

“GOD BUILDS HIS HOUSE”

I. Introduction

- A. Amid all of the crazy things that we see taking place in the world around us these days, and even in some churches, there is one statement from the lips of our Lord that is especially comforting.
1. I am thinking of what Jesus said after the apostle Peter confessed that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God.
 2. Jesus responded to Peter’s confession with these words: “on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.” (Mt. 16:18)
 3. Those words assure us that, no matter what is happening in this nation, no matter how things appear in any given time or place, Christ is building his church and nothing can hinder him as he carries out this work.
- B. This relates to our sermon text because this passage introduces the section of Exodus in which we are told about the construction of the tabernacle.
1. This final section of Exodus shows us how the Lord built his sanctuary as the place where his presence would dwell in the midst of his people under the old covenant.
 2. As we study this passage today, we will see that it sets forth basic principles that are just as true today when it comes to how God is building his church.
 3. In particular, we will see that God’s command is fulfilled, that God calls for contributions, and that God creates willing hearts among his people.

II. God’s Command Is Fulfilled

- A. Exodus 35-40 describes the construction of the tabernacle, and most of the material contained in these chapters is a verbatim repetition of the instructions that God gave Moses in chapters 25-31.
1. We are inclined to see this sort of thing as a redundancy.
 2. We might wonder why Moses wouldn't simply write a summary statement, something like, 'And the people built the tabernacle exactly as God had commanded.'
 3. Moses certainly could have done that, but instead he utilized a literary convention that was popular in the ancient Near East, and he did so in order to make an important point.
 4. Scholars refer to this literary form as the 'command-fulfillment repetition genre.'
 5. While this kind of repetition seems unnecessary to us, Old Testament scholar Douglas Stuart explains that "The reason for the genre is in fact easy enough to see: elaborate, even tedious repetition forces the reader/listener to agree that a set of important instructions were carried out to the letter. In other words, the command-fulfillment repetition pattern is a way of highlighting the *importance* of what is commanded and the *precision* with which it was obeyed." [743]
 6. The fact that God's instructions for the building of the tabernacle are repeated in the account of the tabernacle's construction tells us that this is a matter of immense significance.
 7. God is about to take up residence in the midst of his people, and the only way this can happen is if God's blueprint is followed, even down to the last detail.
 8. In other words, this underscores that the only way we can enjoy communion with God is by following his plan, the plan that he has revealed in his Word, and not by coming up with a plan of our own.

9. This means we are not free to revise the biblical message in order to make it more acceptable to contemporary people.
 10. It means we are not free to worship the Lord in whatever ways we find to be appealing.
 11. We always need to submit ourselves to God's revelation of his plan and of his will in Scripture.
- B. There is a parallel between this account of the construction of the tabernacle and God's construction of the world back in the opening chapters of Genesis.
1. When we read the creation account, we see that each day of creation is structured around the phrases, "And God said... And it was so."
 2. We see the same thing when it comes to the construction of the tabernacle.
 3. God said how it was to be built, and it was so.
 4. This connection with the creation account is significant.
 5. It shows us that as God created the world to be the place where man lived under his blessed dominion, God created Israel to be a holy nation under his redemptive rule.
- C. This also helps us to understand why the Sabbath command is repeated again at the beginning of this account of the construction of the tabernacle.
1. The Sabbath figures prominently in the creation account.
 2. It signifies the goal for which God created the world.
 3. God made the world with a view toward bringing it into his rest, bringing it under his perfect dominion as Lord over all.

4. God created Israel with the same goal in view, the goal of bringing his people into his eternal Sabbath rest.
 5. As Israel begins the project of constructing the tabernacle, God wants them to keep the goal of entering into his rest in view.
 6. This is why he reiterates the Sabbath command here.
 7. Israel needs to be reminded that the point of all of their efforts is not merely to make a beautiful tent that will serve as a place of worship.
 8. The point of all of this was to enter God's rest, and the Sabbath was the sign of that rest.
- D. God wants us to keep our focus upon the goal of entering his rest.
1. As Christians, we need to remember that our ultimate hope, our ultimate home, our ultimate rest, is not in anything in this world.
 2. It is very easy for us to lose sight of this.
 3. The troubles and concerns of this life can easily cloud our vision.
 4. The pleasures and distractions of this world can easily come to dominate our attention.
 5. We need to take measures to ensure that we remain spiritually alert, with our eyes fixed upon our great hope, upon the rest that Christ has secured for us in the new heavens and the new earth.
 6. The Sabbath is God's provision to help us do precisely that.

III. God Calls for Contributions

- A. We turn now to look at verses 4-19, where we see how God calls for the contributions that are needed in order for the tabernacle to be built.

