

The End Of The Beginning

Exodus 35:1 – 40:38

Series: Book of Exodus [#20]

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Introduction

This morning we come to the finish line. We conclude this journey through the book of Exodus. But, of course, the story really has only just begun. The book opened some years before Moses was born with his people enslaved in Egypt. The little we do see of Moses' first eighty years is surveyed quickly in the first four chapters. Then the lense zooms in and the pace slows down through the plagues and Exodus from Egypt, and on to Mt. Sinai where God gave the law and established his covenant. The elapsed time from the Exodus in chapter 14 to the end of the book in chapter 40 is only about one year. The rest of the nation's forty years in the wilderness continues in the next books written by Moses.

There is a youth musical about Moses and the Exodus titled *Are We There Yet?* The answer at the end of the book of Exodus is "No! It will be a long, long time, and we've only just started. We are only at *the end of the beginning.*"

The last six chapters we are looking at today detail the construction of the Tabernacle and God's presence being on and in it. Today we are not looking at blueprints, time lines and progress reports of the construction. We are looking at *four key principles for living and working with God* that emerge from this record. The first one is that...

God Gifts His People For Serving Him.

Often, perhaps most often, we think of this as a New Testament or church principle. But the principle has been true in all ages. We see clearly here in Exodus that God gifted, that He gave special abilities to the people who built the Tabernacle. Turn to chapter 35, verse 30.

"Then Moses said to the sons of Israel, 'See, the LORD has called by name Bezalel the son of Uri, the son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah. And He has filled him with the Spirit of God, in wisdom, in understanding and in knowledge and in all craftsmanship; to make designs for working in gold and in silver and in bronze, and in the cutting of stones for settings and in the carving of wood, so as to perform in every inventive work. He also has put in his heart to teach, both he and Oholiab, the son of Ahisamach, of the tribe of Dan. He has filled them with skill to perform every work of an engraver and of a designer and of an embroiderer, in blue and in purple and in scarlet material, and in fine linen, and of a weaver, as performers of every work and makers of designs. Now Bezalel and Oholiab, and every skillful person in whom the LORD has put skill and understanding to know how to

perform all the work in the construction of the sanctuary, shall perform in accordance with all that the LORD has commanded.’ Then Moses called Bezalel and Oholiab and every skillful person in whom the LORD had put skill, everyone whose heart stirred him, to come to the work to perform it.” (35:30 – 36:2)

Notice the descriptions of what God did here. In the first six verses of chapter 31 God tells us He appointed and called people whom, we read in 36:2, He then stirred to volunteer for these tasks. God’s Spirit filled them with wisdom, knowledge, understanding and skill for these specific tasks. God gave Bezalel and Oholiab the desire and ability to teach others needed skills.

God still gifts His people for serving Him. In the church age it is not just some people for some tasks, but all believers for all ministries. There are four chapters in the New Testament that give us the core principles of what are referred to as spiritual gifts: Romans 12, 1 Corinthians 12, Ephesians 4 and 1 Peter 4.

No believer is left out. God gives everyone of us spiritual abilities for ministering for Him. 1 Peter 4:10, “*As each one has received a special gift, employ it in serving one another as good stewards of the manifold grace of God.*” Then, Ephesians 4:7 in talking about these gifts says, “*to each one of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ’s gift.*”

The spiritual abilities God gives us are varied for the different tasks we do. We don’t all have the same gifts and no one has “all” the gifts. God gives us the abilities He wants us to have for our part in His work and so, as we read in 1 Corinthians 12, we all need each other just as our bodies need all the different parts to function properly. If I hold back and do not use the abilities God gives me, the whole body or church suffers. The purpose of these abilities is to equip and build up each other so that we all can serve and grow, so that we become spiritually mature and stable.

