

Let us first have a word of prayer.

Lord, as we come together before You once again, we continue to look to Your mercy. May the Lord grant us more of the heavenly wisdom and the spirit of revelation so that we can understand the purpose of Your words. Lord, we thank You and wait upon You. Lord, may You speak freely to us. We look to You. We commit this time into Your hand. We pray this in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Brothers and Sisters, please turn to Exodus 25: 8-9.

*Let them construct a sanctuary for Me, that I may dwell among them. According to all that I am going to show you, as the pattern of the tabernacle and the pattern of all its furniture, just so you shall construct it.*

Numbers 1:52-53

*The sons of Israel shall camp, each man by his own camp, and each man by his own standard, according to their armies. But the Levites shall camp around the tabernacle of the testimony, so that there will be no wrath on the congregation of the sons of Israel. So the Levites shall keep charge of the tabernacle of the testimony.*

Numbers 2:1-4

*Now the Lord spoke to Moses and to Aaron, saying, "The sons of Israel shall camp, each by his own standard, with the banners of their fathers' households; they shall camp around the tent of meeting at a distance. Now those who camp on the east side toward the sunrise shall be of the standard of the camp of Judah, by their armies.*

Now Judah led two other tribes to camp on the east side.

Numbers 2:10

*On the south side shall be the standard of the camp of Reuben by their armies.*

So the tribe of Reuben led two other tribes to camp on the south side.

Numbers 2:17

*Then the tent of meeting shall set out with the camp of the Levites in the midst of the camps; just as they camp, so they shall set out, every man in his place by their standards.*

Numbers 2:18

*On the west side shall be the standard of the camp of Ephraim by their armies.*

Ephraim led two tribes to camp on the west side.

Numbers 2:25

*On the north side shall be the standard of the camp of Dan by their armies.*

Dan led two tribes to camp on the north side of the tabernacle.

Numbers 2:34

*Thus the sons of Israel did; according to all that the Lord commanded Moses, so they camped by their standards, and so they set out, everyone by his family, according to his father's household.*

Thank the Lord. According to the Brethren's arrangements, I will continue to share with brothers and sisters the purpose of God's words in regard to the tabernacle. Last time we touched lightly upon the matter of the tabernacle but that concerns only a small part of the entire tabernacle. We will not have time at this conference to have a comprehensive understanding of the entire tabernacle. Yet we must be able to see what is brought forth by these small details in the tabernacle. If we are to look at the tabernacle in its entirety, we cannot just look at the objects inside but we also need to look at its construction and the priests who serve in the tabernacle. And of course we cannot neglect the significance of the sacrifices. Time does not allow for us to go through all these so we can only share on what God asks of His people through the tabernacle by looking at a small part of the tabernacle.

I believe brothers and sisters understand clearly that when God told the Israelites He was to dwell among them, the Israelites felt a heavy burden in their hearts. They felt that they could not bear the fact that God was to dwell among them. Anyone who has seen God's glory but continues to live in the Adamic life will have the same mindset, yet how compassionate and mindful God is. He said, "Do not be afraid. I will dwell among you after you build a tabernacle according to what I show you. This tabernacle will not only give you rest while I live among you but also show you that I will bring you to a very important purpose through My dwelling among you. I will make you a kingdom of priests."

To me, I do not think that the Israelites could comprehend these words at that time. How is it possible that once the tabernacle is built, God will be able to dwell among them and they will become a kingdom of priests? Can it be that simple? Of course it is not that simple. The fact that God can dwell among them through the tabernacle helps to illustrate the spiritual reason that makes it possible for God to dwell among them. When God dwells among them, it is to manifest God's protection, provision, and government among them. The Israelites were not able to fully comprehend this at that time.

Perhaps what they could understand was this: It would be nice for God to dwell among us as long as He will not come out to look at us. We can then have the confidence that we can ask for His help when we encounter problems on our way. Since He lives among us and is no longer in the heaven, He will know for sure what kind of problems we encounter. He will bear all our hardships. This is probably what was in the hearts of the Israelites at that time. They forgot that even though God was in heaven, He could still dwell among men through the tabernacle. He is God who fills all in all. When He comes to the earth, it does not mean He has left heaven.

