

Exodus 35 - God's Great Building Project

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[0 : 0 0] Well, tonight I'd like us to go back to Exodus chapter 35 and we're going to look at almost all of the chapter from verse 4 to the end, but we can read again verses 21 and 22.

And they came, everyone whose heart stirred him, and everyone whose spirit moved him, and brought the Lord's contribution to be used for the tent of meeting and for all its service and for the holy garments. So they came, both men and women, all who were of a willing heart, brought brooches and earrings and signet rings and armlets, all sorts of gold objects, every man dedicating an offering of gold to the Lord.

Now Exodus is a very significant book because it records for us that great moment in history where Israel are brought out of slavery in Egypt by God. God redeems them and delivers them from their slavery. Back in Genesis, God had made a promise, a covenant, with Abraham and with his descendants through Isaac and Jacob that they would be established into a great nation. And that family grew and eventually became that huge family nation called Israel. But it also ended up as slaves in Egypt. And so although they had grown numerically strong, they were in a position of oppression and suffering under the tyranny of Egypt. But now in Exodus, after 400 years of suffering, God is delivering them from slavery and he's leading them towards the promised land. And if you read through all of Exodus, it divides really into two parts and they're almost exactly halfway.

In the first part, which is chapters one to nineteen, we read about how God brought them out of the land of slavery. And then in the second part from chapter 20 to chapter 40, we read about God preparing them to go in to the land of promise. And in order to live as God's people in God's land, they need two things in particular. They need God's instruction. In other words, God's law, which is given to them in the Ten Commandments in Exodus chapter 20. They need God's instruction so they will know how to live. But they also need God's presence. And in order for them to have God present with them, they need a tabernacle. Exodus 25, it says, God instructs Moses and says, let them make me a sanctuary that I may dwell in their midst. Exactly as I show you concerning the pattern of the tabernacle and of all its furniture, so you shall make it. And this tabernacle would become a vital part of the life of Israel. As we said, it's the forerunner to the temple in Jerusalem. And so when we say tabernacle and temple would basically mean the same thing. The only difference is the tabernacle could move, the temple couldn't.

It was fixed. It was the focal point of the Old Testament worship and sacrificial system. It was to be at the centre of the camp, just as the temple again took a central role in the city of God. And it was where the tablets of the Ten Commandments were kept in the Ark of the Covenant. And above all else, it was the place where God himself dwelled in the midst of his people. That's a really important thing to understand because we have to remember that there was a difference in those days to what there is now in terms of God's presence on earth.

[4 : 0 6] Back then, you could go up to the Israelites and you could say to them, where's God? And they would say, he's in that tabernacle. Now, if you say where's God? What's the answer?

In you, in the people of God, in the heart of the Christian believer. But back then, the tabernacle was the place where God dwelt and it was essential. If these people were going to worship God, they needed a tabernacle. If God is going to come and be present among them, they need a tabernacle. So the last part of Exodus is devoted to explaining and describing this key moment in history when the tabernacle was built. Now, I want you to notice something really important and really interesting. Back in this verse here in chapter 25, God gives the command for the tabernacle to be built. And of course, at this moment, he is speaking to Moses.

So the command is given to Moses, but the task is given to the people. Notice what it says.

Let them make me a sanctuary. So the people of Israel now have a great building project that they have to do. And Exodus 35 tells us how they did it. And I want us just to look at it together tonight. And going through that chapter, we can see that there's three things in particular that happened. And we'll look at them very briefly to begin with. First of all, the people gave their resources. In verses five to 19, we read how God gave Moses this big long list of materials that are going to be needed for the various parts of the tabernacle, yarn and wood and stones and spices and various other objects that are going to be necessary. And they're going to be used for the frame and for the coverings, for the hooks, for the lampstand, for the pillars, all these different things that God needs them to make in order for them to build a tabernacle. So God has this big list of materials that he gives to Moses. And Moses tells the people what they need. And we see that the people responded and gave of their resources. That was what we read about there.

