

## **GOD AT HOME**

### **Exodus 29:45-46**

*Dr. Trevor Brown*

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I have noticed that my current phase of life brings me to the zoo more often than most people. I don't know if you are a regular at the zoos in our region, but it is always amusing to see the habitats for each animal. Often, they seem less about the animal and more about what we appreciate most about them. The giraffe enclosure keeps the food high and gives a viewing deck. The elephants have the food hanging so that the trunk is needed to reach all the way up and eat. The monkeys get nylon straps to swing from, which don't seem very home-like to me.

The burrowing, nocturnal animals end up with a glass wall so that you can still see in. The most comical are the reptiles and snakes kept indoors. The tanks are small. So, we've politely wallpapered them to resemble the wild, as if they won't notice. In our latest trip to the zoo, I couldn't help but admire one animal in the final building as we made our lap around the park.

The Northern Tree shrew looks like a squirrel with a slightly larger snout. I learned from the signage that the Northern Treeshrew has the highest brain to body mass ratio of any animal. So, I stopped to find out what the biggest brains in the wild are like. A few facts were listed. They mate for life. They protect their territory from other shrews. These are both wise choices. The bottom line read: "Treeshrew parents have a separate nest that they build for their young while they stay in their own nest. Only visiting the young to feed them, adults will not even clean or groom their offspring." After a full day at the zoo, every parent pushing their worn-out children through the final exhibit is tempted to think, "Maybe the Treeshrew really is the smartest animal in the wild."

Today, we turn our attention to the book of Exodus, where we find ourselves in the middle of the Bible's story about God's home and our home. If you were planning to build God a home, a dwelling, what would you make? What would it look like?

### **GOD MAKES A HOME**

Exodus can be separated into the three large sections. The first chapters of Exodus tell us the heroic account of God bringing people out of slavery in Egypt. The middle chapters detail the giving of the Law. Here, in the third section of the book of Exodus, we are introduced to the Tabernacle. This is a pivotal moment in understanding God's desire for creation, but it is also where many Bible reading plans have gone to die. It is a graveyard of good intentions, where February Bible readers become bogged down in interior design.

It is announced in Exodus 25:8: "*Let them construct a sanctuary (miqdash) for me, that I may dwell (shakhan) among them.*" The word for sanctuary speaks about a holy place, a unique and

set apart place for the God *above* to dwell *within*. God says he will live there, literally meaning “to dwell in a tent.” God makes a home because God desires to be with us.<sup>i</sup>

## **1. GOD MAKES A HOME TO BE WITH US.**

God shows Moses the heavenly temple and then gives him a pattern to follow for the construction of the earthly tabernacle. Yahweh instructs the Israelites to collect gold, precious stones, animal skins, and fine fabrics. Then, he tells Moses why. Having given Moses the law, God takes the relationship another step forward. He tells Moses that he wants his holy and divine presence to dwell – to have a home - in the midst of Israel.

There are something like 42 miracles in the first 20 chapters of Exodus. Not one of those miracles is given this length of prose or this detailed of accounting. Consider for a moment that the writer of this book spends considerably more time telling you about the tent created for the presence of God than he would the conditions of the sea as they crossed through on dry ground. We know every detail of this dwelling but not what kind of bush it was that never stopped burning. We know the materials of the tent but not the species of snake that emerged from Moses’ staff.

The words of Exodus 29:44-46, sit in the middle of seven chapters that detail the architectural blueprints of this sacred tent called the tabernacle. Why are the instructions so specific? Why go to such great lengths to ensure that generations to follow could read and know exactly what God designed? The reason is because every detail of God’s design points to the truth about God and the truth about us. God wants the people to make a home for his presence to dwell and from that home he will teach them who they are.

## **2. GOD MAKES A HOME TO TELL US WHO WE ARE.**

The tabernacle plans feature an outer courtyard with an altar, an outer room, an inner room in the center of the tent, and inside the inner room—called the most holy space—is a golden box with angelic creatures on it, the ark of the covenant. This is a *place* for the presence of God.