When the Lord came into their midst and dwelled among them in the tabernacle, what was His purpose? Let us look at God's arrangements and directions for them. In the last chapter of Exodus, the tabernacle is built and God's glory fills it. This should have been a great comfort for the Israelites. We see the arrangement God made for the Israelites regarding how they should live. This is a very meaningful arrangement. But it seems this arrangement is putting a barrier for God to dwell among men. When we read Numbers, we can see the first arrangement God made for the Israelites concerning the tabernacle: God arranges for the Levites to camp around the tabernacle. Why does God make such an arrangement? God explains it very clearly that it is for them to become the protection of the Israelites.

How do the Levites protect the Israelites? It is by not allowing the people to trespass and enter into the tabernacle. Using today's term, would we not call it racial discrimination? What is the reason for the Levites to surround the tabernacle and to keep the twelve tribes from entering the tabernacle? God says it very clearly that the people cannot bear the consequence of trespassing. He is protecting them from the consequence and that is why He lets the Levites camp around the tabernacle.

We thank the Lord. After the Levites have set their camp around the tabernacle, God arranges for the twelve tribes to set their camps. It is difficult to imagine how the Israelites set their camps since the time they left Egypt. I believe all the tribes including the Levites may have just set their camps randomly. But now God tells them they can no longer set their camps in a disorderly manner and must set their camps orderly according to each tribe's banner. Wherever the tabernacle is erected, the Levites are to camp around it and the twelve tribes are to set their camps accordingly.

Setting camps is a matter of living. After the first two groups set their camps, God instructs them to move forward. After the first two groups set out, it is not the third group of tribes that follows. It is the tabernacle that follows. After the tabernacle is disassembled, the Levites follow the first two groups to set out. After the Levites set out, then the third group of tribes begins to set out. After them is the fourth group led by the tribe of Dan.

Brothers and sisters, let us pay attention to the purpose of this arrangement. This arrangement has a direct relationship with the tabernacle. We thank and praise our Lord. God has a very clear purpose in this. This is the area I am entrusted to share with you: The spiritual meaning and the practical principle of the tabernacle. Now what is the relationship between this arrangement and the

tabernacle? Even though God has not explained it explicitly in words, God has revealed His requirements of His people in a very practical way.

I mentioned at the end of our last sharing when we look at the revelation of the order of objects in the tabernacle, we can see the way of the cross. This experience of the cross is the Son of God Himself. It is also the work of God that makes up the basis of the function of the tabernacle. Now the tabernacle is built, and God arranges for His people to surround it. Are we able to see the same condition? Inside the tabernacle is Christ Himself. Outside of the tabernacle, Christ's experience is to become the experience of the people of the kingdom of priests. Not only does it speak of the Son of God Himself who has walked through this way of the cross, but it also tells us, we who follow the Lord must also walk forward following the same path the Lord has walked on.

Brothers and sisters, let me ask you a question. It is the same question I asked the brothers and sisters in San Bruno a few weeks ago. If you were one of the Israelites at that time, what would be the first thing you would see in the morning every day? I think this is a very interesting question. You must remember you are now in the wilderness before entering into Canaan. You eat manna every day. In order to get manna, you need to get up early every morning. If you are a little late then you will miss the manna. You live under this circumstance. Now when you wake up in the morning, what is the first thing on your mind? Most likely it is to pick up manna and to have God's blessing. Such a thought is only natural to us. But if we place ourselves in the shoes of the Israelites who live in the wilderness, a more likely response is not to eat manna. After you wake up and get out of your tent, the first thing you probably will do is to check whether there is any movement of the pillar of cloud or pillar of fire above the tabernacle. When you look for any movement of God's glory, which is the pillar of cloud and the pillar of fire, then you will not just focus on eating manna. God gives manna to the Israelites to eat and He will certainly give them enough time to gather them. They must pay attention to the guidance of God. Does God want us to set forward or does God want us to stay put? If God wants us to set forward, then we need to first pack before going out to gather manna. Probably after we gather the manna we will eat them on the way as we move. I think this may be what will naturally happen at that time.

