting and the altar, and you shall put water in it, with which Aaron and his sons shall wash their hands and their feet. When they go into the tent of meeting, or when they come near the altar to minister, to burn a food offering to the Lord, they shall wash with water, so that they may not die. They shall wash their hands and their feet, so that they may not die. It shall be a statute forever to them, even to him and to his offspring throughout their generations.”
The bronze altar illustrates the justification of the one who has come to faith in Christ, and the bronze laver illustrates the sanctification of the one who has come to faith in Christ.

Before a priest went into the tent of meeting to perform his responsibilities, he had to stop at the bronze laver or washbasin. It was located between the altar and the entrance to the tent of meeting to remind them of their need to be cleansed. Because the priests would walk back and forth from the altar to the tent, this washbasin was in constant use.

Ordination requirements of priests in Exodus 29:

• cleansed
• clothed
• consecrated

The priests were washed with water, robed with linen garments, anointed with oil, and sprinkled with blood. Once they had been ordained, they were able to offer sacrifices on the altar.

If the priests were washed at their ordination, why was continual washing at the bronze laver required?

God commanded that every time the priest approached the altar or the tabernacle, he must stop and wash his hands and feet that had become defiled. This took place a hundred or more times a day.

This is the imagery that John presents us with in the upper room as Jesus washes the feet of His disciples:

John 13:8-10 - “Peter said to Him, You shall never wash my feet. Jesus answered him, If I do not wash you, you have no share with Me. Simon Peter said to Him, Lord, not my feet only but also my hands and my head! Jesus said to him, The
one who has bathed does not need to wash, except for his feet, but is completely clean.”

In this passage, Jesus was distinguishing between two different types of cleansing. On one hand, there is total cleansing that comes the very moment a person comes to faith in Christ. On the other hand, there is every day, ongoing cleansing that is needed throughout the Christian life. It is the difference in positional sanctification and practical sanctification.

David Levy - “By washing the disciples’ feet, the Lord taught that we who have been thoroughly cleansed by His blood must still be cleansed in our daily walk with Him. Daily sins must be confessed to God in order to maintain an unbroken communion and fellowship with Him.”

2 Corinthians 7:1 - “Since we have these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from every defilement of body and spirit, bringing holiness to completion in the fear of God.”

God’s Spirit uses God’s Word to produce real, lasting change in our lives. This is the truth presented by the bronze laver.

Ephesians 5:25-27 - “Christ loved the church and gave Himself up for her, that He might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, so that He might present the church to Himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish.”

We can only be cleansed if God Himself cleanses us. No amount of effort on our own will ever purify us from the stain of sin. We are made clean through the cleansing flow of Calvary.

This is symbolized in the believer’s baptism. The real cleansing is what God does on the inside to wash away our sin. Even as believers, when we sin and fall short, our sins make us feel dirty.
1 John 1:9 - “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”

Hebrews 10:19-22 - “Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus, by the new and living way that He opened for us through the curtain, that is, through His flesh, and since we have a great high priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water.”

Have you been to Jesus for the cleansing power? Are you washed in the blood of the Lamb? Are you fully trusting in His grace this hour? Are you washed in the blood of the Lamb?

Are you walking daily by the Savior’s side? Are you washed in the blood of the Lamb? Do you rest each moment in the Crucified? Are you washed in the blood of the Lamb?

Take away:

- Christ’s death gives the believer **perfect standing** before God
- Christ’s Word gives the believer **practical sanctification** for life