As we read this long and detailed plan, we’re reminded of God’s desire from the beginning of creation to dwell in the world. The creation stories of Genesis teach us that God created the first humans and placed them in the garden of Eden and tasked them with helping the garden flourish as their home. Genesis 3:8 tells us, *“They heard the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day.”*<sup>ii</sup>

Why did God come to walk in the garden at the time of the cool of the day? It was because the garden was meant to be God’s home, too, and not just Adam’s and Eve’s. In the beginning, God spoke creation into being. Here, in Exodus, God speaks again. Moses must wait six days on the mountain before God delivers the plans. Seven times God’s instructions repeat the refrain: “you shall make...” These seven creative speeches parallel the structure of God’s own speaking of creation. They also describe a home full of symbolism. There are flowers, angels, gold, and

jewels. The details all point back to the garden of Eden, the place where God and humans lived together in relationship. Only, God did not actually come to dwell in the world at the end of the Genesis creation account.<sup>iii</sup>

### **3. GOD MAKES A HOME TO REPAIR WHAT'S BROKEN.**

The world *was intended* to be a home for God and people, but creation is disrupted by the sin of that first couple whose hands and hearts failed to resist the fruit of the tree of knowledge. It wasn't enough for them to be made in God's image. Instead, they reach for being God. And as a result, they find themselves cast out of the garden, separated from the presence of God and alienated from each other.

Sin by its very nature, casts you out. That's what sin does: it isolates, and it alienates. When you lie to someone, for example, there's an isolation. You've created a distance. They've moved away from you. You've moved away from them. You have to be careful what you say because you might say something that shows there was a lie. Whether a friend, spouse, or acquaintance, the lie has created a separation. All selfishness, all self-centeredness, and all sin drives you out. The penalty throughout the Bible is to be banished, to be exiled.<sup>iv</sup>

#### **Hiding Alone**

*As the weather warms, we are approaching an important season in the life of my family: popsicle season. It's become something of a tradition for our kids. When the hottest days come, they get to spend some time out on the porch with a cold treat. Our detached garage has an extra freezer, and it stays stocked for those occasions. We even keep a pair of scissors in there so the kids can choose their color, cut it open, and enjoy.*

*One Saturday, a few years ago, popsicle time had ended for the family. I was doing some work in the yard in front of the house which meant I was walking back and forth up the driveway beside our house, carrying things to and from the garage. I heard a rustle from behind the bushes that separate my driveway from the neighbor's yard.*

*When I looked over to see what was crawling around, I found one of my children. Crouching there, holding a half-eaten popsicle, with colored stain running from lips to chin to chest. I was confused for a moment and asked what he was doing. He looked back at me and said, "I got another one."*

What had been gifted to him for joy, meant to be shared and enjoyed together, had become a moment of isolation and shame. We prefer our own space. We think that the distance we create from God or others frees us to have what we want. But even when you sit alone with the best your world has to offer, you sit alone. Sin isolates and alienates.

In Genesis 3:9, just moments after they heard the sound of God walking in the garden, we read: "Then the Lord God called to the man, and said to him, "Where are you?" He said, "I heard the

*sound of You in the garden, and I was afraid...*” God wants to be with us to tell us who we really are and to repair what’s been broken.

God’s coming to dwell with Israel in the tabernacle during Israel’s desert journey is a pivotal moment. In a concrete place and time, God is bringing into being what was his intention from the beginning. The tabernacle is like a picture of God’s world, a home that reflects the world as God would have it be. In other words, the tabernacle is a portable Eden where God and Israel can live together in peace. No more separation. No more hiding. At least, that was the design.<sup>v</sup>

Before it could even be built, the blatant idolatry of the people put the whole project in danger. Exodus 32-34 tells us about the sin of Israel and Aaron. While Moses is on Mount Sinai, Aaron gives in to the will of the people, and they begin making a god for themselves of gold. It forces Moses into an awful negotiation as he pleads for God to keep His presence with them. Moses knows that without God’s presence, the covenant is as good as dead.

In Exodus 33:15-16, Moses said to him, “If your Presence does not go with us, do not send us up from here. How will anyone know that you are pleased with me and with your people unless you go with us?” Moses knows that without God in their midst, they would lose their unique identity – the one thing that distinguished them from the rest of the nations. They wouldn’t know who they are and could never repair what has been broken. If they weren’t distinct from the nations, there would be no purpose in being a nation at all and no hope for the nations themselves.<sup>vi</sup>

God makes a home to be with us so that He can tell us who we are, repair what’s been broken, and announce it to the world.

#### **4. GOD MAKES A HOME TO ANNOUNCE IT TO THE WORLD.**

He says it clearly in Exodus 33:16, *“For how then can it be known that I have found favor in Your sight, I and Your people? Is it not by Your going with us, so that we, I and Your people, may be distinguished from all the other people who are upon the face of the earth?”*

After humanity’s rebellion in the garden, they had lost access to God’s presence. Through the family of Abraham, God’s presence has become accessible again. First, He came at Mount Sinai and one day to all nations. God makes a home in the middle of one particular people so that they can announce to rest of the world: “Come home.”