They came, all who were of a willing heart brought the things that they had that were needed for the work. Now, there's two things I want to notice there in particular. First of all, God wanted these people to give what they could. So that means that some people gave gold, some gave silver, some gave bronze, some simply gave goats hair. God expected them to give what they could. He didn't expect them to give what they weren't able. So whether it was beautiful jewelry and stones from wealthy people or just a bundle of goats hair from an ordinary Israelite, it was all needed for God's project. God wanted the people to give what they could. But secondly, God wanted the people to give willingly. Notice that nice, that really brilliant phrase in verse 22, all who were of a willing heart. God had no desire to bully these people into giving to his project. Rather, he wanted their contribution to be a voluntary free will offering, as it says in verse 29. That means that these resources were not gathered under a system of taxation. It was rather an act of devotion. The people who were willing gave of their resources in order to help in God's big building project. So the people gave of their resources. The second thing that we see is that the people worked together. As we said, the command was given to Moses for this tabernacle to be built. But the actual task was given to the people. They were the ones who were going to build it. And at one level, there were some particularly gifted individuals. In this case, we read about

[8 : 45] Bezalel, who had been gifted with skill, with intelligence, with knowledge, with all craftsmanship. And alongside him, Aholiab, who was also gifted for this work. But although these two were the key figures in building the tabernacle, they did not work on their own. They had other craftsmen along with them. You can read into chapter 36 when you get home. The first two verses said, Bezalel and Aholiab and every craftsman in whom the Lord had good skill and intelligence. So it wasn't just the two of them. They were others serving along with them. And not only that, chapter 35 also highlights the fact that the women had a key role as well. Every skillful woman spun with her hands and they all brought with it spun in blue and purple and scarlet yarns and fine twist twined linen.

All the women whose hearts stirred them used their skill to use their skill, spun the goats here. And the key point is that this great building project was not for the select few. Everyone was involved. The key qualification was a willing heart. So the people worked together.

And thirdly in this chapter, we see that the people learned from each other. As we said, the two key guys were Bezalel and Aholiab. And I have to say that I would love, I wish I could see the work that these men had done. People often say, which Bible characters would you love to meet?

And I'm sure there's loads that we'd like to meet. But I would love to meet Bezalel and Aholiab, because they were clearly incredibly gifted tradesmen. And I'm sure you agree that when you see a gifted tradesman at work, it's amazing because they make really hard things look really easy.

Of course, that's a reminder that the skills of tradesmen and women are God given as well. These two men were immensely gifted and were key to this project. But it says something really important in verse 34. It says that God has inspired Bezalel to teach. And that's amazing, because not only does Bezalel and Aholiab have these amazing gifts, but they are to share them with others so that more people would learn and others would gain the knowledge and abilities that these two men had. So even people who weren't initially as gifted as Bezalel and Aholiab could still learn from them. And that way, many, many more people would gain the knowledge and the abilities that these two men had. The people learned from each other and they worked together.

[11 : 47] And so in this great building project of constructing the tabernacle, the people gave all their resources. The people worked together. The people learned from one another. And the end result was a great success. There's not that many things in the Old Testament that the Israelites really get right. But this is one of them. If you go to the second last chapter of Exodus, it says, according to all that the Lord had commanded Moses, so the people of Israel had done all the work. And Moses saw all the work and behold they had done it. As the Lord had commanded, so had they done it, then Moses blessed them. The people did it. They made the tabernacle and God himself came to dwell there. Now, all that is great, but you may well be sitting there thinking, what on earth has that got to do with us in 2018? Well, the truth is, all of that is incredibly relevant to us because now God has a new building project. And that great project is for the same purpose. It's a place where God is going to dwell. Back in Exodus 35, the project was to build a tabernacle. Today, God's great project is to build his church. And the church serves the same purpose as the tabernacle. It's the place where God dwells. It's the focal point of the worship and service of God. But of course, there's one big difference. And that is the fact that the church is not a physical building like the tabernacle was. Always remember, the church is not the walls and the roof. It is the people of God. It's you, all who trust in Jesus and who are indwelt by the Holy

Spirit. That's what we read at the very beginning. Notice, listen to all the temple language in these verses. You are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets. Jesus Christ, Christ Jesus himself, been the cornerstone in whom the whole structure being joined together grows into a holy temple in the Lord. In him, you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit. That's all construction language. That's all tabernacle language because the church is serving the same purpose as the tabernacle did. It is God's dwelling place. And we are all part of this big building project.

