

EXODUS CHAPTERS 35-40

INTRODUCTION

These chapters are a repetition of the material that we have already dealt with in Exodus 25-30:10. In those chapters we read that God gave Moses instructions for building the tabernacle item-by-item and detail-by-detail. These chapters we are looking at are almost identical in content.

The main difference is that the verb tense changes from future to the present for what is happening in these latter chapters is that what God has ordered in chapters 25-30 is now being carried out in detail. Therefore because we have already dealt with this material in previous sermons I want just to focus on a few things for our consideration.

1. THE PEOPLE'S RESPONSE TO GOD'S COMMANDS

In 35:1 – 36:7 we see Moses passing on the instructions that the Lord gave him to the people. The necessary materials are gathered together so that the construction work can begin. Then from 36:8 – 39:41 we see the craftsmen, under the leadership of Bezalel and Oholiab carrying out the instructions down to the very smallest detail. What I particularly want us to notice from these chapters is the response of the people.

Throughout this book the people of Israel have often been disobedient; they have displayed lack of faith when they should have been faithful. The incident with the golden calf is probably the pivotal point of their disobedience but now in these closing chapters I want us to notice the obedience of the people. They obey God's words as they are relayed to them by Moses and they obey willingly and wholeheartedly.

After the Israelites unbelievable behaviour in chapter 32 where they willingly substituted the one true and living God for a calf idol made out of gold we might find it hard to believe what we read in these chapters. But the people have clearly repented and now they have a new willingness to obey the Lord and so we see them obeying the Lord in a number of ways.

a) Their obedience is seen in their generous giving – First of all we see that they gladly and willingly provided materials for the building work of the tabernacle (38:21-31). They brought a total of about one ton of gold, four tons of silver and three tons of copper. In fact they brought so much that they had to be forcibly stopped from bringing any more. In chapter 36:6-7 we read these remarkable words

“Then Moses gave an order and they sent this word throughout the camp: “No man or woman is to make anything else as an offering for the sanctuary.” And so the people were restrained from bringing more, because what they already had was more than enough to do all the work.”

It is hard to believe such a notice being made in any local church. We so often have to encourage Christian people to give to the work of the Lord so often we have to challenge one another to give a little more so that the ministry of the church might be able not just be maintained but to grow as well. But it's not so much what they gave that impresses me; it is their willingness to give to the extent that they did give. These offerings were voluntary no one was forcing them to give so generously (36:3).

Yet they gave and gave and gave. Their motivating factor was the tabernacle. They knew that if God was going to be glorified in the midst of the people then they needed to build the tabernacle and they could not do that unless they gave willingly of their resources. Now the church of Jesus Christ today could learn a lesson from these Israelites of old. So often Christians give of their money to the Lord through the church without any real thought.

Perhaps we simply look into our purses or wallets or pockets for some loose change to put into the offering box. We simply do it and never think about it. But the question behind our giving is this; why do we give whatever it is that we give to the Lord through the offering boxes in the church? Perhaps you do it in order to help with the upkeep of the building or to help keep the Pastor in full time ministry.

They might be good reasons but surely the main reason is that we want God to be glorified. God is never glorified in his church when a church has no money to upkeep its buildings or when the Pastor has to find additional work in order to keep his family or when churches go appealing for money to the general public. If we care enough about God's glory then we will be generous in our giving to the Lord.

It is also worth noting that although the Lord was the ultimate provider of the material it was the people who had to give. That is how the Lord works. He will not pour out money from heaven to run our church, He provides all that we need by blessing His people with all that they need and so often He provides much more than we need. He expects us to give to the work of the church from the abundant supply that He provides for us. The money that we have is not ours.

The Lord makes us stewards of it but He entrusts it into our care so that we might use it wisely for his glory. He provides us with a job and strength so that we can earn enough money to live on. But He does not expect us to keep that money for ourselves. The Bible says it is more blessed to give than receive (Acts 20:35). Therefore the Lord is looking to us to give to his work and in doing so we will be blessed but the Lord will also be glorified as the needs of his church are met by the generous giving of the Lord's people.

b) Their obedience is seen in giving of their time and talents to the work (36:2 & 8) – It's one thing to give of your substance to the work of God but it is a completely different thing to give of your time and talents to His work. It is relevantly easy to stick money in the offering box and then think I have done my bit especially if our giving has been generous. But notice that not only did the people give of their resources they also gave of their time and talents.

Look again in 36:2 & 8. It was not just the people who had the necessary skills and gifts that gave of their time but I want you to notice those words "who were willing." It's no good having the talent if there is not a willingness of heart to use that talent for the Lord. Now once again notice that it is the Lord who gave these people the ability in the first place (36:2). But the Lord is not forcing the people here to come and work, He is looking for willing volunteers who realise that God has given them the talent and who desire to use it for his glory. So it is the same in the church. The church is full of gifted and talented people those gifts and talents are God given but that God given talent is of no use unless there is a heart that has a desire to use it for the Lord. There must be a willingness to use every gift that God has given to us for the glory of the Lord.

If we use our gifts and talents only for ourselves and our own well being and fulfilment then we are simply missing the point of the gift that God in his grace has granted to us. He has granted us grace gifts so that we will use them for his glory both outside the church and inside the church. Notice that God didn't force the Israelites to work on the tabernacle He told them what they ought to do and how they ought to do it but at the end of the day the people had to willingly give of their own time and talents and do the work.

There had to be a heart response. It's not that God is indifferent to disobedience for failure to use one's God given talent for God's work is disobedience but God looks for a heart response that demonstrates our love for him. After all if we give of our time and talents grudgingly and reluctantly then how can God be glorified in such situations. Such reluctant service is simply not acceptable to God. God longs for a heart full of love for him and such a heart will be demonstrated in a

commitment to his work. Such a heart will only desire the glory of God and will long for God to be gloried and will pray and work for his glory.

