

Exodus 31:1–11 and 35:30–36:1

Introduction

Last week, we looked at the bronze basin that God graciously provided for washing and for cleansing. After that, the Lord gives instructions concerning the holy anointing oil and the incense to be burned on the golden altar in the Holy Place. I included the passage on the anointing oil (Exod. 30:22-33) when we looked at the consecration of Aaron and his sons in chapter twenty-nine. And I included the passage on the incense (Exod. 30:34-38) when we looked at the altar of incense at the beginning of chapter thirty. Since we've already looked at these passages, we'll be coming this morning to chapter thirty-one. But before we do, the instructions concerning the anointing oil and the incense are actually the very last instructions to be given for the tabernacle, and all the things that need to be made in connection with it. The tabernacle instructions are now complete. The tent with all its parts and pieces, all the furniture with all their utensils, all the garments, the anointing oil and the fragrant incense—it's all been fully revealed. So, all that remains is to build it. We say, "*all that remains,*" but, of course, it's not really anywhere near that simple. Back in Exodus chapter twenty-five, we read:

- Exodus 25:8–9 — And 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.

There is to be absolutely no room for improvising, for "improving," for cutting corners, or for making any other kind of change whatsoever to the pattern that God has revealed. In light of how the tabernacle is to be such an exact copy of the pattern, I think we have to assume there were more blueprint details revealed to Moses than we have actually recorded in Exodus. Even more than that, it seems most likely that what God did was show Moses an **image**, or a **picture** of exactly what everything was to look like. "Exactly as I **show** you concerning the pattern of the tabernacle, and of all its furniture, so you shall make it." And then there's these occasional reminders:

- Exodus 25:40 — See that you make [the lampstand, the table, and ark of the covenant] after the pattern for them, which is being shown you on the mountain.
- Exodus 26:30 — You shall erect the tabernacle according to the plan for it that you were shown on the mountain.
- Exodus 27:8 — You shall make [the altar] hollow, with boards. As it has been shown you on the mountain, so shall it be made.

What it seems like is that when God finishes telling Moses about the specific materials and dimensions and other details, then He summarizes by saying: "Just make it **exactly** like what you **saw** on the mountain – exactly like the picture that I showed you." In the book of Acts, Stephen says:

- Acts 7:44 — [The Lord] directed [Moses] to make [the tent of witness] according to the pattern that he had seen.

And so now we have a very, very big problem. Building the tabernacle isn't just about materials, and dimensions, and other details written down on paper. Building the tabernacle is about reproducing exactly a living image and picture that Moses has seen on the mountain. But who can do this? No matter how talented, or skilled, or experienced any person might be, who would be **able** to do this? And the answer is, apparently, no one. There's no one who can reproduce with such perfection the image and the picture that Moses was shown on the mountain. The task is quite *impossible*. And, yet, the task *must* be accomplished. Not only has God required it, but what's at stake is nothing less than God's redeeming plans for His people.

So, what possible solution—what possible remedy to this problem—can we see? It's in the light of all this that we can come to rejoice in our text for this morning. We read in verses 1-2 and verse 6:

I. Exodus 31:1–2, 6 — The LORD said to Moses, “**See, I have called by name** Bezalel the son of Uri, son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah... And behold, **I have appointed** with him Oholiab, the son of Ahisamach, of the tribe of Dan.

It's all so very, very clear. This is Yahweh Himself speaking, and He begins with the word “See!” One commentator explains that this word “carries the force of a direct command to Moses to consider, inspect and observe what God is doing.” (Currid)

“**See, I have called by name...**” The NIV misses the full force of God's word when it translates, “See, I have *chosen...*” because the Hebrew is even more powerful. Who is **allowed** to oversee the work of constructing the tabernacle? *Only* the ones that God has “*called by name.*” Who could be **able** to oversee the work of constructing the tabernacle? Who could possibly be **fit** for such an impossible task? And the answer, once again, is *only* the ones that God has “called by name.” But that's putting it negatively. Maybe we should really be asking: Is there **anyone** who can accomplish this impossible task? And the answer is, *yes*, there is!—He is the one that God has called by name. “**See,**” and consider, what God has done!

