
A Heart for Giving and Serving

Exodus 35:1-29

Introduction We are in the midst of building project. It has been a venture full of hopes, disappointments, difficulties and surprising joys. Over seven years we have watched the cost of construction rise at double digit rates. We have adjusted what we intend to build to fit the pressing needs of the ministry. You have given faithfully and much. In the next month, we should be getting construction bids in, final funding quotes and hopefully breaking ground. There is still much that needs to be sorted out. It is a big project for us. I bless God for Tadd Dieringer and the Expansion Team who are working hard in different ways to make this happen.

We are in the midst of budget planning. The Finance Team will be reviewing your budget submissions to prepare a proposed budget for the Elders. We will be putting this into your hands in August and asking for your support at the annual congregational meeting. God has blessed us so much. God has blessed us with a people who willing to give and often give sacrificially and joyfully.

We are in the midst of ministry development. Our ministry year runs from September through August. Most ministries are working on scheduling, staffing and provisioning their ministries. Gifted, able and experienced people are leading and serving in ministries all over this church.

Sometimes a message comes at a timely moment for examination. It causes people to pause and to commit themselves to what they hear. Sometimes a message comes at a timely moment for encouragement. It causes people to be stirred up in what they are already doing, to be sustained in it and possibly even to greater effort as needed. Sometimes a message is both. May what you hear this morning exhort you and encourage you. May God's grace come through God's Word and Spirit to God's people.

<<Prayer>>

Imagine the scene of Exodus 35

- Wilderness encampment with the fenced and fearsome mountain glowing and smoking with the hovering presence of God...
- Remembering what it was like to wait, first with impatience and then again with penitence.
- There stands Moses with two tablets in his arms and his face glowing...
- Humbled faces look up to hear what God has spoken to them...

What will be God's message to the people?

The Requirements (v.1-19)

Moses gathers Israel to hear what is required of them in the construction of the Tabernacle. They have heard the general terms of the covenant. They have agreed to them in humble repentance. Now, they can proceed with the implementation of the Levitical portion of the covenant. Initially, that involved the construction of the Tabernacle and equipping it with all that was needed for the Levitical sacrifices and services.

As to the Sign of the Covenant (v.1-3)

Moses assembled all the congregation of the people of Israel and said to them, "These are the things that the LORD has commanded you to do. ² Six days work shall be done, but on the seventh day you shall have a Sabbath of solemn rest, holy to the LORD. Whoever does any work on it shall be put to death. ³ You shall kindle no fire in all your dwelling places on the Sabbath day."

Does it not strike you as odd that God begins with reminding them about the Sabbath? For Israel under the Mosaic Covenant, the Sabbath was as important as circumcision was under the Abrahamic Covenant. It was the sign of the covenant. In keeping the Sabbath, they were acknowledging several important facts.

They were affirming that God was their creator and were following His example of rest. The Sabbath was a celebration of the creation rest. It looked back to the fact that God had done His creating work in six days and then had rested.

They were acknowledging that they were in the covenant. It was an act of obedience arising from believing what God had said. Any one caught breaking the Sabbath was immediately to be executed. The death penalty for Sabbath breaking may seem harsh to us but it signified how deadly disobedience and covenant breaking was. There is little Biblical or historical evidence that this was consistently obeyed down through Israel's history.

They were obeying an important part of the covenant. The language of the Sabbath is located in the center of the Ten Words, the Ten Commandments on purpose. Remember that Hebrew thinks in terms of chiasmic structures. At the center of a group is the main point of the group. So, Sabbath keeping is not only the sign of the covenant, it is the point of the covenant.

They were expressing their total dependence upon God. One day out of seven, nothing could be done that was a part of sustaining ones own life. The Sabbath cycle was designed for the good of the people and the fertility of the land. But it meant that regularly no work could be done in the home, in the field, on the job. It meant every seven years, a whole year of no work. It meant that on the seventh cycle of seven years, there were two years of no work in the fields. To do this meant that the Israelites had to trust in the wisdom and provision of God.

