

## I. Introduction

- A. Hi. My name is Bill. First I want to welcome you to church.
- B. Second, I want to give you an orientation. It's an orientation not only to our church, but to life as a whole.
- C. It goes like this:
  - 1. My name is Bill and I don't answer to you.
- D. This is the end of our orientation. Because this is really what I want to preach today. It is one of the great secrets of spiritual maturity. It is one of the great secrets of emotional strength.
- E. I want to teach a biblical truth that has a life-changing conclusion.
- F. The conclusion was stated by the great Apostle, Paul, this way:
  - 1. *But with me it is a very small thing that I should be judged by you or by a human court. In fact, I do not even judge myself.* (1 Corinthians 4:3, cf. Romans 14:4)
- G. So, like I said, this is the conclusion of a well-constructed bit of biblical theology.
- H. And I want to construct that theology together with you.
- I. So please think together with me on this topic:
  - 1. **Propitiation (pro-pish-ee-AY-shun)**
- J. My talk today is part five, which is the last part, in our series called Under Construction. We are using a construction project in ancient Israel to illustrate what has to be reconstructed in our lives and our culture today.
- K. Our illustration comes from something built by Moses. God told Moses to build a **Tabernacle**.
- L. This was a very detailed Tent that became a portable worship center for the Jews. They left Egypt. They wandered in the wilderness for forty years. Then they moved into the Promised Land. Wherever they went, the Tabernacle went with them.
  - 1. The single most important place in the Tabernacle was a tent within a tent. It was called the Holies of Holies, or the Holiest place.
  - 2. Only the high priest could enter the Holy of Holies. And he could only enter once a year.
- M. Inside the Holy of Holies, the High Priest stood before the single most important artifact in ancient Israel. This was the **Ark of the Covenant**.
- N. We're going to focus on the Ark of the Covenant for the rest of our time today... Because the incredible meaning for our lives embedded in this ark ripples down the corridors of time and eternity forever.

## II. The Ark of the Covenant

- A. **CONSTRUCTION: God gave precise blueprints for the Ark to help teach on earth the eternal truths that flow from heaven.**
  - 1. The Ark is the first item God told Moses to build. This is recorded in Exodus 25:10.
    - a) *"And they shall make an ark of acacia wood; two and a half cubits shall be its length, a cubit and a half its width, and a cubit and a half its height. And you shall overlay it with pure gold, inside and out you shall overlay it, and shall make on it a molding of gold all around.* (Exodus 25:10, 11)
  - 2. Start with a wooden box. It is made of a kind of wood that resistant to insects and to rot — called acacia wood.
  - 3. The box is 45 inches long, 27 inches wide, and 27 inches tall.
  - 4. The entire box is overlaid with pure gold, inside and out.
  - 5. There's a gold molding around the top edge that is sometimes called a crown.
  - 6. There were gold rings built into the two long sides, one in each corner. The priests were given long poles to carry the ark, like a litter. The poles were of the same material — acacia wood overlaid with gold.
  - 7. Once the Ark was completed, and the poles were inserted into the rings, the poles were never to be removed.
  - 8. When it was time for the Jews to move, the priests could collapse the tent panels of the Holy of Holies, folding them the Ark. This would hide the ark, allowing the poles would still stick out. That way nobody saw it. Nobody touched it.
- B. **LID: The lid was crafted of solid gold to teach the counterintuitive doctrine of grace.**
  - 1. So, the Ark was wood overlaid with gold. But the lid — which was very ornate — was all gold. Solid gold. Actually, one piece of gold hammered into shape.
    - a) *You shall make a mercy seat of pure gold; two and a half cubits shall be its length and a cubit and a half its width. And you shall make two cherubim of gold; of hammered work you shall make them at the two ends of the mercy seat.* (Exodus 25:17, 18)
  - 2. Here's a lid that perfectly fits inside the crown molding of the ark. It's solid gold, so super-super heavy.
  - 3. Also, it includes two cherubim... these are two regal gold angels. So two cherubim, one on each end of the lid. The two angels weren't attached to the Mercy Seat... it was all one piece, hammered into shape.
  - 4. If you read the next few verses, you'll see that the two angels faced each other. Their wings were spread out over the ark. And their faces were looking downward (v. 20-23).
  - 5. If you look up the Hebrew Word for Mercy Seat, you get *kapporeth*.
    - a) In the New Testament, this Hebrew word was translated by the Greek word *hilasterion*.
    - b) These words means a place of atonement, and atonement means the payment of a ransom (message #2 in the series).
    - c) And ransom means that someone who was a captive or a slave just got bought with a price and then set free.
  - 6. It's a form of the word used in Yom Kippur, which is the Day of Atonement, the holiest day of the year for the Jews. It's the day set aside to remember the price that God paid in Christ to set his people free.
  - 7. We'll come back to this.
- C. **CONTENTS: Inside the Ark, the Jews placed the tablets of stone on which God wrote the Ten Commandments.**
  - 1. So, Moses God the instructions from God. And he followed them to the letter.