In order to make this calling even more clear, and even more powerful, God identifies those He has called not only by their own names, but by their fathers, and their tribes. “See, I have called by name Bezalel **the son of Uri, son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah...** And behold, I have appointed with him Oholiab, **the son of Ahisamach, of the tribe of Dan.**” Who is to be fit and able for the impossible task of constructing the tabernacle? It is these two men who have been called by name and appointed by God. And then there's more:

“Bezalel” seems to be a compound of three Hebrew words: “Be”=in, “zal”=[the] shadow, “el”=[of] God — “In the shadow of God.” In Scripture, the Lord's protection and care is often described as the “shadow” of His wings (Ps. 17:8; 36:7; 57:1), or as a “shade” from the heat of the sun. (same Hebrew word; Ps. 91:1; 121:5; Isa. 4:6; 25:4; Hos. 14:7) And isn't that what this tabernacle is all about? In Exodus 24, “the glory of the Lord **settled** on Mount Sinai, and the cloud **covered** it six days.” (Exod. 24:15-16) In Exodus 25, the Lord said to Moses, “Let them make me a sanctuary, that I may **settle** in their midst.” (Exod. 25:8) **Who** is the man **called** by God to construct His tabernacle so that His people might dwell under His shade and protection –

under the shadow of His wings? That man is none other than Bezalel, the son of Uri, son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah, whose name means, “In the shadow of God.”

And then there’s Oholiab. “Oholiab” seems to be a compound of two Hebrew words: “Oholi”=tent, “ab”=father — “My tent is the father.” This word for “tent” is the same word that’s been used over and over again over the last six chapters for the tabernacle **tent** – the **tent** of meeting. So, **who** is the man **called** by God to assist in the work of constructing His tent so that He might dwell with and among His people? That man is none other than Oholiab, the son of Ahisamach, of the tribe of Dan, whose name means, “My tent is the father.”

What a strong encouragement this all would have been to Bezalel and Oholiab as they thought about the “impossible” task of building the tabernacle “*exactly*” according to the pattern that Moses had *seen* on the mountain. In fact, it was this calling by God that was the only grounds upon which they could have any hope or confidence of success.

But what does this calling actually **do**? How is it *effective* to qualify Bezalel and Oholiab for the work? “See, **I have called** by name Bezalel the son of Uri, son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah...” And then we go on to read in verses 2-5:

II. Exodus 31:2–5 — ...**and I have filled** him [Bezalel] with the Spirit of God, with wisdom [skill] and intelligence, with knowledge and all craftsmanship, to devise artistic designs, to work in gold, silver, and bronze, in cutting stones for setting, and in carving wood, to work in every craft.

Now isn’t *that* good news! We see that the Lord’s calling is never an empty call. Instead, His call always carries within it the grace, and the power, and the enabling to fulfill that call. In other words, those whom the Lord calls He also *fills* with His own Holy Spirit, enabling and equipping them in *every* way to *fully* carry out *whatever* the task might be, *no matter what* the circumstances might be. In Exodus 35, we learn that this enabling and equipping also means that the Lord has “put in Bezalel’s heart, and also in Oholiab, the ability to teach.” (Exod. 35:34)

Prior to these verses in Exodus 31, the construction of the tabernacle was an **impossible** task – one that couldn’t be accomplished by anyone. But *now*, with these two men being called by name and so also filled with the Spirit of God, what *was* impossible is now *fully guaranteed*. What *was* a hopeless task can now be entered upon with the *utmost confidence*. That’s not to say that Bezalel wasn’t already a skilled craftsman. But it is to say that all his ability and skill would still have resulted in *total failure* if he had not been called by name and filled with the Spirit of God.* Also, the point here is not that Bezalel was filled with the Spirit in the same way that we are today, after Pentecost. The point here is “only” this – that when God calls us to a task, He always supplies His Spirit to enable our obedience and success for His glory and our joy. *This* is the point that we have driven home even further in verses 6-11:

* This seems to be the point of what the Lord says in verse seven: “And I have given to all *skilled men* skill...” Cf. Exodus 36:1 — Bezalel and Oholiab and **every craftsman in whom the LORD has put skill and intelligence** to know how to do any work in the construction of the sanctuary shall work in accordance with all that the LORD has commanded.”