If there was a helicopter at that time to take us up to the sky for us to look down, what would we see? We would see the sign of a cross. Take note that this cross is centering around one thing: the tabernacle. It is the manifestation of the Lord. Brothers and sisters, what do we see in such an arrangement? If we look at the way they set up camp, at the very least we will see two things. First, whether we are moving or not, the command lies with the tabernacle. It is the guidance given by the Son of God. Simply put, God has placed Christ as the center of all our living and activities. This is the first point. Second, the arrangement for setting camps is based on the requirements of the cross. They do not remain stationary permanently in the wilderness. Their goal is to enter into Canaan. Spiritually speaking, they are to appropriate the promised inheritance from God. It is promised that they would receive this inheritance from God to manifest the function of their priesthood. Therefore, they must set forward. They will not remain stationary for a long period of

time in one location. And when they set forward, it seems the emblem of the cross is gone. It just becomes a straight line. But thank God, we can see the central point of this line is still the tabernacle. Even though at this time the tabernacle is taken down and carried in pieces, but practically speaking the tabernacle as a whole is still in their midst. We thank our God. It is very clear that when the people of Israel set forward in the wilderness, their focal point is always one, and that is the tabernacle. In spiritual terms and in today's words, it ought to be the case for us who follow the Lord. All our lives ought to base on our Lord being our focal point. Brothers and sisters, we must see one thing. When God designed this arrangement, it was not done casually. We can see very clearly God allowed them to experience the work of the cross in detail in their daily living.

Now, brother and sisters, through such arrangement, we see God Himself is bearing their burden, for God knows it is not easy for one who is in Adam, one who has partaken of the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, to turn his focus upon Christ. Therefore, such an arrangement is made for them to experience God in their daily living. How do they experience this? They have to experience what kind of God is dwelling in their midst. When God dwells in our midst, He desires for all of us to know He is the Lord who will surely bear all of our responsibilities. Therefore, when the Israelites encounter any problems they can come to inquire of God.

This is closely related to the work previously done in their midst. How did they leave Egypt? Pharaoh used all his means to forbid them from leaving Egypt, yet God opened up a way so they could boldly leave Egypt. It was God's own work that they were able to be delivered out of Egypt. Had God not worked it out for them, they would not have been able to move forward at all. They had experienced this and witnessed it. And now they were in the wilderness, would God shoulder their responsibilities like before? We thank God. Man may be unfaithful to God, yet God remains faithful to those whom He has called. We thank our God. When we are in the wilderness, God's faithfulness does not change.

Brothers and sister, we recall when Israel was journeying on the way they encountered much opposition from the enemy and hardships in their daily living. On the path throughout the wilderness where no one had treaded before, what was the direction they ought to take? We thank the Lord. In this dreary wilderness, when the Ark of the Covenant was taken out of the tabernacle while the people made their journey, God directed the Ark of the Covenant to lead the way. Why? The Ark would guide their way to a place where they could have rest.

Brothers and sisters, from all that God has done in their midst, we understand why God must be in the center and why we must follow God. God does not need to speak. Through His action, He shows us that apart from Him we will have no way. Perhaps we may feel His presence is a burden to us. But when we realize that God Himself shoulders the responsibilities, we will understand one thing: Without God there is no way. Without God there is no direction. Without God we do not know the purpose of our pursuit. We thank the Lord. In order to edify His people, God allows His people to experience and learn of Him. I have put all of these in a very passive way. But what is the positive result? It is for the people to realize that God Himself is their goal and their purpose

and the substance in their living, so that they will acknowledge that God has given them all the blessings. It is not merely for us to be ones who receive blessings. We can also acquire a firm grasp of the fact that God is our center and we must follow Him. Then God will have a way to accomplish His will through us. Therefore, brothers and sisters, we have to discern how God's thought is forever directed to His people. In order that they will become a nation and a kingly priesthood, God allows them to experience His blessings continually along their journey. God has done all these for them. In His heart He has such a longing for this purpose. When you come to know and experience God as your center and as your all, you are to manifest the function as a kingdom of priests. This is the first matter that God purposes to do among His people.

Next, we will consider this matter of following the Lord. We admit that it is easy when we merely talk about following the Lord as head knowledge. But when we actually follow Him, we will find that we are not very willing. I believe I do not have to give any example as we can understand this in our personal experience. When we see the form of the cross in the arrangement of the camps, we see it is the Lord himself who walk in the experience of the cross. It is not only for the Lord to walk this path but also for those who follow after Him. When we are to go on the way of the cross, we will find that although the doctrine of the cross is good to know, but the reality of walking the way of the cross is difficult to live out. Why do we have so much trouble when we walk on the way of the cross? It is because we must yield ourselves to the experience of the cross if we are to walk on the way of the cross.

