

An Ark of Acacia Wood

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We are occupied with the greatness and the glory of Jesus Christ. So far we have been looking at this matter in a comprehensive way. We have been considering the immense vocation of the Son of God in this universe, and from the greatness of that vocation we have come to see something of the greatness of the Person. For so great a vocation a very great Person is necessary, and never has so great a purpose been entrusted to any other being. It demanded God Himself in the Person of His Son to do what Jesus Christ came into this world to do.

Now we are going to break that up into fragments.

There are many ways in the Bible by which the great truth of the greatness and glory of Christ is brought before us. This week we are confining ourselves to one of these ways by which God has chosen to reveal His Son, and that way is by means of the ark of the covenant in the tabernacle of the Old Testament. That ark was God's temporary method of representing the greatness and glory of His Son.

Now I want to safeguard this matter very carefully. There will be a great deal said about that ark as we trace its history through the Old Testament. But this sounds like a contradiction - I am not really talking about the ark. It will be mentioned perhaps very many times during this week, and you might think that I am giving some messages on the tabernacle and the ark, but what I am really speaking about is what the ark represents. The ark is only a symbol, after all. It is one of the types in the Old Testament, and we are only doing here what God did, and what Jesus Himself did. God took an earthly object by which to teach heavenly truths. The object is not an end in itself, but only a means to an end, so that in order to understand and appreciate typology we have to stand back from that which is used in order to see what purpose it serves. We have to see what it is that God is trying to say by using this object. So we must get behind the type to that which it typifies.

What we are going to see as we look at this ark and its history is the absolute supremacy and exclusiveness of Jehovah as God. This ark is going to say to us, if we have ears to hear and eyes to see, that God is God alone in this universe. This ark is the symbol of the rights of God in this universe.

I wonder if you have ever been impressed with the way in which the Psalmist so often addressed God? He was addressed as the 'Creator of the heavens and the earth', which was just one way of saying that God has by creation supreme rights in heaven and on earth. We shall find as we go on that this ark is set up against all other gods, and all these other false gods of the nations have to bow in the presence of this ark. Those of you who know anything about its history are at once realizing how true that is. Whether it be the gods of the seven nations in Canaan, or whether it be Dagon, the god of the Philistines, down they will come from their thrones when this ark comes into their midst. There are many gods in this universe, but they will all have to bow the knee when the ark comes into their presence. All these gods represent rebellion against the absolute supremacy of Jehovah. Therefore, in principle, all these other deities embody the law of lawlessness. They are against Jehovah. Lawlessness is in the heavens and in the earth, and we know that today more than ever. Lawlessness has reached its highest point in our time, but we can see it so much in the Old Testament. Very well, then: bring in the ark and see what happens when it appears on the scene!

You see, it is not just the ark: it is what the ark represents. We shall see that the ark is a type of Jesus Christ, God manifest in the flesh. It is the function of Jesus Christ to establish the uniqueness, the perfect holiness, the almighty power and the wonderful grace of God. All these things were features of the ark, and the Lord Jesus Christ takes them all up in Himself. The uniqueness of God - there is no other - the absolute holiness of God, the supreme power of God and the unspeakable grace of God. These were features of the ark which point to the Lord Jesus.

It may be that there are some of you who are a little sceptical about Old Testament typology. Indeed, you may be sceptical about the place of the Old Testament in our life today, but I think I shall have to bring you right to the real point.

Are you sceptical about the Old Testament? Have you no place for Old Testament typology? If that is your attitude, then you must close your New Testament as well as your Old Testament. You will have to tear your New Testament to pieces and throw a lot of it away. That is why, in this special connection, I asked you to read the ninth chapter of the Letter to the Hebrews. We will just look at it.

"And after the second veil, the tabernacle which is called the Holy of holies; having a golden censer, and the ark of the covenant overlaid round about with gold, wherein was a golden pot holding the manna, and Aaron's rod

that budded, and the tables of the covenant; and above it cherubim of glory overshadowing the mercy-seat; of which things we cannot now speak severally" (Hebrews 9:3-5).

Now that looks backward, but in verse 8 it is brought forward to the present time: "The Holy Spirit this signifying, that the way into the holy place hath not yet been made manifest, while as the first tabernacle is yet standing; which is a parable for the time now present; according to which are offered both gifts and sacrifices that cannot, as touching the conscience, make the worshipper perfect, being only (with meats and drinks and divers washings) carnal ordinances, imposed until a time of reformation" (verses 8-10).

I want you to note several little fragments in that passage. "Not yet." Now, as you know, the writer of this Letter is saying that that 'not yet' is finished - now it is all finished... "which is a parable for the time now present". If you look at verse 23, it says: "It was necessary therefore that the copies of the things in the heavens...", and verse 24: "For Christ entered not into a holy place made with hands, like in pattern to the true." Now put all those fragments together: Not yet while the old tabernacle was standing. The 'yet' is a later time. That was a parable of the things now. That was a copy of things in the heavens, and the writer is saying throughout the Letter: 'We are living in that time of reformation.' This is something much bigger than the Reformation under Martin Luther! This is the re-forming of everything from types to realities, from the earthly type to the heavenly truth.