- a) *So Moses raised up the tabernacle, fastened its sockets, set up its boards, put in its bars, and raised up its pillars. And he spread out the tent over the tabernacle and put the covering of the tent on top of it, as the LORD had commanded Moses. He took the Testimony and put it into the ark, inserted the poles through the rings of the ark, and put the mercy seat on top of the ark. And he brought the ark into the tabernacle, hung up the veil of the covering, and partitioned off the ark of the Testimony, as the LORD had commanded Moses.* (Exodus 40:18-21)
2. Now, what can this impossible ancient relic say to our lives today? Before I get into that, let me say four things the Ark wasn't.
  - a) *It wasn't an image or idol of God.* It taught ABOUT God, but it didn't offer an image of him. Every other ancient religion PICTURED their God in idols. But our God is beyond that. He can't be depicted in any form. He can't even be imagined.
  - b) *It wasn't a power generator,* like Raiders of the Lost Ark.
  - c) *It wasn't magical.* Whatever happened in and around the ark happened because God made it happen from heaven... not because the Ark had any kind of esoteric circuitry or wiring.
  - d) *It wasn't like anything else in the ancient—or modern—world.* Not an image. Not an idol. Not a magical box. Not anything like that. It was completely unparalleled and one of a kind.
3. **The Ark was a gift from God to anchor his people to the most urgent and far reaching realities that define human existence.**
- D. Of these realities, land at the top of the heap.

## III. Symbolism

## A. TRUTH

1. If you flash forward to the end of the Bible and the book of Revelation, you get this.
  - a) *Then the temple of God was opened in heaven, and the Ark of His Covenant was seen in His temple. And there were lightnings, noises, thunderings, an earthquake, and great hail.* (Revelation 11:19)
2. The Ark on earth was a model of the Ark in heaven. I am saying that the earthly ark taught eternal truth that emanates from heaven.
3. What is this about?
4. It is about the origin and source of all truth.
  - a) **Truth begins in heaven. All truth. Any truth. Any field. Any science. Any conclusion of philosophy.**
  - b) **All truth is God's truth.**
  - c) **Because all truth comes from God and originates with him.**
5. God put the Ark on earth because he knew that earth was a battlefield. There was a dark fiend bent on corrupting truth, and he's still at work today.
  - a) Truth vs deception.
  - b) Christ vs AntiChrist.
  - c) God vs Satan.
  - d) The Bible vs all vain human imagination.
6. This is the battle we are in. This is not a friendly discussion among friends. It is a life and death conflict between those who claim the name of Christ versus the demonic hosts of wickedness and their more or less gullible minions.
7. The ideas of the two sides are irreconcilable. They are fundamentally opposed views of reality and truth. They are light and dark, wet and dry. You can't mix them.
8. This is our war. Your war and mine, every single day.
  - a) *In the realm of logic,* it is a war between God-ordained reality vs a flight from reason and plunge into irrationality.
  - b) *In the realm of morality,* it is a war between divine absolutes that dignify human existence, vs a perversion that damages human dignity and floods every bit of culture it touches with chaos.
  - c) *In the realm of worldview,* it is a war between our infinite Creator God, and the supernaturally infused universe he created vs a vast compendium of randomness, and therefore of absurdity, and therefore of evil at the core... with a devil laughing all the way to hell.
9. If you won't take your stand on absolute truth, you will trip yourself up again and again over relativism. Postmodernism. Critical theories with no basis in fact or reality.
  - a) Relativism preaches there is no truth, only opinion. They shift all debate from the realm of objective rationality into the realm of subjective emotion.
  - b) The second you surrender the intellect to the passions is the second you open the door to fascism and every form of tyranny.
  - c) Tyranny is a lust for power unchecked by truth.
  - d) To erase truth is to enthrone tyranny. This is why there is today such a fierce warfare for absolute control over the dissemination of truth. Whoever controls the narrative owns the world.
    - (1) To erase truth, to make it all subjective opinion, is to enthrone tyranny.
    - (2) To erase truth is to enthrone the survival of the fittest as the only law of the jungle left standing.
    - (3) To surrender the claim of truth upon humans is to surrender Earth to thugs.
  - e) Philosopher Michael Novak writes,
    - (1) ...Relativism is an invisible gas, odorless, deadly that is now polluting every free society on earth. It is a gas that attacks the central nervous system of moral striving. "There is no such thing as truth," they teach even the little ones. "Truth is bondage. Believe what seems right to you. There are many truths as there are many individuals. Follow your feelings. Do as you please. Get in touch with yourself."

