

That I May Dwell Among Them

Exodus 25:1-40

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September 29, 2002

Now if we were going to outline this passage together we would divide it into four parts. The introduction to the building of the tabernacle and of all its furnishings is in verses 1-9. There we have the call for costly gifts to build the tabernacle. The second part of the chapter is in verses 10-22 where we get the instructions for the ark of the testimony or the ark of the covenant. The third part of the chapter is in verses 23-30, where we get the instructions for the bread of presence. And the fourth part of the chapter is found in verses 31-40, where we get the instructions for the golden lamp stand. But I am going to concentrate especially on verses 1-9 and on verse 40, because, Exodus 25 sets forth key spiritual principles for all true worship and in the midst of these divine instructions for the sanctuary and its furnishings, I want you to see several abiding principles for worship. In fact there are 5 that I would like to point out, which are set forth here in Exodus chapter 25.

The LORD said to Moses, "Tell the Israelites to bring me an offering. You are to receive the offering for me from each man whose heart prompts him to give. These are the offerings you are to receive from them: gold, silver and bronze; blue, purple and scarlet yarn and fine linen; goat hair; ram skins dyed red and hides of sea cows; acacia wood; olive oil for the light; spices for the anointing oil and for the fragrant incense; and onyx stones and other gems to be mounted on the ephod and breast piece. "Then have them make a sanctuary for me, and I will dwell among them. Make this tabernacle and all its furnishings exactly like the pattern I will show you.

As we look at verses 1-9, I want you to see 5 things in that passage and we'll reiterate the 5th thing that we see there by also looking down to verse 40. In verses 1-9, we find a call for costly and free giving for the building of the sanctuary, and we find a directive for strict obedience to God's commandment in the making of the tabernacle. But we also see a call for willing worship, for costly worship. A description of God's desire for communion with His people, and an expression of the importance of our obedience in worship. Look at verses 1 and 2, because we are going to find 5 worship principles in verses 1-9 alone.

I. Willing worship, costly worship, God's condescension, God's desire for

communion with His people, and the importance of obedience in worship.

First verses 1 and 2. In these verses God commands Moses to raise a contribution for the building of the sanctuary. But notice verse 2, tell the sons of Israel to raise a contribution for Me. From every man whose heart moves him. The contribution, in other words, is to be voluntary and free. Now think of it my friends. These people have been slaves. Nothing that they have done has been voluntary. Now comes the time for them to do what they were made to do. They were not made to be slaves of Pharaoh. They were made to be servants of the living God. Yet, their gift to the building of the place where they will meet the living God and thus fulfill the function of their very reason for being, is to be voluntary. They are to give from willing hearts. Their contribution is to be voluntary and free.

Surely there is a huge message in that for us. It also speaks to us about the importance of our own willingness in giving. The apostle Paul speaks of this in Corinthians and elsewhere. But, it also speaks to us about willing worship. We learn here that true worship is willing worship. It is to be given by every man whose heart moves him. If our worship does not spring from hearts filled with gratitude for God's grace, from hearts that long to worship the living God, if it is not coming from heart felt response to God for who He is and what He has done, then our worship is hollow.

Some of you have taught before, and you've had students raise that faithful question, "Is this going to be on the test?" Now, you immediately know when they ask you, "Is this going to be on the test?" that they do not care anything at all about what you have been teaching them. The only reason they want to know it, is so that they can pass your test and get out of your class. It's a very disheartening thing. And God is saying, He wants none of that in the attitude of His people when they come into His courts with praise. He wants none of that grudging spirit of disinterest when we come into His courts with praise. Is that your attitude? Do we have to keep the Lord's Day? Do we have to worship on Sunday morning and Sunday evening? Do I really have to give to the church? All of those things manifest the heart that is not voluntarily overflowing with praise to God with His goodness. And the very first principle which God sets forth in the section on worship in Exodus 25 is that true worship is willing worship. It is freely offered, because of our love to God our thanksgiving for who He is and for what He has done. And it is our business to learn to grow in that kind of willing worship.

That's not the only thing, though; there's a second thing to learn. Look at verses 3-7. Here we have a specification of the kinds of contributions that God wants. He wants gold, silver and bronze, blue, purple and scarlet material, fine linens, goat hair, ram skin, porpoise skin, acacia wood, oil for lighting, spices for the anointing oil and for fragrant incense, onyx stones and setting stones for the ephod and for the breast piece. In other words, very costly and very beautiful materials are to

be used for making this wilderness sanctuary.

Now think of it. These people have been up to fairly recently slaves. Slaves are not reputed to have tremendous earned income. Yes, in God's mercy they had spoiled the Egyptians. The Egyptians had given to them many things, many material blessings, stones and precious metals and other sorts of things. And yes, some of these other resources that they could bring to the Lord were close by. But, by and large, God is asking slaves to lavishly express the priority of God in the furnishing of goods for the place of worship.

And doesn't that bring up another principle of true worship? Doesn't that remind us that worship is important to God? And what we give reveals what we care about, what we really care about. For God to ask former slaves to give lavishly to the construction of this tabernacle surely speaks of the importance of worship, surely speaks to the importance of the presence of God amongst His people, and the fact that He calls upon them to give lavishly, even extravagantly, reminds us that what we give reveals what we really care about.