III. Exodus 31:6b–11 — And **I have given** to all wise [skillful] men wisdom [skill], **that they may make *all* that I have commanded you**: the tent of meeting, and the ark of the testimony, and the mercy seat that is on it, and all the furnishings of the tent, the table and its utensils, and the pure lampstand with all its utensils, and the altar of incense, and the altar of burnt offering with all its utensils, and the basin and its stand, and the finely worked garments, the holy garments for Aaron the priest and the garments of his sons, for their service as priests, and the anointing oil and the fragrant incense for the Holy Place. **According to *all* that I have commanded you, they shall do.**”

Do you see how the emphasis of these verses is on successfully completing **all** the work that God has commanded Moses? The verses begin, “**that they may make *all*** that I have commanded you,” and then they end, “According to ***all*** that I have commanded you, they shall do.” And then between this beginning and end, the “**all**” is actually spelled out with a *list* of all the different items that God has commanded over the last six chapters!

So once again, we see the good news! How can this impossible “**all**” be accomplished ***so completely*** and ***so successfully***? It’s because the workmen have been filled with the Spirit of God.[†] Without this, all the talent and skill in the world would have resulted not just in something subpar or less than perfect, but in total failure. A tabernacle that doesn’t reproduce “**exactly**” what Moses saw on the mountain can’t be called a tabernacle **at all**.

There’s one more thing we need to see. These verses begin, “that they may make all that I have **commanded** you,” and then they end, “According to all that I have **commanded** you, they shall do.” The Spirit of God is only given to accomplish the calling of God and the specific task that He **commands** by His Word. We can’t claim the enabling of His Holy Spirit for anything else, ever, in all the world.

Conclusion

So, what do these things mean for us as we seek to live our lives to the glory of God? First of all, if the Holy Spirit is only ever given to accomplish God’s calling and the specific task that *He* has given, then shouldn’t this make us **want** to be **about** His calling, and the task that He has given us? Shouldn’t this make us **want** to be seeking first His kingdom and His righteousness each and every day ***so that*** we might fully experience the enabling and empowering of the Spirit of God? When we go about our days driven by our own agendas, we’ll never know the joy of being “filled” with the Spirit of God. But this leads us to a second, very important lesson.

The moment that we truly begin to be driven by God’s agenda – the seeking first of His kingdom and His righteousness – we’ll know deep down in our hearts that it’s an impossible task. If we don’t sense deep down how impossible it is, then I think we’ve missed the true nature of the task that we’ve been called to. Living the Christian life isn’t about being more good than bad, or becoming more and more good, and less and less bad; it’s about being a whole new creation – it’s all about doing the things that were quite literally ***impossible*** before we were in Christ. So, as a Christian, all that I do is to be done to the glory of the one true God.

[†] In verse 6, the Lord says that He has given to all wise and skillful men wisdom and skill. In verse 2, Bezalel’s being filled with wisdom and skill is the result of his being filled with the Spirit of God.

- 1 Corinthians 10:31 — So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, **do all to the glory of God.**

As a Christian, all that I do is to be firmly anchored and rooted in the undeserved love and grace that God has poured out on me through Jesus.

- Ephesians 4:32 — Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, **as God in Christ forgave you.**
- Philippians 2:5 — Have this mind among yourselves, **which is yours in Christ Jesus.**
- Romans 15:7 — Therefore welcome one another **as Christ has welcomed you**, for the glory of God.
- Colossians 3:17 — Whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything **in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.**

Can we see just how impossible all of this is – literally? The task that God has given us is a task that our own so-called “goodness” could only attempt with the result not just of “falling short” as we think of “falling short,” but with the result of absolute, total, abject **failure**. Even as Christians, we need to learn to feel the impossibility of the task (Eph. 4:1; 2 Tim. 1:9) so that *all* our confidence can truly be in the **reality** that God has called us by name and filled us with His Spirit.