And so that means the question we have to ask ourselves is, how can we help? How can we contribute to God's great building project? And the key point is that the three things that we learned from Exodus 35 still apply to us today. So that means, first of all, that to build the church, we need to give of our resources. In order to build the tabernacle, the people willingly gave what they could. Some could give a lot, some could only give a little, but every contribution was essential. And it's exactly the same with the church. God wants us to give of our resources to supply the church with the things that it needs. And it's absolutely clear that without that giving, the church struggles and the building slows down. And in places, it has to stop all together because the church does need resources. It's just a reality. And in terms of that giving, it's really important to remember the two great principles that were highlighted in Exodus 35.

I'm sure you remember what they are. That first of all, the people gave what they could. And that is all that God asks of us. He wants us to give what we can. That's why the biblical principle of tithing, of giving a tenth to the Lord is such a brilliant and wise principle, because it is entirely based on our means. Someone with few resources will give a small tithe.

Somebody with great resources will give a large one. But each is just as valuable and each is proportionally exactly the same, because in each situation, you are giving what you can.

[16 : 57] And that phrase, give what you can, is a wonderful phrase because it guards us against the two extremes of selfishness and of carelessness. Sometimes people don't give what they could. And that's selfish and dishonoring to God. But sometimes people maybe give more than they really can, or they feel incredibly guilty because they don't give what they can. But God only asks you to give what you can. Nothing more. His expectations are never unfair. And if you've given what you can, no matter how small that is, then your contribution is still incredibly precious to God.

He only asks for what we can. And the second thing that Exodus 35 highlights in terms of giving was that the people gave willingly. As we share our resources with the church, we are not to do that grudgingly. We're not to do that out of a sense of duty. We should do so with a willing heart, gladly contributing to God's great building projects. God has got no desire for an unwilling gift.

As Second Corinthians says, each one must give as he's decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion for God loves a cheerful giver. God wants our gifts to be willing, not to be grudging. And the best way to nurture that willingness is to remember who we are giving to. We are giving to God in an act of devotion, thanksgiving and worship. And of course, we only have to think for two minutes about how good God has been to us, to realise that anything we give back to him is just a fraction of the blessings that he's showered upon us. And so we are sharing our resources in order to help with God's building project. That's really, really important. But a really important thing arises here. This is not about maintaining a church building. This is about maintaining the building of the church. Now, I hope you know what I mean when I say that.

That's why if you look at the Book of Acts, you will see that anything that they received from people was not used to build up buildings. It was used to build up people. That's why they shared what they had with anyone who was in need in Acts chapter two. That's why in Acts six, we read about food being distributed daily to widows. That's why when you read in the letters about New Testament churches, sharing their resources and sending them to people who were in need, particularly the church in Macedonia and Achaia that sent a contribution to the poor Christians in Jerusalem, the priority is building the church, building the people of God. And that's a really, really important thing to remember. And it's an important thing to remember in the context of our own denomination because sometimes people think that they give to the church and this huge chunk of money goes into a black hole called Edinburgh. And so anything that's gathered or a big chunk of what's gathered goes to Edinburgh. And Edinburgh is sometimes viewed as this kind of thing that sucks up money and we don't know what happens with it. But by giving to Edinburgh, by giving to the central offices of the church, we are actually helping to plant new churches in places like Edinburgh and Haddington and the central belt. We are helping struggling congregations who need revitalization and who aren't strong enough to stand on their own. We're supporting the work of ETS. We're supporting missionaries who are going out with the gospel at home and abroad. We are supplying the resources for new gospel work to begin. In other words, we're helping to put an extension onto God's great building project. And our great goal is to build the church. And first and foremost, that means building up people, helping to support those engaged in gospel work throughout the country and beyond. And that's our priority here locally as well.