So, what about us? Are we supposed to keep the Sabbath as well? Are we to set aside one day a week and do absolutely no work at all of any kind? This would include cooking, house work, yard work, travel for any reason except to worship, no business nor anything related to how you make your living. And, if we are

supposed to keep the Sabbath what about the seven year cycles and year of Jubilee on the 50th? These were Sabbaths as well. And should we immediately excommunicate anyone who violates the Sabbath and declare them to be an unbeliever?

At one point in my life, I was convinced of Christian Sabbath keeping. I was convinced that we ought to keep the Sabbath, with Christian modifications. The day was changed to Sunday. The requirements were lessened so I could still do what suited me. And no one was willing to excommunicate me when I had to work on the Lord's Day (I was a cook in a restaurant). But then I came to understand the New Covenant and its relationship to the Ten Commandments and the Sabbath itself.

The Sabbath came into existence in the Mosaic Covenant. It was a part of the Old Covenant and was its sign. We who are in the New Covenant are no longer under the Old Covenant.

The Sabbath recognized the creation rest of God *as it pointed to the salvation rest of Christ*. Like all of the Old Covenant it was a shadow of a greater reality. The Sabbath has been fulfilled in Christ. He has finished the salvation work of His Father and now has entered into His rest.

The Lord's Day does not replace the Sabbath; Jesus' death and resurrection does. When I by faith believe in and put my trust in the finished work of Christ, I enter into the Sabbath rest. The Lord's Day, the first day of the week (which we paganly call Sunday) was generally set aside for the public worship of the church as intentionally celebrating the resurrection.

Not one word in the New Testament apart from Christ's severe criticisms of the hypocritical practice of the Pharisees and the Jews of His day commands, guides, corrects, warns or exemplifies "Christian Sabbath keeping."

So, is taking some time off from work and having a change of pace a good idea? Yes. We need physically to rest. Christ often took time away from His ministry to rest. But we do not do so as a matter of Biblical, moral obedience; we do so as a wise steward of the bodies God has given us.

Now, one more, very important word: Paul says that some out of conviction or conscience honor one day above others and celebrate festival days. He does not condemn those who do so because this is what they have been taught and this is how their consciences have been instructed. So, if you believe and practice Christian Sabbath keeping, then do so and be pleasing to the Lord. Do carefully consider what the Bible actually teaches and be willing to change. All of us who are not Sabbatarians should honor, respect and encourage those who are.

As to the Support of the Ministry (v.4-9)

⁴ Moses said to all the congregation of the people of Israel, "This is the thing that the LORD has commanded. ⁵ Take from among you a contribution to the LORD. Whoever is of a generous heart, let him bring the LORD'S contribution: gold, silver, and bronze; ⁶ blue and purple and scarlet yarns and fine twined linen; goats' hair, ⁷ tanned rams' skins, and goatskins; acacia wood, ⁸ oil for the light, spices for the anointing oil and for the fragrant incense, ⁹ and onyx stones and stones for setting, for the ephod and for the breastpiece.

The Tabernacle was to be built through the contributions of the people. It was required that the congregation supplies all that was needed. Out of their own possessions they were to give. Now, it is important to remember that a great deal of this was what they had been given by the Egyptians as they left. But we all know how easily treasures can become idols in our hearts. They had been quick to give up their gold earrings for the golden calf. Now, will they be quick to give up their treasures for the sake of the ministry?

The contributions to the ministry were to come from those who had a generous heart. This is an interesting phrase. God required that those who give have generous hearts. They were inclined to give. In verse 29 this generous giving is characterized as “free-will” or not compelled. It is a giving that loves God, hears the call to give, has the means to give and moves gladly to give. A generous heart is more inclined to meet needs than to keep for itself. It is full for others so it will empty itself for others.

The contributions were solicited in a careful, thought through, planned manner to provide for the real needs in the construction. In this list of what was needed and what should be brought, careful attention is being given to the construction of the Tabernacle. Given how it was to be built, then these are the materials that will be needed. In a sense, this is giving to a plan. We might call this in our monetary culture, a budget. What they were going to do is largely laid out. What it will take to that is tabulated. And the people are called upon to give in such a way as to meet the plan and fund the ministry, in this case, the building of the Tabernacle and supply of the Levitical ministry.