*The Northern Treeshrew may have the largest brain to body mass ratio, but despite being the smartest, he is not the ruler of the zoo. You might think the largest, or fiercest, or fastest animal is the king of the jungle. The zoo says otherwise. You might be thinking, “Its humans, of course.” I would disagree. While all the other animals live rent free and are regularly fed, we pay money to enter and see them. On our way out of the zoo, I came across the real lord of the zoo.*

*There is one animal who receives all the benefits of zoo life with none of the restraints. He struts around like he owns the place, living in freedom, for all to see. We call him: the peacock. He roams free and needs no enclosure. It seems to me that the peacock is lord of the zoo.*

When we stop and look at the way God has made his presence available, the times and places where this timeless, unbound, all-powerful God has allowed Himself to be known to us and within the limits of our world, it really is incredible. It is amazing to consider that God would come and say, "I desire to be known in your time and in your space."

Today, we serve a Lord who is on the loose. The same God once confined to the designs of a tent, offers his presence to people. God's presence didn't stop there. John writes, "*And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.*" (John 1:14) The Word, who was before all beginnings and who was himself God, came to us in the form of a person. Drawing on the language and history of this tent in Israel, John says he dwelt – he tabernacled – among us. The divine glory of God was visible in Jesus for those who had eyes to see.

In Him, we discover a new presence of God in the world. God dwells not only "among" the people, but also *in them*. In the moments before his arrest and crucifixion, Jesus turns to the Father and prays asking, "*that the love with which you have loved me may be in them, and I in them.*" (John 17:23)

This is why Paul can pray for the Ephesians, "*that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith.*" He can write in Colossians, "*the glorious riches of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.*" (Col. 1:27) Paul can tell the Corinthians, "*Don't you know that you yourselves are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in your midst?*" (1 Cor. 3:17)

Through faith in Jesus, you are nothing less than part of the very temple of God. The living and eternal God has made the presence of His Spirit available to you. He's not waiting in a tent or bound up in a building. We don't come to admire Him in an enclosure from afar or observe His habitat only when you're in need. He's on the loose! He is the risen and reigning Lord of the whole world who has given His Spirit so that he might live among us.

### **Homeless Jesus**

One day a couple years ago, outside of a basilica in Minneapolis, passersby became concerned. As the light snowfall accumulated, they could see a man laying beneath a blanket on bench. More than one called 9-1-1. Hopefully, they were worried about his wellbeing. Some were more worried that he shouldn't be there. When police responded they discovered it was a new statue. The bench and man were cast in life-size bronze, and it wasn't just any man. The bronze blanket concealed all of him but his feet. When you looked closer, you would see that both feet had large holes in them, the size of Roman nails.<sup>vii</sup>

Timothy Schmalz, the creator, has made nearly a dozen of these placed around the country. He titled it: "Homeless Jesus." People were calling the police on Jesus. "Foxes have holes, birds

have nests” Jesus once said. “But the son of Man has no place to lay his head.” He came into the world to his own people, and his own did not receive him. Today, he comes looking for the people in whom he longs to dwell. He comes to make his presence known in and through you. Will he find a home?

Jesus, rest assured, is not homeless. He ascended to Father where he sits at His right hand. However, he also says he wants to make a home with you and in you through His Spirit.

***God wants to be with you to tell you who you are, to repair what is broken, and to announce it to the world.***

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<sup>i</sup> Tim Mackie, “What’s So Special About the Tabernacle,” *Exodus Scroll*, Ep. 8 (BibleProject Podcast: 2 May 2022).

<sup>ii</sup> Miroslav Volf and Matthew Croasmun, *For the Life of the World: Theology That Makes a Difference* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2019) 69-70.

<sup>iii</sup> Miroslav Volf and Ryan McAnnally-Linz, *The Home of God: A Brief Story of Everything* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2022) 5-10.

<sup>iv</sup> Tim Keller, “The Longing for Home,” *Gospel in Life*, 28 September 2003.

<sup>v</sup> Volf & Linz, 6-7.

<sup>vi</sup> Christopher Wright, *The Mission of God: Unlocking the Bible’s Grand Narrative* (Downer’s Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2006) 335.

<sup>vii</sup> <https://www.fox9.com/news/why-are-people-calling-911-about-this-statue-in-minneapolis>