Although we want to look after our building and although we are incredibly blessed to have our building, we must always remember that it's not the priority. We must always remember that the people are not here to build up the building. The building is here to build up the people.

[22 : 27] In other words, the church building is not the project. It's actually part of the toolkit. It serves for the greater purpose. And everything that we invest in terms of maintaining and developing our building is in order to help the work of the church. It's to help encourage you as God's people and it's to help us reach out into the community so that we can welcome more and more people into our midst. To help build the church, we want to share our resources just like the Israelites did. Secondly, to help build the church, just like the Israelites in Exodus 35, we need to work together. The chapter we read in Exodus is a wonderful model of how church should be because there you see that everybody is serving, everyone's involved and God is using everyone.

It's a reminder that God's great building project is not for the select few. It's not for the elite, it's not for the outstandingly gifted. When it comes to serving in God's church, when it comes to God's great building project, everyone has a part to play. And that's where we need to remember the wonderful teaching that the Bible gives us about the gifts of the Spirit. In the New Testament, we find in various places a description of various spiritual gifts that God himself endues upon his people. We see in several places an example is Romans 12. Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them. If prophecy in proportion to our faith, in service, in our serving, in the one who teaches in his teaching, the one who exhorts in his exhortation, the one who contributes in generosity, the one who leads with zeal, the one who does acts of mercy with cheerfulness. Now the gifts of the Spirit are amazing, absolutely amazing, but we must always remember the purpose that these gifts serve. Why does the Holy Spirit give remarkable gifts to people? Is it to make certain individuals stand out? Is it to make us stand back at marvel and say, wow, look at them? Is it to give us a great reputation? No, it's none of these things. What does it for? Well, here's what it's for. So with yourselves, since you are eager for manifestations of the Spirit, strive to excel in building up the church. Ephesians 4, and he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds, the teachers to equip the saints for the work of ministry for building up the body of Christ. Every spiritual gift is for building up

God's church. So in exactly the same way that Bezalel and a holy ab were gifted for building the tabernacle, so you and I are gifted to help build up God's church. It's important to remember that no one has every gift. Different gifts are given to different people, but it's maybe even more important to remember that no one, no Christian has no gifts. Every believer is a spirit baptized believer. Everyone has spiritual gifts. That means you can never, ever, ever think that you are useless. It's theologically impossible for a Christian to be ungifted. Impossible.

Because in God's great building project, everybody is needed. And Paul gives a wonderful explanation of that using the imagery of the human body in 1 Corinthians 12. This is talking all about the different gifts that you have. So you might be sitting here thinking, well, I'm not in use of this and so and so is good at that. I'm rubbish at it. I can't do this. I can't do that. I'm no use. Here's what Paul says, for just as the body is one and has many members and all the members of the body, though many are one body, so it is with Christ. For in one spirit, we were all baptized into one body, Jews or Greeks, slaves or free and all were made to drink of one spirit. For the body does not consist of one member, but many. If the foot should say because I'm not a hand, I don't belong to the body, that would not make it any less a part of the body. And if the ear should say because I'm not an eye, I don't belong to the body, that would not make it any less a part of the body. If the whole body were an eye, where would be the sense of hearing? If the whole body were an ear, where would be the sense of smell? But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them as he chose. And so Paul is saying that a church works because everyone can contribute.

And the fact that our gifts are gifts are all different means that we complement each other really well. So in other words, what I can't do, there's plenty of things I can't do, somebody else can. So you might be terrified of talking to people, but you might be really good at listening. You might be rubbish with finances, but really good with children. You might be really shy of people or of crowds, but you might be brilliant with technology. You might be hopeless at cooking, but really good at organizing. You might be poor at singing, but really good at contributing to a Bible study. There will always be things that will rubbish at as Christians, but there will also be things that we are able to do and that we can contribute to the Lord's great project. And the wonderful thing about the Holy Spirit is that he has made all of these things different in different people. So what you find incredibly hard, someone else finds not too bad. What you find terrifying, somebody else finds okay. And what somebody else struggles with, you can do and you can cope with because God wants us all to work together. That's why he's established a church. That's why he doesn't say, if you become a Christian, go off on your own and you'll be fine. He doesn't. He says, come into the church where you can serve, where you can contribute, where you can be part of this great body working together, doing great things for the Lord. And it means that you've all, all, all of you got a role to play and God can do great things through us all. So if you want to get more involved, go for it because that's how God wants this church to work. There's two brief extra points I want to mention here. First of all, women. Exodus 35 is brilliant because it shows that the women played a vital role. People often think that the Bible is very sort of patriarchal and suppressing to women.

