

Sermon	
Passage	Ex25,23-30 / Lev24,5-9
Place & date	Denver Nov 18, 2007
Title	
Series	Tabernakel #6
Point of the <i>sermon</i> (present tense, personal, contemporary)	<p>Why is bread used to represent Israel before God's face?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bread is symbol of our daily lives: how God provides and what we do with it. Offer it up to God! • Bread is powerful symbol of how we need Jesus.

Congregation / believers / disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ,

Intro:

Samuel, Ruth's little brother, comes running into the tent.

'Mom, look what I made in school!'

He shows her the drawing he made on papyrus: a house in the hills.

'This is going to be our new home in the Promised Land', he says.

His mom says: 'Oh, it's beautiful! I love it. I hope that our home there will be as beautiful as your drawing. Let's show it to dad when he comes home.'

Children like to show what they've made in school.

You kids do that too, right? When you come home from school, or after Sunday school, you proudly show what you have made. And you love it when your mom and dad praise you and admire your work.

The text this morning is about something like that.

Every week, the priest places 12 loaves of bread in the tabernacle. He puts them on the table that was specially made for them.

God has told them to do this. Why does he like to see the bread?

He does not eat it because he does not need to eat. So why bread?

Theme: **God's people present their lives to God**

1. We confess that everything comes from him
2. We offer our work to God.

1. We confess that everything comes from him

The bread is placed on the table in the Holy Place.

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But it's not there for God to eat.

Remember, the Holy Place is in front of the Most Holy Place, only separated by a curtain. Everything that is placed here is placed before God's throne: the ark.

When the priest places the bread on the table, it is placed before God.

It is called the "bread of the Presence" or "the bread of the face": it is placed before God's face for him to look at all the time and to enjoy.

The congregation is present / represented before God

Every object in the Holy Place represents the people before God.

Last week we saw the light on the lampstand: God's people shines like a light before the Lord.

The golden table has a similar function: Israel is represented in the loaves.

It is easy to see: 12 loaves were placed on the table in 2 rows. Lev24 says

"This bread is to be set out before the LORD regularly, Sabbath after Sabbath, on behalf of the Israelites, as a lasting covenant" (Lev 24.8)

So the 12 loaves represented the 12 tribes.

God does not eat them.

What matters is that God sees them.

That's why it is often called the 'show bread': God saw it and remembered Israel. They were always before him.

Why bread?

But isn't this redundant?

The lampstand represented Israel.

And there was the altar of incense.

And now these loaves of bread.

Why does God want Israel to be represented before him in the form of bread?

You can't live without bread. This was their daily food.

Maybe when you think of daily food you think of cereal, chicken, and pizza.

We live in enormous prosperity. I can have different things for breakfast every weekday morning if I want. (maybe some people stick with oatmeal, but I like cereal, or bread, bagels, or bacon and eggs. If I have a lot of time I could make pancakes or waffles.)

Things were less complicated in the wilderness. They quickly ran out of food after they left Egypt. Nothing grew in that dry and rocky place.

So what did they eat?

God gave them manna, which they could use to bake bread.

Bread was their daily food, for years on end while they walked through the desert.

So the bread that was placed on the table before God every week, was a symbol of their daily food. It represented Israel's daily life.

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The bread was indeed a different way of bringing Israel before the Lord.

The light on the lampstand was the symbol that they received life from God and began to shine for their Lord through the work of the Holy Spirit.

The incense on the altar spoke about God's willingness to hear their prayers.

The table with the bread has a different message: Israel's whole physical life happened 'coram deo', before God's face. They brought it before the Lord so that he would look on it with pleasure.

Now there is something special with this bread. Two things, actually:

- A. it was provided by God
- B. they offered the product to him

a. God provided their food

Bread – every Israelite knew where it came from. This was so special about the way Israel survived in the wilderness: God sent them quail and manna when they complained that they didn't have any food any more.

This is the point: God provided it!

The loaves of bread the priest put on the table were baked with the same the manna God had just given, that rained down from heaven.

God still provides

Maybe you think 'but if I look at the bread I'm eating, or my pizza, or the coffee I drink, it's not so clear that God has given it. How can I explain that to my neighbor? He'll laugh at me!'

The manna in the desert was a clear sign that God provided for his people. He continued to do it when they had arrived in the Promised Land. The manna stopped when they could plow their fields and harvest their own grain. But did that mean that God no longer took care of them, and they were left to the mercy of 'mother earth' and had to rely on their own work?