- (2) Those who speak in this way prepare the jail of the twenty-first century. They do the work of tyrants.
10. If truth is relative—relative to opinion, or emotion, or tribal affiliation, or ethnicity, or economic class—if there is one truth for you and another truth for me... then there is no God. There is no eternal source of truth. There is no meaning, no purpose, no value, no sacredness to your life, my life, or our children's lives.
  11. When John caught a glimpse of the Ark of the Covenant in heaven, and when God told Moses to build everything as an model of a pre-existent original in heaven...
    - a) God was anchoring truth in the one place beyond all shifting sands of emotion, emotion, race, tongue, and tribe.
    - b) He was saying that truth exists prior to and independently of every thought of humankind and is not up for a vote.
  12. Absolute truth—this is the first lesson of the Ark of the Covenant.
  13. Here is the second one.
  14. Let's break down the symbolism of the Ark.

## B. PROPITIATION

### 1. The Cherubim

- a) *The two angels represent the holiness and righteousness of God.* (Genesis 3:24, Psalm 99:1, Ezekiel 10, 2 Chronicles 3:10).

### 2. The Ten Commandments

- a) **The Ten Commandments represent God's demands AND mankind's failures.**
- b) So you have God's holiness and God's righteousness. And they are looking downward into the Ark. What do they see? The see God's demands and mankind's failure.
- c) God's holiness is not satisfied with mankind's sinfulness. God cannot dwell with sin. God cannot allow sinners into his presence.
- d) A broken law demands judgment. If God did not condemn unrighteousness, he would cease being God.
- e) *When divine holiness sees moral failure God's character is not satisfied, and when God's character is not satisfied, divine righteousness sends down judgment.* (Psalm 96:13, Joel 2:1).
- f) **This is called the wrath of God. (Romans 1:18, Ephesians 5:6, Psalm 96:13, Joel 2:1)**
  - (1) For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, (Romans 1:18)

### 3. The Day of Atonement (Leviticus 16:3-10, Leviticus 16:26-32, Numbers 29:7-11)

- a) I said there was one day of the year when the high priest appeared before the Ark of the Covenant. This is the high holy day called the Day of Atonement.
- b) On the day of atonement, all Israel gathered at the tabernacle to see what happened. It was a somber, serious assembly.
- c) The High Priest chose two goats.
- d) He then cast lots over the two goats for two different purposes.
  - (1) *One goat was chosen as the sin offering.* The priest laid his hands upon this goat's head, and confessed the sins of the people. This could take a while. This symbolically transferred the sins of the people to the head of the goat. The priest then killed it as a sacrifice, and collected some of its blood in a bowl. We'll come back to this.
  - (2) *The other goat was chosen as the scapegoat.* The priest also laid his hands upon this goat's head, and confessed the sins of the people. Kind of a repeat. But then, this goat was led alive into the wilderness, and sent away, never to be seen again.
  - (3) I think you can see the symbolism here.
  - (4) **Because of God's grace, once your sins are paid for, your sins are gone. (Psalm 103:10-12)**
- e) But now, the most important thing happens.
- f) Now, the high priest takes the blood of the sacrifice. He goes into the courtyard, into the tent of the Tabernacle, and through the Holy Place.
- g) Now, he enters the Holy of Holies and appears before the Ark of the Covenant, to meet with God.
  - (1) He will use his fingers to sprinkle the blood of the sacrifice on the Mercy Seat seven times.
  - (2) Now what happens?
- h) God's holiness and justice—those mighty cherubim—are still looking downward.
- i) Before the high priest sprinkled the blood, they saw the tablets of the Law—God's demands and mankind's failures.
- j) But now what do the cherubim see?
- k) They see the blood.
  - (1) The see that a life has been poured out. A death has occurred. A sacrifice is complete. The penalty of sin is paid in full.
- l) And now, instead of Holiness seeing sin, and Righteousness sending down judgment, we have a completely different situation.
  - (1) Jesus sought me when a stranger,  
Wandering from the fold of God.  
He, to rescue me from danger,  
Interposed his precious blood.  
(Come Thou Font, Robert Robinson, 1758)
- m) Now, Holiness sees the blood and is completely SATISFIED on behalf of sinners, so Righteousness sends down blessing.
- n) This is called...