So, look at the listings of some spiritual gifts in Romans 12, 1 Corinthians 12, Ephesians 4 and 1 Peter 4. Pray and start responding to opportunities, and God will confirm to you and other believers the evidence of some of what He is doing through you. Remember that it is God’s power that accomplishes His work through these gifts, not yours.

A second principle we see in these closing chapters is that

God’s People Are To Obey Him Completely.

God calls and expects us to obey Him, to obey all His commands. God repeatedly told Israel this through Moses. For example, in Deuteronomy 11:1 we read “You shall therefore love the LORD your God, and always keep His charge, His statutes, His ordinances, and His commandments.”

We also see this in Scripture in less direct ways. Have you wondered about that long section of detailed instructions for the Tabernacle and its worship in chapters 25-30? In those six chapters God said “you shall” 169 times and “they shall” 20 times about its design

and building. The point? God is saying, “This is what I want you to do. Do it! Obey Me in everything I tell you down to the smallest detail!”

It may seem like it could go without saying that obeying God is important. But God repeatedly tells and reminds us of this throughout the Bible.

- The prophet Samuel told King Saul “to obey is better than sacrifice” as he announced God’s judgment of tearing away the kingdom from Saul because of his disobedience (1 Samuel 15:22, 28).
- In Isaiah 1 God told the disobedient people of Judah, “I have had enough of your burnt offerings...bring your worthless offerings to Me no longer, [your] incense is an abomination to Me” (11, 13). Instead, God said, “Wash yourselves, make yourselves clean; remove the evil of your deeds from My sight. Cease to do evil, learn to do good; seek justice, reprove the ruthless, defend the orphan, plead for the widow. Come now, and let us reason together... though your sins are as scarlet, they will be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they will be like wool.” (16-18)
- In his first letter to the church at Corinth the apostle Paul gave instructions about obeying God and disciplining those who persist in sin. There was one case, one person in particular that he was concerned about. After the church received the letter, that person confessed his sin. So in his second letter Paul told the church to forgive him and reaffirm their love for him. Then he wrote, “to this end also I wrote, so that I might put you to the test, whether you are *obedient in all things*” (2 Corinthians 2:9).

We are to obey God in all things.

Part of our obedience to God is doing His work His way. Chapters 35-39 can read like a monotonous repeat as they record Israel constructing the Tabernacle following God’s instructions back in chapters 25-30. I did another word count. The phrase “he made” occurs 52 times in these five chapters and “they made” 8 times. All these uses refer to the workmen following God’s instructions precisely. There was no freelancing here. There was no “I’ve got a great idea, a different approach! Let’s do it this way!” No. They were obedient by doing God’s work His way.

And then God did something that at first look is curious as chapter 35 opens. He repeated the Commandment, the law of the sabbath. But it is not out of place at all. As the work on the Tabernacle was about to begin, God reminded them that even though it was a place for Him they were to work on it for six days and then rest and worship on the sabbath. They were to do this work of His in His way.

Part of obeying God completely is doing His work His way. Let’s look briefly at two out of many New Testament examples. First, worship in the church. I am not referring to differences in *styles of worship*, but about the quality of our worship. What are some guidelines? How do we worship God in His way?

Worship in the church at Corinth apparently had become chaotic and confusing. In his first letter, chapter 14, the apostle Paul set out some guidelines which he concluded by writing “all things must be done properly and in an orderly manner” (40; cf. vv. 26-40). Paul did *not* say “Come into church with a straight and sober face. No smiles or joyful exuberance allowed. Nothing out of the ordinary allowed.” He *did* say that since God is a God of order, a God of peace and not confusion, our worship is to be done in an orderly manner.

The next example is our involvement in spiritual warfare. How does God want us to do His work of standing firm in and for Christ against the attack of Satan’s forces? The pivotal passage here is Ephesians 6:13-20 where Paul tells us that our service for God in this is to stand firm. He tells us we do that as we “take up the full armor” God has provided for us. This armor is:

- The belt of the foundation of truth;
- The breastplate of the protection of righteousness.
- The shoes of the preparation of the gospel of peace.
- The shield of the defense of faith.
- The helmet of the security of our salvation.
- The sword of the power of God’s word.
- And the indispensable dynamic of prayer.
- The work of standing firm, resisting and seeing God defeat the attacks of Satan’s forces comes as we do it God’s way.