[30 : 16] It's completely false because the Bible is really what gives liberty to women and even back in the new test in the old Testament in the days of a very male dominated society, you see here in the most important building project that has ever taken place to this day, the construction of God's tabernacle, the women are playing a vital role. It's a reminder that women are not just called to facilitate the gifts of men. You women, you are gifted, you are skilled, and you are called to be co-workers in God's great building project. And secondly, we are reminded that a lot of work in God's building project is hidden. Often we can fall into the trap of thinking that unless we're making a big name for ourselves, unless we're doing something really high profile, then we're not achieving anything. That is totally, totally untrue. Our work is not being done to impress people. It's not being done to be seen by the world. It is done in the sight of God.

And even if no one else sees it, God does. And we do it all for Him. Go back to Exodus 35 and ask the question, who spun the thread for the tabernacle? The answer is we've got absolutely no idea.

And yet whoever it was made an essential contribution to God's project. So never ever think that your effort is futile. Whatever you do, whether it's a knock on someone's door or a word of encouragement or a commitment to pray for somebody, a secret act of kindness, it's all vital, it's all part of God's great project. To help build the church, we need to work together. And last of all, to help build the church, we need to learn from each other. Remember we said, Bezalel and a holy ab were not just gifted to work, they were also gifted to teach. And the instruction that they gave to other people was essential for the building of the tabernacle. And exactly the same as through in the church today, we all are to learn from one another. That's a fundamental part of being a disciple. A disciple is a learner, somebody who is listening and learning. And that means that although God sometimes gives us a skill as a gift, at other times he gives people skills through learning and through teaching. So never ever think that you can't learn. You might be gifted in an area that you never expected to be. You might be able to do something great for God that you never ever thought that you were able to do. I can relate to this because I genuinely thought and I'm being absolutely honest, I genuinely thought that I could never ever present a Sam. Now some of you might be saying you were right. I genuinely thought I could never do it.

It was only through the encouragement of my wife that I did it. And that reminds us of the importance of encouraging each other and mentoring each other. As we work together on this great building project, we need to mentor each other. We need to support each other because we all need that support.

We all need that mentoring. We all need to be close to each other so that we can learn new skills and so that we can be helped to shake off unhelpful habits and things that we're better off without. Wouldn't it be great if you had a mentor in this church that you could go and speak to maybe once a month who would ask you how you're getting on, would check how you're getting on in your faith and be there to support you, to pray with you, to encourage you? And at the same time wouldn't it be brilliant if you were a mentor to somebody else so they would come to you and you could encourage them and help them and support them because we all all need each other. We can all learn from each other. I remember as a student, I may have said this to you before, but I remember as a student for some of our classes we had Donald MacLeod who's an immensely gifted theologian and you'd hand your essays into him and a few days later he would come back with the essays and when he was handing the essays out he would always say I want to thank you all for these essays,

[35 : 17] I learned a lot from them and that really struck me because I thought how is he learning anything from us? But he recognized the fact that even as he read these poor efforts at essays from students like me, he was benefiting, he was learning. We must never ever think that we graduate as Christians into this realm where no one needs to teach us anything. We will be learning throughout the endless ages of eternity as we grow in faith and grow in knowledge and all of this is a reminder that the church must always be a safe place to learn. The church must be a safe place to learn.