When Moses wrote this portion of Exodus, this command had been fulfilled and completed. So what is the point? Is this just for historical information? Is he just reminding them how the Tabernacle came into being? No, I think his point is to encourage continued generosity in sacrificial contributions. They were required to bring in their tithes. Yet, they were still to have generous hearts. He is showing them the marriage, the union of God’s commands and a heart poised for obedience. Just doing what was required was not real and full obedience. Rather, generosity emerged when they heard what God commanded and then by grace they organized and oriented their hearts to desire what God required.

The same point Moses is making with Israel can be made with us. God the Father gave His Son out of a loving and generous heart towards us. His giving was a matchless gift. Paul points to the grand giving of God the Father, to the generous heart required here, and to the graced example of other churches to motive us to give generously. This is what we desire in our own stewardship. We desire to carefully plan our ministry, even as we are getting ready to build. We plan our budget so that you will know what is needed to give. We challenge you to give generously from the heart out of the treasure God has given you.

As to the Skills for the Construction (v.10-19)

¹⁰ "Let every skillful craftsman among you come and make all that the LORD has commanded: ¹¹ the tabernacle, its tent and its covering, its hooks and its frames, its bars, its pillars, and its bases; ¹² the ark with its poles, the mercy seat, and the veil of the screen; ¹³ the table with its poles and all its utensils, and the bread of the Presence; ¹⁴ the lampstand also for the light, with its utensils and its lamps, and the oil for the light; ¹⁵ and the altar of incense, with its poles, and the anointing oil and the fragrant incense, and the screen for the door, at the door of the tabernacle; ¹⁶ the altar of burnt offering, with its grating of bronze, its poles, and all its utensils, the basin and its stand; ¹⁷ the hangings of the court, its pillars and its bases, and the screen for the gate of the court; ¹⁸ the pegs of the tabernacle and the pegs of the court, and their cords; ¹⁹ the finely worked garments for ministering in the Holy Place, the holy garments for Aaron the priest, and the garments of his sons, for their service as priests."

The work of the construction of the Tabernacle and service of ministry was to be done by the congregation. The call here is for all the various kinds of skills that would be needed. God had promised to put the Spirit on Ooliab and Bezalel so that they would have the skill to manage the whole project. But the people must step forward with their skills, experience and abilities and make them available. Once again there is a summons, a sovereign call for the people of God to humbly and graciously respond to. They would hear what they are responsible for and their hearts would be moved to volunteer. This is what is going on internally. Externally, it looks like discussions at home, rearranging priorities, setting aside time and resources and organizing and orienting family and life to meet the commitment. Then, it is the stepping forward and giving one's name, contact info (you know, tent # on row # in the family of ____ in the tribe of ____), skill set and experience as well as the level of time and effort being committed to. Surely you understand that all ministry undertaking everywhere in the Bible involves the organizational wisdom that God's Spirit supplies.

The long list of what must be produced points us back to the chapters where the blueprint was narrated. The tabernacle and items required for it are listed here. It is evident that multiple skills are going to be needed. And so the congregation, under the direction of Spirit-enabled leadership in different skill areas, is needed to do the work. The need for a wide array of skills is brought forward. Realize also that a great deal of just infrastructure support is need. There will be forms and looms and casts to be built, meals to be prepared and served, refreshments prepared. Materials will need to be stockpiled, organized and catalogued. The order in which things were to be made must be planned and implemented. This is a complex project requiring trade, home and managerial skills.

This is given so that God's people in the wilderness, in the land and in the church may be motivated to get involved as they are able in the ministry. The New Testament tells us that every true believer has at least one Holy Spirit enablement that they are to put to use to serve the body. Primarily, but not exclusively, these gifts are to be used in conjunction with and under the oversight of the local gathered church. No spiritual enablement is given to personally profit the person. It is given to build up the body of Christ. Peter divides these Spirit enablements into two large categories: speaking gifts and serving gifts. The point is that there are to be no spectators. All of you who have publicly professed Christ should be involved in ministry in some way – including believing teens.