Now I am sure that has wearied many of you, because you have no difficulty in this matter, but I want you weary people to remember two things. There are here a large number of young Christians who have yet to learn all the meaning of the Bible, and there are a few present, who, because they come from a certain part of Europe, have little place for the Old Testament. So it is necessary for us to see that we cannot understand the Old Testament without the New Testament, and to understand the New Testament we must have the Old Testament. The New Testament is illuminated by the Old Testament, and the Old Testament is explained by the New Testament. Forgive me for taking so much time on that, but I think it is important.

Let us come back to this ark. You know that it goes by a number of different names, which we will just mention, and then explain them afterward. Fifteen times it is called 'The ark of God'; fourteen times it is called 'the ark of the testimony'; nine times it is called 'the ark of the covenant'; five times it is called 'the ark of the Lord'; twice it is called 'the ark of the glory' and once it is called 'the ark of God's strength'. Let us, then, look at some of these names more carefully.

Firstly, the ark of the covenant. The covenant is the basis or ground upon which God is willing to be with us. Perhaps the greatest thing that man needs is to have God with him, so it is important to know the ground on which God is willing to be with us. So the covenant is an agreement which God makes. It is a contract made by God, a charter provided by God. In the covenant God says: 'These are the terms upon which I will be with you.' God has made a covenant and says: 'This is the covenant that I make: that I will be with you on this ground. If you will keep on this ground I will remain with you.' That is the covenant, and the ark is the ark of that covenant.

In the next place it is called 'the ark of the testimony', and in the Hebrew language the word 'testimony' is a different word from the word 'covenant'. The testimony is a declaration made by God, a statement and a proclamation that God makes to man. God is a speaking God, not a dumb God. He makes a proclamation. If we were using New Testament language we would say 'God is a preaching God'. You see, the Gospel is a proclamation. It is the speaking of a speaking God. "God hath spoken" is the great proclamation of the prophets. God has made Himself known in word. You must store all this up for what we are going to say in a few minutes.

The third name is 'the ark of the Lord'. This declares that He is Lord, and by means of this ark men are going to meet God. They are going to know that it is the Lord with whom they have to do, and the name 'the ark of God' carries with it a very similar meaning. By means of this ark a relationship with God is created. They truly did learn in the old days that this ark meant that men came into touch with God.

Now we need not enlarge upon the other names, 'the ark of God's strength' and 'the ark of God's glory'. We are going to see that as we go on with the history of the ark.

All this was concentrated into a small chest. I used to think that the ark was about the size of a man's coffin, and that when they carried it through the wilderness they were carrying something like a coffin - something about the size of a man. But that, of course, is not true. The ark was a comparatively small box, only just a little longer than this reading desk here, about as wide and also about as high. It was really quite a small thing.

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As you know, it was made of acacia wood, a wood chosen for its strength and incorruptibility. That ark would never be troubled by woodworm or dry rot. That is not just a joke - I am thinking all the time beyond the ark. But there it was - quite a small cabinet with a basis of acacia wood.

Then it was overlaid with gold, and on the top of it was a slab of pure gold. That was called the mercy seat, and over the mercy seat were the two cherubim of glory.

Inside the ark there were three things. There were the tables of the covenant, the golden pot with a specimen of the manna in the wilderness, and Aaron's rod that budded and bore fruit.

We have to turn over from the type to the reality to understand all these details, but before we do that let us mention one other thing: the place that the ark occupied.

The ark was right at the very heart and centre not only of the tabernacle but of the whole nation of Israel. The whole system which gathered around that ark was governed by the position which it occupied. It was there that God had His place as the centre of everything. It was there that He was heard to speak and it was there that He made Himself known.

Now we turn over. We have said that this ark was a type of Jesus Christ, and we begin with the incorruptible nature of the Son of God. He could say: "Which of you convicteth me of sin?" (John 8:46). If He were not the Divine Son of God, how dared He say such a thing? There is not another human being in all God's universe who dare say: 'You cannot find any sin in me'. Mark you, we are now speaking about His humanity - we are referring to the acacia wood. No sin could register its power in His life. That is what I meant by 'no woodworm and no dry rot'. Neither sin nor death could affect Him. The testimony concerning Him was: "it was not possible that he should be holden of death" (Acts 2:24), and Peter, quoting the Psalmist, also said: "Neither wilt thou give thy Holy One to see corruption" (Acts 2:27). His humanity was a sinless, perfect humanity, and yet it was true humanity.

Do you not wish that you were like that? Do you not wish that sin could have no power over you? Do you not wish that you had an incorruptible nature? Do you not wish that death had no power over you?

Dear friends, we are chosen to be conformed to His image that all that shall be true of us. Paul says that even these corruptible bodies are going to be changed and "conformed to the body of his glory" (Philippians 3:21). The Word of God teaches us that we are not going to be just disembodied spirits floating about in the air. We are going to have resurrection bodies, from which all sin and corruption will have been removed for ever. We are chosen for that, and for that very purpose Jesus Christ, God's Son, came in the form of a man. Every time we take the loaf at the Lord's Table we are really testifying to this fact that by faith we are made partakers of that incorruptible Body of Christ. We are secured in Him unto a body that will overcome death.

We are launched out into the beginning of a mighty ocean! So far I have only just touched a little upon the acacia wood, but the ark will go through all the wilderness trials. It will overcome all the difficulties and adversities of the wilderness life and, as we shall see, it will lead the way right through into the promised land of the inheritance.