The third principle for living and working with God from these final chapters is that

God’s People Are To Bless Others And Their Faithful Work.

Moses gives us a good example here. It is recorded very simply, briefly and yet very clearly. When all the workman had finished the project, when all the Tabernacle’s components had been made, we read in chapter 39, verse 43, “Moses examined all the work and behold, they had done it; just as the LORD had commanded, this they had done. So Moses blessed them.”

Moses took a careful look, he examined “all the work” — all the fabric, all the posts, all the brackets, all the furniture, each and every item to make sure that the workman had been faithful to God’s direction to him “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.” (25:9)

They had been faithful. “So Moses blessed them.” Such a brief description, but such an important and powerful act. Moses confidently declared God’s pleasure with and favor on these workers because they had been faithful. Moses also stated His own approval and praise. How important that must have been to those workmen. I am sure they never forgot Moses words to them.

There is a thread of this truth that runs throughout Scripture. Some of the letters in the New Testament list individuals. Some we may recognize, others we don't. Paul blessed some well known people such as Timothy, Apollos, Phoebe, and Priscilla and Aquila for their faithful ministry, but also some not well known people such as Stephannus, Fortunatus and Acharcus, Andronicus, Junias, and Urbanus, among others.

Even more that that, in Philippians 1 he blessed true preaching of the gospel even by people who were envious and contentious. He said, "whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is proclaimed, and in this I rejoice, yes, and I will rejoice" (18). He did not wink at or overlook their improper motives, but he blessed the faithful proclamation of the gospel.

Yes, we are to expose and stand apart from all false teaching and false teachers. But when people are being faithful to the gospel, we are to bless them. Bless them even if we have never blessed anyone before or are afraid it might go to their head. Bless them even if their tradition, distinctives or methods are different than ours. How many times have you and I blessed someone for his or her faithful work for God recently?

Now the last principle here for living and working with God,

God Demonstrates His Approval With His Presence And Direction.

Let's look at God doing this for Moses and all the people of Israel. Back in chapter 25 God told Moses to have the people construct the Tabernacle. We are not told how long it took to gather the materials and construct all the parts, but during this time the people contributed generously, the workman worked diligently and faithfully.

Now turn to the end of the book, chapter 40, picking it up at verse 34.

"Then the cloud covered the tent of meeting [that's the cloud of God's presence], and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle. Moses was not able to enter the tent of meeting because the cloud had settled on it, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle. Throughout all their journeys whenever the cloud was taken up from over the tabernacle, the sons of Israel would set out; but if the cloud was not taken up, then they did not set out until the day when it was taken up. For throughout all their journeys, the cloud of the LORD was on the tabernacle by day, and there was fire in it by night, in the sight of all the house of Israel."
(34-38)

How gracious of God! The pillar of cloud and pillar of fire of His presence had guided them from the Red Sea to Mt. Sinai. It had settled on Mt. Sinai as Moses met with God and God spoke His law to the people, establishing the covenant. Now God's presence and glory settled on, covered and filled the Tabernacle they had made. Each day for the rest of their journey in the wilderness they would remember this day. When they looked at the cloud they would remember God's approval of their work and His presence with them. Each day when the cloud would lift up or settle down they would know God was directing their steps.

God has not changed. He still demonstrates His approval with His presence and direction for each one of us who are His. There is no visible cloud of God's presence we can see. There are no halos over our heads. But it no less true today. In fact, it is even more true. There are times when we may wonder if God really is approving of us as we believe we have been faithful, but don't seem to see sense Hi confirmation. There are times when we don't have a sense of His presence and direction. We too pray, desperately plead with the Psalmist in Psalm 90:17 "Let the favor of the Lord our God be upon us; and confirm for us the work of our hands; yes, confirm the work of our hands."