In that verse there see what it says inspired him to teach literally in Hebrew it says God put it on his heart to teach and that's reminding us that teaching and mentoring each other is a matter of our hearts. It's something that we do out of love for God and love for one another and we want that learning and that mentoring to be totally safe so that you never ever feel that you can't ask questions, never feel that you are on your own and you can't talk to someone, never feel that you're a failure because you still have a lot to learn. It's so easy to feel like that again, thinking back to my student days, I remember being in a class and I've told some of this to you all as well I'm sure, I remember being in a class and they were having a big discussion about the establishment principle. The lecturer was talking about the establishment principle, all the students were talking about the establishment principle and I was sitting there thinking am I the only person in this room who has no idea what the establishment principle is and I felt too embarrassed to ask and we should never ever feel like that in a church, you can always ask, you can always, always, always be open. By the way if you don't know the establishment principle is just the view that the church and the state, whilst at one level are separate in their own domain, are to work together so the government should support the church, the church should support the government, the two work together. It wasn't that complicated but I didn't have a clue what it was. The key point is that God wants us to learn from each other. He didn't give these gifts to Bezalel and

Aholiab and say by the way don't tell anybody else how to do these things, you are the only ones. In exactly the same way God doesn't say oh you've got a minister, he's the guy who does everything, the rest of you just stand back and watch. God's plan for the church is that everyone is serving and he's giving you gifts to contribute and to work together. God wants us to learn from each other, he wants us to work together and that's why he has brought us together to help build the church. So to help build the church we share our resources, to help build the church, we work together to help build the church, we learn from one another and we see that together, together we are able to do amazing things for God. But all of this is reminding us of something incredibly simple but something incredibly amazing. It is the fact that God allows us to do things for him. Now just think about that. In Exodus God wanted a dwelling place to be built for him. The God of heaven and earth, the God who had just shaken Mount Zion because he had come down to the top of that mountain. The God who had said don't let anybody near this mountain unless they are destroyed from coming too close to me. The mighty sovereign, holy God, he wants a dwelling place and he gets ordinary people to build it.

And now the mighty sovereign, holy God is building a dwelling place in his church that is reaching across every nation of the world and he is doing it through you. He is doing it through you.

And that's amazing. He's not doing it without you. He's doing it through you. You are his chosen vessels, his chosen instruments. You are his workforce, you are his team. That means you are not just the building, you are the builder. You are there to serve God and together through the power of the Holy Spirit we can all do it. We can all work together and every one of us is probably thinking I can't do it but the biblical truth is you can. We can together because God has gifted us, God has brought us together and God will help us. You are not just the building, you are also God's builder. And so as Christians that should inspire us and encourage us and motivate us to work together as we want to serve the Lord in Carlyway in the weeks and months ahead.

[41 : 13] But if you're sitting here and you're not yet a Christian you might be thinking this has got nothing to do with me. None of this is helpful to me. None of this is about me.

But do you want to know the truth? The truth is it's actually all about you. You. Because the great mission of this church which God is building is to come and call you to join us. To come and say there is room for you on God's team. And who knows just what amazing things God could do through you if you trust in him and follow him. So I really hope that you are not sitting there thinking this is not for me. I hope you're thinking I want to join because God can do amazing things for you and he can do amazing things through you. The great goal of this church is to call in people and to say that the good news of Jesus Christ is not just for us.

It's for you as well. God wants to come and dwell in your heart as well. And if that's what you want all you have to do is put your trust in Jesus and pray Lord make me yours. Amen. Let's pray.

God our Father we thank you for the work that you have done over the generations of history to build your church. And we are so privileged to be part of that and we pray that by your empowering presence through your spirit we that we would work together for that. That each of us would contribute what we can serving you and working hard for you together as your people. And we pray Lord that by your grace we would build one another up and also that we would call other people in. That we'd be able to just invite people in to come and to hear the good news of Jesus and to come and taste for themselves what a great and wonderful God you are. We know Lord that everything that we do is done in complete dependence on you but we are being reminded tonight Lord that through ordinary people you can do extraordinary things and in your grace Lord may that be true on our island, in our nation and across the world. In Jesus name we pray. Amen.