What is the cross? Even people of the world will use this term "the cross". But in the mind of the people of this world, "the cross" just means hardship. When you suffer some hardship, you are bearing your cross. If you are able to bear that cross, then you will have good consequences. This is the view point of the people of the world. But how are the people of God to understand the cross? We do not need to understand too much. We will merely point out the basic facts and we will understand. Our Lord walked the way of the cross all through His life, and He also ended His life on the cross. As He walked the way of the cross, sometimes He was lifted up but at other time He was treaded upon. But no matter how He was treated, these experiences never affected Him in any way. When He was exalted, no matter how high man exalted Him, the status He was given could never be higher than His rightful position as the only begotten Son of God. No earthly position can aspire to surpass that honor. Even though man may give Him much applause, it is no comparison to the honor bestowed on the One who is at the right hand of God and in the bosom of the Father. On the other hand, sometimes our Lord was rejected and treaded upon when He was on earth. He was even falsely accused and in the end was crucified. He suffered such agony. But to Him such agony was minor. What He deemed the most painful experience was that moment when His fellowship with God the Father was momentarily interrupted on the cross.

There is another important point we have to mention. Our Lord is the Lord of life. But the cross put the Lord of life, the Lord who gives life, to death. Is this a trivial thing? Can the Lord of life die? He can never die. But we thank our Lord. He was willing to lay down His honor to taste

death. Even though three days may be a very short time to Him, for us it is a very long period of time. We cannot even bear that kind of pain for one second, but our Lord tasted death for three days. We thank the Lord. He is the Lord of life. He entered death in order to give us life. What is the key point? It lies in the end result of the cross. He has completely forsaken Himself. Our brother has mentioned that our Lord accepted the cross, but His focus was not on the hardship He had experienced but on the end result of the cross. He completely poured out Himself. He chose the will of God, asking only for the fulfillment of God's will, and was not mindful of what He had to go through.

We thank God. This is the way of the cross. This is the experience of the cross. Through the arrangement God gave to the Israelites regarding the tabernacle, we can see how God earnestly longed for a complete union with His people. How could they become a kingdom of priests? It was not because they had the qualification. They had to have the practical experience in order to be brought to a complete union with God. Only through this complete union could the kingdom of priests be materialized.

So let us return to Exodus 19 to see that when God chose them to be the kingdom of priests, He asked for only one condition: If you indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, I will make you a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. But how can the descendants of Adam be the manifestation of a kingdom of priests? Through the encampment arrangement around the tabernacle, the Israelites were led by God to let Him be their center throughout all the days of their lives, even to their last breath. As we follow the Lord, we will let God get rid of what is not pleasing to Him in our lives through the work of the cross so that the promise of the kingdom of priests can be fulfilled in us. This was the condition when the tabernacle was built.

The fact that the tabernacle could be manifested among the Israelites was due to God's desire to dwell among them. The matters of the Old Testament have passed. When God revealed His heart's desire about the tabernacle, what did He truly want to tell us? We know that when God spoke those words to the Israelites, they did not understand the seriousness of the matter at all. Our brother also pointed this out when he shared on the relationship between the Old and the New Testaments. If we go back to Deuteronomy 18, we see God told the Israelites implicitly that He knew they would not obey His words even though He told them to. God said to them, "I give you the law, the statutes and the ordinances. You hear them but you are not able to keep them." God already told them about this implicitly. God knew the people were not able to follow the law so God made a covenant with them.

Our brother has already shared with us what a covenant is. It is not for you to focus on the blessings involved, but you must realize you have a responsibility to bear. If you take the responsibility, you can then enjoy all the blessings. But if you do not, not only are you unable to enjoy the blessings, but you also need to bear the consequences of the covenant. God had already told them ahead of time that they would not be able to observe His law. Even if they could keep the law, the law was only a shadow given by God. God said, "I will do one thing in the future that will

truly enable you to fulfill My will. I will raise up a prophet among your brothers and you must listen to Him. If anyone does not listen to Him, this person will be cut off from the people. Even if you can live out all the contents of the law, but if you disobey the words of this brother whom I will raise up from among you, you still will be condemned.” God let the Israelites know early on they must keep His covenant. But even if they keep the covenant, they need to know the covenant is to bring them to one person. If they know only the requirements of the law but do not know this person, they will not be able to go any further before God because everything in the law points to this person. The building of the tabernacle also points to this person.