In the most basic sense, God demonstrated His approval of us when the Holy Spirit came to be with us always when we accepted Christ. God's promise given to Moses' successor Joshua, and repeated to all people of faith in Hebrews 13:5, "I will never desert you, nor will I ever forsake you" is true for us every day. Asaph's declaration in Psalm 73:24 is still true, "With Your counsel You will guide me, and afterward receive me to glory." Jesus' promise that the Holy Spirit "will guide you into all the truth" is still true (John 16:13).

There are no magic-like instant or easy formulas for all our dark and troubled days. There are no formulas at all. These are God's unchanging truths worked out in the course of all our days—our days of triumph and our days of tragedy.

Consider one case from the New Testament. The gifted, courageous man of unwavering faith, the Apostle Paul. He was blessed by God to be caught up into heaven where he saw visions and truth which God did not allow him to speak about. But after that he had a "thorn in the flesh" which he did not identify, but was with him for the rest of his life.

He tells us he prayed, he implored, he begged God to be relieved of it. But God told him that while this was from Satan, it was allowed to keep him from being proud, to keep him from exalting himself because of the revelations he had received. And further, God said, "My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness." To which Paul replied,

"Most gladly, therefore, I will rather boast about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may dwell in me. Therefore I am well content with weaknesses, with insults, with distresses, with persecutions, with difficulties, for Christ's sake; for when I am weak, then I am strong."

(cf. 2 Corinthians 12:7-10)

And so, even though it was so difficult, he accepted it and moved forward. He did not get stuck there. He moved forward. Every time Paul thought of, felt, winced at that thorn in his body, he knew it was a tangible reminder that God was with him; he was reminded that only God's power counted, not his own, and so, with God's presence and direction, he was content and moved forward in the mission God had given him.

God does not change. What he did for Moses and the people of Israel, what he did for Paul and so many others, *He still does.* He demonstrates His approval with His presence and direction.

Conclusion.

So we have come to *the end of the beginning*. The account continues in the book of Numbers. When God lifted the cloud of His presence and started leading Israel from Mt. Sinai toward the promised land, it wasn't long before they began to complain. One again it was about the miracle food of manna. They wanted the meat, fish, cucumbers, melons, leeks, onions and garlic they had in Egypt. God gave them quail, but disciplined them with a very severe plague. Next Moses' brother Aaron and his sister Miriam jealously attacked him. God confronted them directly and struck Miriam with leprosy for seven days.

The cloud lifted and the people moved out after it. At Kadesh-Barnea God directed Moses to send out a twelve man reconnaissance team to check out the land. But ten came back without faith and a bad report. Only Joshua and Caleb stood firm in faith with a good report. The people cried, then got angry and wanted to stone Moses and Aaron. After Moses interceded with God not to destroy them, God decreed their punishment: this generation of adults would not enter the land, only their children. Just as the reconnaissance team had been on their mission for forty days, so each day would be a year, forty years of wandering in the wilderness until all the adults had died. From that generation only Joshua and Caleb would set foot into the land.

Using our title metaphorically, today is *the end of the beginning* for us in terms of the four principles we have looked at today.

- God has gifted us for serving Him.
- We are to obey Him completely.
- We are to bless others and their faithful work.
- God demonstrates His approval of us with His presence and direction.

What will our next steps be, yours and mine? Will we, as Israel, quickly forget what God has said and done, and go on our own way? If we do, we too will forfeit blessings and experience God's discipline. Or will we, as the hymn writer penned, say to God "Lead on, O King Eternal, the day of march has come!"? Will we choose to trust and rest in God's Word and what He has done for us? Will we choose to obey Him, to bless others, to know He is with us and follow His direction? Think about this. Make your decision as you spend the next few personal moments with God.

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