Many today prize the excitement of spontaneity, primarily equating that with the work of the Spirit. I know that some churches are so organized and efficient that they would not even be aware if there were no believers there doing Spirit enabled work. But, my study of the Scriptures places the weight of the Holy Spirit's work in careful preparation, planning, organizing and implementing while being flexible where needed. I am absolutely certain that the Spirit is just on me in my study as He is on me in my preaching, whether I am working with a manuscript or not.

The Responses (v.20-29)

How will the people respond to these instructions? Have they truly been humbled and become repentant? As we work through this section, rather than an outline of the text, I want to observe the points Moses is making and then make application to us.

²⁰ Then all the congregation of the people of Israel departed from the presence of Moses. ²¹ 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. ²² 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. ²³ And every one who possessed blue or purple or scarlet yarns or fine linen or goats' hair or tanned rams' skins or goatskins brought them. ²⁴ Everyone who could make a contribution of silver or bronze brought it as the LORD'S contribution. And every one who possessed acacia wood of any use in the work brought it. ²⁵ And every skillful woman spun with her hands, and they all brought what they had spun in blue and purple and scarlet yarns and fine twined linen. ²⁶ All the women whose hearts stirred them to use their skill spun the goats' hair. ²⁷ And the leaders brought onyx stones and stones to be set, for the ephod and for the breastpiece, ²⁸ and spices and oil for the light, and for the anointing oil, and for the fragrant incense. ²⁹ All the men and women, the people of Israel, whose heart moved them to bring anything for the work that the LORD had commanded by Moses to be done brought it as a freewill offering to the LORD.

Obeying as a Community Together (v.20-29)

Having heard the instructions from the Lord through Moses, they now move to obey God as a community. Moses emphasizes the community obedience through the use of the Word, "all".

Note too how Moses highlights the role of women in this giving and serving. This is an intentional emphasis. Much that needed to be done in this service required the skills and ministry of women. Serving God in the building of the tabernacle was not just men's work. The women were helpfully encouraged and gladly received to do skillful work. This was practical work in the tabernacle. It was important work. While they could not serve as priests, they were moved by the Spirit of God to take the skills they had and serve everywhere they could.

While we believe, teach and practice that the eldership is reserved for Biblically qualified males, we also encourage ladies to serve in any way they can. Many ministries here at the Chapel are sustained solely by the dedicated serving of skilled women. We celebrate that. We do more than that. We call on every believing young lady or woman in this church to bring your skills, abilities, spiritual gifts and interests and offer them for service here. We have ministries now that need able and qualified people. As the new ministry year is coming in Sep-

tember, we need several different kinds of help in our children's ministries. May God's Spirit move in the hearts of all of you to be involved in the work of serving here.

Why are these being emphasized? Remember that the book of Exodus is not being written as these events unfolded. They are being written much later, possibly during the forty years of wandering. It serves then to remind the generation that obeyed this way how they had been moved by God's grace and Spirit to give and serve. To the new generation of Israelites who were going to enter the land, it also stressed the importance of community obedience. In the disobedience and sin of the golden calf, there was a powerful influence exerted by the "crowd." And, there is a powerful influence for godliness encouraged by corporate and community attitudes and actions.

This is part of the reason God calls the church to emphasize the importance of our being a community together. The world offers you two substitute and corrupting alternatives. It offers an alternative of individualism where each person is their own person and has the right to go about their Christian life without reference to, without relationships with or accountability to others. It also offers substitute communities that take the place of the church in people's hearts. These may be sports teams, social circles, workplace relationships, neighborhoods or possibly even family. These alternative communities may be fine in and of themselves. But they often compete for time, skills, money and attention. Where they win the competition, you have given up the place the Bible places on the community of believers as necessary and essential to life and godliness.