In what way does the tabernacle reveal God’s heart desire? Let us look at the tabernacle itself. We have only mentioned a few objects in the tabernacle. But we have mentioned a few times that the tabernacle not only speaks of who the Son of God is, it also tells us what the Son of God has done. Now let us turn our focus on what the Son of God has done. The tabernacle is built according to God’s will, but how can it be erected? When we see how the tabernacle is erected, we cannot help but see what the Lord has done. The objects in the tabernacle tell of who the Son of God is and the erection of the tabernacle tells of what the Son of God has done. The erection of the tabernacle relies on the wood boards that are overlaid with gold. The wood boards are made of acacia wood and are completely overlaid with gold. It is gold that overlays the wood but the objects inside the tabernacle are overlaid with pure gold. The wood is not worthy to represent God Himself but now it is overlaid with gold. What is gold? It is faith and is connected with redemption which is represented by the silver socket at the bottom. On top, it is connected to the innermost part of the tent, which is the representation of the nature of our Lord. Now these wood boards overlaid with gold are connected to the glory of the Son of God. These wood boards refer to you and me -- the church. The setting up of the tabernacle displays the complete manifestation of the Son of God. Apart from the kingdom of priests, God has selected other people who, by the will of God’s redemption and the faith given by God, are to be connected with Christ.

The acacia wood overlaid with gold portrays people being clothed in Christ, which is the church. These are the people who are in Christ and are also filled with Christ. It is these boards that lift up the tabernacle. Before the mentioning of the boards, God told the people to do this and that and the Israelites followed accordingly. After everything was completed, how did they erect the tabernacle? Then God showed them how to make the boards to lift up the tabernacle. Man may be able to follow God’s instructions to set up the tabernacle but man can never manifest the spiritual reality. We have been sharing on the true tabernacle. What is the true tabernacle? It is what Christ has done. It is Christ’s work.

Brothers and sisters, all these are to express the fact that God wants to dwell among men. We need to take note of the process starting from the revelation to the completion of this desire of God. The tabernacle was built and later came the temple. Of course the temple was even more majestic, glorious, grand, and displayed more authority than the tabernacle. It seems like outwardly there was

an expansion of what God wanted to do. But the temple did not last. The temple has been torn down once, twice, and even thrice. Only a few stones were left behind.

But we thank the Lord because He had said that He would rebuild it in three days. We then see one thing: the church has become the dwelling place of God. The church is now the temple of God. In Psalm 23, David said that he would dwell in the house of the Lord forever. And we envy him, wondering when the Lord will let us dwell in His house forever. Forgive me for saying this, when the spirit of the Lord enlightens us, we will no longer envy David's longing. The reason David had this longing was because he was still living under the Old Testament. But with the Lord's enlightenment, we can see that due to all the work of Christ, the church has now become the dwelling place for God. Be it the tabernacle or the temple, they are but material things. When Christ's work is manifested, is it not you and me who make up the dwelling place of God? It is no longer any material but a large group of people who are all in Christ. Their union in Christ has become the temple, the dwelling place of God. God says that He will dwell among men. This means God wants to be completely united with man.

When we read the Bible, we see that God said these words: It is done. Where was this first mentioned? It was before our Lord breathed His last breath on the cross: It is done. What is done? The redemptive work of God is done. The second time is the voice from heaven in Revelation 21. When the seventh trumpet is sounded, the kingdom of the world will become the kingdom of our Lord Christ. We thank God for He will have finished establishing His kingdom. The Chinese translation says, "It is all done". This is an excellent translation. It was only partially done before, but now it is completely done. What is done? God dwells among men. Often among those who do not know God's will, they will ask, "Why do you keep talking about the church? Isn't everything done after we have received salvation?" To men it may be so, but it is not done in God's will. God wants to dwell among men. He is not to dwell within one man but to dwell among all men, and through all these men to bring the whole universe back to Himself. Brothers and sisters, now we understand it is meaningless to follow the Lord if we do not pay attention to the building up of the church. We thank the Lord. God's desire is to dwell among men. In the Old Testament, God expressed this desire through the tabernacle. God leads His people into the redemption work of His Son according to His will and He builds them up to become His dwelling place by His Son's finished work. May the Lord be gracious to us and continue to speak more clearly to us.

Let us pray.

Lord, may You impress Your words heavily upon our hearts through the working of Your Holy Spirit. Just as you have given up Yourself without reservation, may we follow You without any reservation so that Your will can be done. You can dwell among men and men can abide in You. Lord, You have done such a great thing. We ought to give You all the honor, glory, love and praises. We pray this in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.