So the question to us is this. Are we using our God given gifts and talents for God's glory in this church? Is your heart consumed with a desire for the glory of God here in the Dales? Does our commitment to God's church clearly demonstrate that desire or are you a reluctant servant or perhaps dare I say it; you are so consumed with yourself that you are barely a servant in the church at all.

God is calling us all to use our God given gifts for his service. He wants you to willingly volunteer for his service and He wants you to do it out of love for him. Remember He loved you and sent his Son to die for you; will you not in response to his love give of your time and talents for his work here in the Yorkshire Dales?

c) Their obedience is seen in the way that they worked together – Not only did the people willingly volunteer to use their talents on the work of the tabernacle but if the work was going to be accomplished they had to work together. These chapters are a record of the people's co-ordinated attempt to build the tabernacle of God. It was a real team effort.

There was a structure to their work for everyone recognised that Bezalel and Oholiab were not only skilled craftsmen, but they were the men who had been called by God to perform important tasks. They were not willing volunteers but men handpicked by God to head up the building project. As you read these chapters there is great harmony among the workforce, no one it seems is jealous that Bezalel and Oholiab are in charge but it seems that everyone worked under their supervision.

There is no indication of any dispute or argument among the workers in these chapters. It seems that every person knew what his or her job was and they all willingly submitted to the orders given by Bezalel and Oholiab. They had the master plan given to Moses by God and they had the Master builders appointed by God (Bezalel and Oholiab) and all the willing volunteers simply submitted to the God appointed authority and got on with their task.

They all co-operated with one another and worked with one another in order to finish the task given to them by God.

In the same way the church today is called upon to work in harmony in order that we may complete the building work that we have been given to do. That building work is the building of the church of the living God. No not any physical building but the adding to the church precious souls for whom Christ died. We are not at liberty to do our building work our way; we have God's master plan which has been given to us in the Scriptures. We have all the principles that we need for building Christ's church. We have the message (gospel) and we have the method (preaching or proclaiming Christ) but we must work together in order to see God's building completed. Of course it is Christ who ultimately builds the church but He does it through his instruments; through people like you and me.

The Master-builder is Jesus Christ but He has granted authority to the leaders of his church who are the Elders to organise the church so that God's plan is carried out as instructed. Therefore we all must recognise God given authority in the church and submit to it so that we can simply get God's task done. We must all work in harmony, there is no room for jealousy or one-upmanship we all have gifts given to us by God and we must use those gifts to work in harmony with our fellow Christians for the glory of God.

This is why Christians need to deal with their differences when they arise in the church. This is why we need to make allowances for one another in the church. We ought never to withdraw from service in the church because we find it difficult to work with a particular person. Remember they

might find it difficult to work with you too. The tabernacle would never have been built unless there was wholehearted co-operation with one another and a wholehearted giving of self to the work.

The church of Jesus Christ needs both of these things today. We need unity displayed in working relationships and we need a willingness to work in order that under God we might see God glorified through the building of the church. Of course we will never give of our resources or of our time and talents or we will never co-operate with others in the work of God unless God by his grace enables us.

We don't have the natural ability or inclination to do so but God gives us the grace to make us willing givers of our resources and willing volunteers and his grace enables us to be workers together in the work of his gospel. So let us be people who will seek his daily grace? Let us confess our failures to be involved in his work because of our sin and let us seek him for fresh grace to fulfil his commission of seeing his church built and his name glorified.

2. GOD'S REPOSE TO THE PEOPLE'S OBEDIENCE (40:34-38)

We are told in Exodus 40:17 that the tabernacle was finally set up "on the first day of the first month in the second year." That was almost a year after they had made preparations to leave Egypt (12:2-3). God had been with them throughout their captivity and wanderings so far. He had saved them from the hand of Pharaoh and the Egyptians and now one year later the people complete the tabernacle just in time to celebrate the Passover feast. Throughout this whole period God had been teaching the Israelites that He wanted to come and make his dwelling among them.

Now that is about to happen for the tabernacle was the outward symbol that God was in the midst of his people. Chapter 40 tells us a great deal about how the tabernacle was set up where each piece of furniture was placed but in verse 33 we read, "Moses finished his work"

Everything is ready now for God to come and presence himself among his people. The closing words of the book describe for us that coming (vs. 34-38). The people have obeyed God in setting up the tabernacle; now God's response to their obedience is to come to them in a cloud. This clearly teaches us that when we obey the Lord with all our hearts then we can be assured of his presence with us to bless us.

In the New Testament we know that God tabernacled among his people in the person of Jesus (John 1:14). But when Jesus died and rose again and ascended into heaven He sent to us his blessed Holy Spirit who indwells his people today. We do not need a tabernacle to know that God is with us for we have the Holy Spirit indwelling us. But in order to know the Lord's presence in a very real way we need to daily submit to him, confess our sins and seek to trust Him and obey Him as our Saviour and Lord.

So the book of Exodus ends on a high note. It began with Israel enduring oppression in servitude and in slavery to Pharaoh. It now concludes with Israel enjoying freedom and travelling to the Promise Land with the presence of their God leading them.

In many ways the book of Exodus is a parallel with sinners coming to know God. We too were in slavery to sin and Satan. God set us free in Christ. Now we enjoy that freedom as we head towards our heavenly home. As we do so we have the presence of God leading the way and one day we will reach that heavenly home where

"Behold the tabernacle of God is with men and he will dwell with them and they shall be his people. God himself will be with them and be their God. (Revelation 21:3 NKJV)

Amen