Coming with their Hearts moved by God (v.20-21)

The people are stirred in the hearts and spirits to rise up and obey God. They hear the requirement and know their responsibilities. But now, they are stirred in their very souls, in their inner man to step forward and do what God required. They came with their treasures because they had been moved by God to do so. They brought the most amazing wealth into the storehouse,

Now, does this mean that those whose hearts were not stirred were then excused and did not disobey God? Are we, when we hear what God requires and what are our responsibilities, are we then just to wait to obey until we have our hearts stirred? There is much debate over what is meant here in this text. Is Moses saying that God moved in who He wanted so that they would bring what they had and the rest do not have to contribute either gifts or skills? Did God make some "generous" in heart so that they were the main instruments of community obedience? Is there an implied indictment against those whose hearts were not stirred as though they had failed in some way to hear and heed?

I am not sure. But this I do know. Now in the New Covenant, passively waiting until some heart stirring for obedience is disobedience. We are to have hearts inclined to do what God requires. If we do not, then we must repent of not believing what God says or not wanting what God requires or probably both. This Biblical idea has revolutionized my life. It is a summary analysis of my own heart and disobedience that too often I hear what God wants and *I don't want that and*

often want something else. What is required then is repentance – to actively change the stream of words in my heart from “not that” to “want that”.

Bringing What they had to Contribute (v.22-24)

Let me illustrate by observing in verses 22-24 what the congregation actually did. Those who had willing hearts brought expensive gold and precious stones jewelry. Everyone who owned other things that were needed brought them as contributions. It seems to me that Moses is pointing to two things:

Some people were specially moved by God to bring expensive treasures. Those who owned very expensive and valuable gold were given willing hearts to obey God in giving up their treasures.

The whole congregation contributed what they had that was needed. All the rest took the list of what was needed, looked to see what off that list they owned and brought it as a contribution.

Moses is establishing basic principles and precepts for giving. This is first for Israel and then to us. Over the whole Bible these common principles are the way God has ordained the ministry to be supplied. There is general obedience by all out of what they have. There is special enablement on some who have been given greater wealth. All are to give and are in disobedience when they don't. Some will be entrusted with much greater wealth and will be spiritually enabled to give in a much larger way and are in disobedience when they don't. However, all will be giving sacrificially according to their means. It is equal sacrifice but not equal burden.

The needs for the construction are fully met. The congregation brings everything that is needed. Gold, silver, exotic fabrics, fine threads and tanned skins. From our prior studies, you may remember that nearly everything that had an underlying framework was made of acacia wood. Now think about this a minute. They are in the wilderness. No one owns plots of land. No one has a tree farm. They do not go out and harvest acacia trees in the neighborhood. All the wood was provided by people who owned it and were hauling it across the wilderness! Rabbi Shlomo ben Yitzchak, 1040-1105, states the following:

Generations earlier, when Yaakov [Jacob] moved to Egypt he mysteriously planted acacia trees in Goshen. He instructed his children to nurture the trees and let them grow very large. He told his children that a time would come that they would leave Egypt, but before they leave they should cut these enormous trees down and take the wood with them into the desert. Hundreds of years were invested into this acacia wood!

The Bible simply does not tell us such a thing. This tradition is unsupported by the Word. The Jewish people to whom this was originally written knew where it came from. But that fact was not recorded. Speculating about this then distracts from the central point. The people themselves gave everything that was needed even the acacia wood that was needed.

Making their Skills Available to Serve (v.25-26)

Having all the materials needed for the construction of the Tabernacle was not enough. Craftsmen were going to be needed to lend their skills, experience and time. Moses chooses to emphasize the serving done by the women. They spun the threads into fabrics. Many were specially moved to spin the goats hair into the fine “cashmere” fabric used all through the tabernacle.

Once again, we are seeing an interesting emphasis. The women are being highlighted. Yes, there were skilled carpenters, fabricators and gold and bronze workmen. But the long and arduous work of weaving the large swaths of material needed to construct the Tabernacle and the fence around it was done by the women of Israel. In addition, these large pieces of material were elegantly and intricately embroidered with multihued threads and finely spun gold. Hours and hours of skilled work was done by ladies whose hearts were stirred to serve God in this work.