No.

God taught them that the rain they needed for their crops came from him. He closed the heavens as a judgment on the sins of king Ahab and the Israelites in the time of Elijah.

God's promises in Deut28 show us that every part of daily life (picking fruit, giving birth, kneading dough, tending sheep) was his gift.

The bread on the table in the tabernacle were a reminder: the daily life of God's people is only possible because God blesses them. They are just giving back to him what he has given them first.

Is this not what we should do this week, when we celebrate Thanksgiving?

We should remember that God is the giver of our daily food and drink.

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Why do you give thanks to God, if he were not the giver of everything? If you would claim some credit for yourself you would take away from God's glory. The bread on the table, made from the manna God provided without failing every day, was a reminder that God was faithful and good for them, and that they could only live by his goodness.

The bread on our table is a testimony of God's care for us. He uses different means to get that bread on our table, and we may personally know very little about farming, never keep track of the weather and be relieved when there is rain because we live in the city and like sunshine, but God has blessed all those steps and processes to give us food.

This is a powerful reminder: the thing they put on the table was a sign that they could not live by their own resources. They had to depend on God for tomorrow's food.

God wanted the Israelites to remember this. When they started living in the Promised Land the showbread would no longer be baked with manna, but the manna would still be there in the tabernacle. It was permanently kept in the ark, so that Israel would not forget it after the manna had stopped falling every day:

"Take an omer of manna and keep it for the generations to come, so they can see the bread I gave you to eat in the desert when I brought you out of Egypt."
(Ex 16.32-33)

Our God provides.

If you forget this, Thanksgiving Day turns into just another holiday with delicious food on the table. But there would be no gratitude in the hearts of those who eat it.

Our gratitude on Thanksgiving Day goes to God because we believe and confess that he is the one who provides for us. Not Safeway, not our bank accounts, not the farmers, but God.

God calls us to protect that confession: that we depend on him for everything in our lives. Our daily food and our homes; the car you drive, the music you listen to, the clothes you wear, and the ski gear you own – you owe it all to God. Do you believe that? Does this belief influence how you look at them and how you use them?

We face the constant temptation to ignore God because we have everything we desire and we don't see how it comes from God. We tend to rely more and more on the things we own.

Can you live without a computer?

What would you do without a car?

And what if you lost your home tomorrow and were out on the street?

We often find that losing things teaches us that we should rely on God, not on the things we own.

But we can learn that **today**, when we read the Bible and realize that the things we have and receive are God's gifts.

Let's rejoice and be thankful for our daily food and all the other things we receive. Our good God sheds his blessings on us like he covered the tent camp of his people in the desert with manna.

2. We offer our work to God

b. they offered the product to God

There is something else about the bread.

God did not tell them to place **manna** in front of him, but **bread**.

This is the finished product, the result of what they did with the manna.

The loaves represented the work they had done. New loaves were placed before the Lord every Sabbath. So, at the end of every week, Israel presented itself to the Lord in the things they had done that week.

The bread represented not only their food supply but their entire lives: the things they did every day.

The table was the place where Israel presented their lives, their work to the Lord.

Children of God do the same thing: we offer up the work we did and ask God to bless it. We pray that God may be pleased with what we have done.

This is what God did in the tabernacle: he remembered his people and looked down on them with pleasure, receiving the fruit of their labors.

Think of what I told you at the beginning of this sermon: Samuel's mom admired what her young son had made. His drawing was probably not very accurate and he probably had not learned to draw things in perspective. But parents know how to look past such things because they know their children. They love to see their work.

Just like your parents loved to see your craft you young guys made during the kids' night out this Friday, I'm sure.

And when you return from the Sunday school this morning, they will look at the drawing you made and say: 'Good job!'

Do you like to show what you've done this past week to the Lord with the same excitement?

'Lord, look at what I've done with your gifts! Thank you for the opportunity to minister to my neighbor, thank you for the time you gave me so that I could visit the widow next door. Thank you that I could study, here is the test result from school.'

Acceptable?

Maybe you start thinking now: well, I don't know whether I should be proud of what I've done. I'll just do what God tells me to do, but I don't want to push that forward and claim any credit for it. It's imperfect because I am a sinner.'

You're right, but only partially. This is not all you can say.

Israel was a stubborn and rebellious nation. And yet God wanted them to be represented before him all the time, in the form of the lampstand, the altar, and the table with the showbread.