1. The first thing to point out about this is what it tells us about how God carries out his redemptive program.
2. God could have built the tabernacle in a different way.
3. He could have simply said, 'Let there be a tabernacle', and it would have come into existence by the power of his word.
4. Instead, God instructed his people to give of their possessions, their talents, and their time for the sake of the construction of the tabernacle.
5. God builds his church in the same way today.
6. He builds it through the things that his people do for the sake of the church.
7. He uses our witness to non-Christians as the means by which he brings new believers into his kingdom.
8. He uses the spiritual nurture that parents provide for their children to establish little ones in the faith.
9. He uses the faithfulness of mature believers to give young believers an example to follow.
10. He uses the money that people give in support of the church to provide for the gospel ministry.
11. He uses the time that people volunteer in service to the church to keep the ministry going.
12. He uses the care that his people extend to their fellow believers to support his saints in times of trial.
13. In these and other ways, God continues to call his people to contribute to the building of his church.

14. Your ambition as a Christian should be to do what you can in order to establish and support Christ's church.
 15. This is how you live out your identity as the living stones out of which God is constructing his temple.
- B. The other thing to point out about God's call for contributions is that all of the things that are mentioned here came from God to begin with.
1. When the Israelites left Egypt, God was the one who told them to ask for precious metals, fabrics, and other treasures from their Egyptian neighbors.
 2. God was the one who gave the Israelites favor so that the Egyptians gave what they asked.
 3. God was also the one who gave Israel's craftsmen and skilled women the talents that they used for the construction of the tabernacle and its furnishings.
 4. The Israelites had previously used these same talents and treasures to make the golden calf.
 5. Now they were to use them to build the true place of worship.
 6. It is easy for us to be selfish when it comes to our possessions, our time, and our talents.
 7. We need to remind ourselves that God is the one who has given us these things.
 8. We need to see that it is a great privilege to use our energies and our resources for the sake of Christ's church.
 9. In the words of Douglas Stuart, "The highest honor a person can have in connection with anything he or she owns and might otherwise have used for self is seeing it given over to and incorporated into that which God thereafter owns and uses for his

honor." [751]

IV. God Creates Willing Hearts

- A. This brings us to the last part of our passage, verses 20-29, where we see that God creates willing hearts.
1. The thing that especially stands out in these verses is the repeated use of phrases like "everyone whose heart stirred him" and "All who were of a willing heart" to describe the people's response to God's call for contributions.
 2. The people gave of themselves and of their resources voluntarily, not under compulsion.
 3. They did not give grudgingly but cheerfully.
 4. In fact, they were so cheerful in their giving that they gave too much.
 5. We learn in the next chapter that Moses had to tell the people to stop bringing contributions because the craftsmen had more than enough to work with.
 6. This is the kind of giving that pleases God.
 7. God takes no pleasure in gifts that are given out of a forced sense of duty.
 8. As Paul told the church in Corinth, "God loves a cheerful giver." (2 Cor. 9:7)
- B. What was it that produced such extraordinary generosity in the hearts of God's people?
1. It was certainly not something that they generated.

2. We have seen far too many examples of their fickleness and ingratitude to say that.
 3. God was the one who gave his people willing hearts.
 4. Their cheerful giving was their grateful response to the mercy that God had extended to them after their sin with the golden calf.
 5. The willingness of their hearts stands as a beautiful example of how God renews our wills when he pours out his grace upon us.
 6. The Spirit stirs up our hearts to display our gratitude by giving of ourselves, our time, and our possessions to serve and honor the Lord.
- C. The way to stir up your heart for willing service to the Lord is to meditate often upon God's goodness and mercy.
1. Think about all that the Lord has done for you, all that he gives you.
 2. Don't just think about temporal blessings — things like your family, your health, your job, your possessions.
 3. While you should certainly thank God for those things, none of them will last.
 4. Think about the fact that in Christ God pours out blessings on you that will never fade away.
 5. As Paul says in Ephesians 1, God "has blessed in Christ us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places." (Eph. 1:3)
 6. Christ is the source of your new birth, your justification, your adoption, your sanctification, your eventual glorification.
 7. In Christ you have redemption, reconciliation, the forgiveness of all of your sins — even the ones that you have committed again and

again and again.

8. The more you reflect upon all that God has done for you in Christ, the more willing you will be to offer your body as a living sacrifice to him.
9. And remember, God works through his people's grateful responses to his grace to build his church.
10. So express your thanks to God by giving of yourself, your time, and your resources for the sake of Christ's church.
11. When you think of the church, the bride of Christ, let this be the cry of your heart:

*For her my tears shall fall,
For her my prayers ascend;
To her my cares and toils be giv'n,
Till toils and cares shall end.*