Following the Example of Leaders (v.27-28)

Moses also noted the example set by the leaders. They bring the jewels for the ephod and breast piece. They contribute the spices and fine olive oil needed for the incense. The leadership was required to contribute just like everyone else. Just because they were pouring hours and hours into the leading and judging of the Israelites did not exempt them from obeying God in their own contributions. The oft-said statement, “I give my time and so do not need to give my money” is not a Biblical statement at all. Both giving and serving are required.

Leaving a Pattern for Us (v.29)

The closing sentence, which leaves a pattern for us, serves as a bookend for verses 20-21. The NLT puts it this way, “So the people of Israel—every man and woman who was eager to help in the work the LORD had given them through Moses—brought their gifts and gave them freely to the LORD.” Frankly, the NLT has missed something important. This was not just the work the LORD had given them through Moses; this way of translating so tones down what is actually being said. The people’s hearts are stirred and they freely do *what they have been commanded to do by God through Moses*. He may command what He pleases; we will be pleased with His commands.

This is where we need to listen carefully. More and more I hear Christians talk as though unless they are “moved” in some way to do what God requires, then they won’t. Worse, they believe that they are not responsible since they were not so moved. If our hearts are not stirred to do what God requires when we hear it, it is our fault. It is not God’s fault. While the precise details of obedience may need careful wisdom, the bent of the heart and soul should be to do what God requires.

Conclusion In closing then, let me challenge you with questions that are being posed to Israel in Moses’ day and to you in ours.

Do you know what God requires of you? Is casual attendance at AM Service, sporadic praying and Bible reading, occasional serious thoughts about life and death, general moral obedience all that it means to be a Christian? Have you poured over the Word of God to see not just the line-items of obedience, but also the general organization and orientation of your heart towards God, His people and His kingdom/community agenda in this world?

Have you made a commitment of the heart to try to obey the Lord when you hear what He requires? Here is a test: when you hear in the Word, or more particularly in preaching, a specific requirement from God for all, do you immediately begin to think of reasons (call them for what they are, excuses) that it doesn't apply to you? I am not talking about "not wearing nose rings" kind of legalism. I am talking general requirements that must be thought through with humble and wise obedience.

In all that is required of all, do you seek to obey the Lord? Now I think a lot of people would say, "Yes, I want to do what God requires. But..." So, will what comes after the "but" cut it with God?

Are you giving and serving as God requires of everyone in the church? I am not talking about all of your giving the same amount; God forbid. I am talking about having a heart that is full of grace and is generous in its character and seeks to give as able. I am not talking about everyone trying to teach or preach. I am talking about everyone faithfully involved in the general life of the church: in Bible Education hour, in worship services, in Flock, in focus ministries like men's ministry, women's ministry and SyM (with others to be coming soon). I talking about getting to know people and love people and encourage others.

Are you using your spiritual enablements/gifts *in the church*? Where you are particularly enabled, you ought to be presenting yourself for service. If you love outdoor work or maintenance and love to *help* then talk to Terry Engle. If you love to work with children, talk to Cheryl Watkins. If you love to organize and prepare or serve meals, see Anita Dieringer. If you have an ability to teach and want to serve with adults, see Chad Bresson. If you love to meet people and make people feel welcome, see Dan Turner or Greg Simmons. If you have ability in music, see Mark Schindler or Linda Frye. And I have not covered all the gifts. Think of evangelism, administration, giving and mercy. And remember, your gift may be expressed through a different sort of ministry. Linda Frye has the gift of teaching (as well as others). She expresses her gift through music and worship.

With a new ministry year starting in September, may each of you be stirred in your hearts to generally obey God and to offer your gifts and abilities in serving God at the Chapel. But let's be careful. We do not gain a heart for giving and serving by thinking about how much we have to offer God nor out of fearing what He will do to us if we don't. We will cultivate a heart for giving and serving by growing in our knowledge of God and all that He has done for us. He desires that you offer yourself to Him. So, soul and body, time, talent and treasure, gladly give yourself, all that you are and all that you have and all that you can do, for His great glory.