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Why would God enjoy that? Why did he want his people near and think of them all the time? How could he stand that? Should he not be irritated and annoyed with everything they did, like parents are with their children when they throw tantrums and make noise all the time? What is there for God to enjoy in the lives of sinners?

In Jesus

This is where we need to apply our faith in the power of Jesus' blood.

The three objects in the tabernacle cannot be pleasing to God by themselves.

The light of the lampstand – it is the light his people have received from Jesus. He is the light and only because he lives in them, they can become a light for God. Otherwise there would be only darkness.

The incense on the altar / the prayers: if Jesus did not take our prayers and bring them before the Father himself, asking him to listen because of his sacrifice, pleading for us, there would never be prayers answered. But Jesus cleanses our prayers from selfish requests and makes them perfect before God. He intercedes for us 24/7. God hears our prayers in Jesus' name.

The same is true for this table with the loaves of bread. God does not enjoy watching everything that happens in the world. On the contrary, his holy eyes see every sin, every selfish act; he notices the abuse, hatred, murder, and corruption that takes place all over the world.

And yet he looks down with pleasure on the lives of his children. Why?

Because he looks at them and sees Jesus, his Son. When we are in him we are covered with his righteousness. (And over our lifetime, we begin to reflect his holy character and look more and more like Jesus, so God begins to see him reflected in us).

God loves to see your first steps on the path of righteousness, knowing that it is the work of Jesus and his Spirit. He is delighted with your prayers in which you admit that you can't do it yourself and need his help. He enjoys the work of your hands if you serve him in those things.

So we should not be afraid to bring our work before the Lord. Jesus cleanses our humble and imperfect work with his blood. He completes our work with his obedience.

Encouragement

This is a huge encouragement to live for God and to consciously offer up the things you do to him.

It begins with the material things we receive: we place our food on the table before the Lord: the turkey you are going to enjoy this week, and the other food you eat every day. Realize you owe it all to him and thank him for it.

You can consecrate the things you receive that you can use: your home, your job, your computer, car keys. It all belongs to the Lord and he wants us to dedicate them to his service.

And the results of your work: your high school diploma, the report you wrote, the house you cleaned, the help you gave o others, and the way you spoke about Jesus.

We offer it all to God, with thanksgiving for what he gave us first. And we don't do it in order to receive a pat on the shoulder, we don't do it with pride. Instead, knowing that God gives us all the things we work with, we should acknowledge his goodness and humbly offer up our work in order to give him the glory for it.

God's eyes

Isn't this a beautiful thing: that God wants to look at us, his children, this way? We live our daily lives before the Lord. In the past, it was described this way in Latin: we live *coram deo*, before God. He watches us and looks down on us with pleasure if we serve him and glorify him. That's encouraging: what we do is not in vain. It's all for the Lord!

What an encouragement to begin another week: my life is before God. I am part of the 12 tribes, God's people. His eyes are on me. I am on his mind, you can say. The apple of his eye. My life matters, the things I do on Monday morning, when I am slow to get started, they are important.

Motivated

That motivates to make the most of the opportunities. To study the Bible, find God's will, and follow it, so that the things I present to the Lord may be pleasing to him. The more you realize that God's eye rests upon you the more you want to please him by doing things that he wants.

Maybe it sounds as if you are motivated by fear: 'Watch out, God is looking!' Like children suddenly become model children when they know their parents are watching. Or like traffic slows down as soon as drivers spot a patrol car. What they do may seem OK, but the motivation is wrong: it is out of fear.

This is different. True love expels fear. When you know how much God loves you and you realize that you live in order to glorify him, you find a desire in your heart to please him in everything. You begin to ask which choices to make so that you will do what promotes God's kingdom. You start thinking: how can I make it my mission to pursue things that God is pleased with. It is a great motivation to live a different life if you know that what you do matters and pleases God!

Remember: forgiveness

And for all the times where you missed the mark, where you wasted your time, when you missed opportunities to mention God's name and give him glory, for all those things you did last week that you know were blemished by sin – remember that the God who watches you is the God who sent his Son to save you. He accepted you because of

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Jesus' sacrifice. The table with the showbread was cleansed and consecrated by the blood. Likewise, our lives and our daily work are consecrated and cleansed by the blood of Jesus.

Live your life before God's face, knowing that his eyes are on you. The eyes of your Father are pleased with you when he sees Christ in you.

Amen