### 4. Propitiation (1 John 2:2, Romans 3:24, Luke 18:13)

- a) **Propitiation means that God is satisfied with me perfectly and forever because of the sacrifice of Jesus Christ for my sins.**
- b) Jesus is your High Priest.
- c) AND Jesus is your Scapegoat.
- d) AND Jesus is your sacrificial goat.
- e) BECAUSE Jesus is your Mercy Seat... all rolled into one.
  - (1) In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation [*hilasmos*, mercy seat] for our sins. (1 John 4:10)
  - (2) And He Himself is the propitiation [*hilasmos*, mercy seated] for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the whole world. (1 John 2:2)
  - (3) “And the tax collector, standing afar off, would not so much as raise his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, ‘God, be merciful [*hilaskomai*, be mercy seated] to me a sinner!’ (Luke 18:13)
- f) Is God satisfied with you today?
- g) If you have Jesus as your Savior, the answer is yes. A thousand times yes.
  - (1) Nobody else might be satisfied with you.
  - (2) Your parents might not be satisfied with you.
  - (3) Your children might not be satisfied with you.
  - (4) Your ex-, your spouse, your boss, your teacher might not be satisfied with you.
  - (5) You might not be satisfied with yourself!
- h) But God is.
- i) God is satisfied. God looks at you and has not one complaint. Not one criticism. Not one whisper of condemnation. Your sins are paid for. Your sins are forgiven. Your sins are gone.
  - (1) No matter how deep. No matter how corrupt. No matter how repeated. No matter how cruel. No matter how ugly. No matter how damaging. No matter how addictive. No matter how embarrassing. No matter how criminal. No matter how anything.
- j) This is propitiation. This is the power of the blood of Christ, *metaphorically* sprinkled on heaven’s mercy seat. (Not literally, that’s for another sermon.)
- k) And this wonderful doctrine of propitiation is why I can say, Hi, my name is Bill, and I don’t answer to you.
  - (1) I answer to God above. And since he is satisfied with me, it’s hard for me to care much whether you are or not.
- l) Spiritual maturity is that wonderful place where how I see myself matches how God sees me...

#### C. In Christ Alone

- 1. There’s a modern hymn that’s become a favorite around the world. It’s called In Christ Alone, written by Keith Getty and Stuart Townsend.
- 2. Not long ago, a church denomination wanted to include In Christ Alone in their new hymnal—which is a book of hymns.
- 3. But this was a liberal denomination, and they objected to a line in the song. They objected to this line in the second verse:
  - a) **Till on that cross as Jesus died**  
**The wrath of God was satisfied**  
**For every sin on Him was laid**  
**Here in the death of Christ I live**
- 4. This denomination doesn’t believe in the wrath of God. They wanted to change the words in their hymnal.
- 5. Instead of singing, “Till on that cross as Jesus died / **the love of God was magnified...**”
- 6. But they had to get permission from the hymn-writers to change the lyrics. “Hey, we’ll pay you great royalties if you let us take the wrath of God out of your song so we can put it in our hymnal. Because we don’t believe in the holiness of God, the righteousness of God, the wrath of God. We don’t believe in condemnation for sin. We don’t believe in sin. And we actually don’t believe in hell. So let us take all that out of your hymn.”
- 7. Getty and Townsend said, No way, not now, not ever.
  - a) May God increase their tribe.

#### IV. Conclusion

- A. Because if there’s no divine wrath, there’s no grace, and if there’s no grace, there’s no gospel, because there’s no good news.
- B. The Ark of the Covenant is God’s reconstruction of a forgotten truth today.
- C. It is time to reconstruct on earth the reality that truth exists, that it comes from God, that culture doesn’t get to change it...
- D. And that of all the truths in vastness of this indescribable cosmos, there is as beautiful as the human person. And God loves us with a love so powerful, he offers the gift of propitiation. It is this God who draws us, standing tall and accepted in the Beloved, toward himself. The same love that moves the galaxies and stars stooped to a manger and then to a cross, that he might be satisfy God on your behalf, once for all.