When the calling feels impossible (because it is), we need to be reminded that it’s the calling *to which we have been called!* This, then, gives us the assurance that we *can* do the impossible. So we read in 1 Corinthians, and then in 1 Thessalonians:

- 1 Corinthians 1:7–9 (cf. Jude 1) — Our Lord Jesus Christ... will sustain you to the end, guiltless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. **God is faithful, by whom you were called** into the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.
- 1 Thessalonians 5:23–24 (cf. 2:12) — Now may the God of peace himself sanctify you completely, and may your whole spirit and soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. **He who calls you is faithful; he will surely do it.**

When you feel and know that the calling is impossible, remember that it’s the calling **to which you have been called** and take **courage**. But what does God’s call actually *do*? How is it *effective*? The answer is the same for us as it was for Bezalel and Oholiab.

Remember what the Lord said to Moses: “**I have filled** [Bezalel] with the Spirit of God, with wisdom and intelligence, with knowledge and all craftsmanship, to devise artistic designs, to work in gold, silver, and bronze, in cutting stones for setting, and in carving wood, to work in every craft.” The Lord’s calling is never an empty call. **Those whom the Lord calls He also fills with His own Holy Spirit, enabling and equipping them in every way to fully carry out whatever the task might be, no matter what the circumstances might be.** (cf. Acts 1:8) Do you **believe** this?

Remember, when you feel it's impossible, it is; but it's *not*. Prior to our being filled with the Holy Spirit, the Christian calling *was* an **impossibility**. But now that we have been filled with the Spirit of God, what was a hopeless task can now, and *must* now be entered upon each and every day with the **utmost confidence**.

Let me say it another way. When God called us to the task of doing all for His glory and being motivated in all things by the grace we've received in Christ, He called us to the impossible. And so, with the call, He also supplied **us** with the gift of His Spirit (the Spirit of God!) so that we might be **able to do the impossible** and **fulfill our calling** in full dependence upon Him. So the Apostle Paul says:

- Romans 8:13 (cf. 2 Thess. 2:13; 1 Pet. 1:1-2) — If you live according to the flesh you will die, but if **by the Spirit** you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live.
- Galatians 5:22–23 — The fruit **of the Spirit** is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control.

And the Apostle John writes:

- 1 John 4:13 (cf. 3:24) — By this we know that we abide in him and he in us, because he has given us of his Spirit.

So then, may it never be our goal to live lives that are more good than bad, or always becoming more and more good, and less and less bad. Instead, may our desire be to live every day the life that's *possible* **only because** it's the life to which **we have been called**—and **only because** God has given to us the **infinite enabling power of His own Holy Spirit**.

In Exodus 35, the account of the actual *building* of the Tabernacle and its furnishings is introduced with a reminder of what God has just told Moses here in chapter 31. Maybe, now, we can see more than ever how wonderful this reminder is. Maybe, now, we can see in these verses the pattern of God's dealings even with us, today.

- Exodus 35:30–36:1 — Then Moses said to the people of Israel, “See, the LORD has called by name Bezalel the son of Uri, son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah; and he has filled him with the Spirit of God, with skill, with intelligence, with knowledge, and with all craftsmanship, to devise artistic designs, to work in gold and silver and bronze, in cutting stones for setting, and in carving wood, for work in every skilled craft. And he has inspired him to teach, both him and Oholiab the son of Ahisamach of the tribe of Dan. He has filled them with skill to do every sort of work done by an engraver or by a designer or by an embroiderer in blue and purple and scarlet yarns and fine twined linen, or by a weaver—by any sort of workman or skilled designer. Bezalel and Oholiab and every craftsman in whom the LORD has put skill and intelligence to know how to do any work in the construction of the sanctuary shall work in accordance with all that the LORD has commanded.”