There's a second thing that we learn. Worship is costly worship. Years and years later, when God had spared Jerusalem from the destroyer, from the plague, from the angel of death, you will remember that David purposed to set up an altar to offer thanksgiving offerings outside of Jerusalem on the very spot where the death angel had stopped his march toward Jerusalem. And the owner of that property, who was a Jebusite (they were the former occupants of Jerusalem), said to David, "I'll give you the site. I'll give you the site. You don't need to buy it from me. I'll give it to you." Do you remember David's response? "I will not offer a sacrifice to the Lord that cost me nothing." He realized that though the true worship of God comes freely and willingly from our hearts, that does not mean it's not costly." And we see that principle right here in Exodus chapter 25.

There is a third thing. Look at verse 8, just the first sentence of verse 8. "Let them construct a sanctuary for Me." Now Exodus chapter 26 tells you what this sanctuary is. In fact, the word that God is going to use in verse 9 is going to tell you what this sanctuary is. Now *sanctuary* may bring to your mind something glorious and beautiful, like the place that you're sitting in right now, but Exodus 26 makes it clear that God is asking Israel to build Him a tent. Take that in for a minute my friends. The God of the universe is asking Israel to build Him a tent, not a palace, not a castle, not a cathedral, but a tent. The tabernacle would have been something like the tent of a desert sheik. Yes, that would have been a lavish, in some ways a grand place, to entertain one's visitors, but it's so clear here that in God asking Israel to build Him a tent, we are seeing a picture of His marvelous condescending grace.

Do you remember 2 Samuel 7:6? Do you remember what's happening in 2 Samuel 7? David has been burdened in his heart to build a temple for the Lord. He has sensed the disproportion, he has sensed the inappropriateness of the

fact that he is now dwelling in a magnificent palace in Jerusalem and the Ark of the Covenant, the very symbol of the presence of God with Israel, is dwelling in a tent. And so he goes to Nathan and he says, Nathan this isn't right. I'm in a palace. God's dwelling place. This visible symbol of the meeting place between God and His people, it's in a tent. It's just not right for me to be in a palace and for God's Ark of the Covenant to be in a tent. So here's what I want to do, Nathan. I want to build a palace, a temple, a house for God. And Nathan says, the desire of your heart is good, David, go ahead and do it.

But then God comes to David in 2 Samuel 7:6, and He says this: David, I have dwelt in a tent with My people from the time that I called them out of Egypt. When did I ever ask them to build a palace for Me? And He goes on to say to David, Oh no, David, you won't build Me a house. I'll build you a house. He sensed the marvelous condescension of God. If His people are going to be nomads in the wilderness, then He wants to be in a tent with them in their midst. God, the God of the universe, asks for a tent to be built so that He might dwell in the midst of His people. What a glorious, marvelous condescending grace. Isn't that what we see in John 1:14, "That the word became flesh and dwelt in a tent among us."

You know, *The Westminster Confession* catches this beautifully. If you turn to page 852 of your hymnals, to the 7th chapter of *The Westminster Confession*, it's the passage on the covenant. And we read, "The distance between God and the creature is so great that all the reasonable creatures do owe obedience unto Him as their creator, yet they could never have any fruition of Him as their blessedness and reward but by some voluntary condescension on God's part which He hath been pleased to express by way of covenant." And here the Ark of the Covenant, the symbol of His presence with His people as their fruition and blessedness, is going to dwell where? In a castle? No. In a palace? No. In a temple? No. In a tent. Because that's how committed God is to dwelling in His people's midst. You see we find here a third principle of worship. There is no worship possible apart from God's condescension. There is no way that we can have God as our fruition and our blessedness unless God condescends to meet with us. And here he is. You do not have to wait until the New Testament. Here is the God of Israel, here is the Lord of Hosts, here is the God of the universe, the creator of the world, saying, "Israel, here's what I would like you to make Me. I'd like you to make Me a nice tent, so that I can be with you."

Now that leads us to the 4th principle of worship that we learned in this passage and it follows on from this. Look at the second half of verse 8. God tells Moses the reason why He wants the tent. He wants the tent so that He may dwell among His people. Now get this point, He doesn't want the tent so that He can dwell in it. Even when Solomon will build a glorious, a much larger temple for the Lord than this tent, even when Solomon does that, he knows that God will not dwell in that temple. Nothing on earth can create, can contain the creator of heaven and earth. The temple, the earth itself, is a footstool to Him. The tent isn't the place that God will dwell inside. Notice Moses words again, "That He may

dwell among His people.” Not so that God can dwell in the tent, but the tent is for him to dwell among His people. The point is, “I want to be in the tent so that I can be right in the thick of you. I want to be with you. I want to be beside you. I want to be around you.”

The point is fellowship with God. The aim, the goal, the end of worship, the goal of the covenant of grace is everlasting fellowship with the living God. And notice, the building of that tent is right in the center of Israel with the tribes the twelve tribes surrounding it, is a picture of fellowship with God. God orders construction of the tabernacle that He may dwell among His people. And that shows us that God's purposes for the ordinances of worship is so that the people will understand that the great goal of His covenant is that they will be His people and He will be their God. The goal of worship, like the goal of covenant, is spiritual communion with the living God. And if our worship aims for anything less than this, it's not worship.

In worship we come to give to God the glory due His name and what do we come to get? Not our fancies tickled. We come to get Him. We come to get Him. We come to give our praise to Him and we come to get Him. It's like a husband who comes to get his bride. That's what he wants, he wants his wife. He comes for her. And we learn from Exodus chapter 25:8, that God wants a tent so He may dwell among His people, and remind them that the great blessedness of life and worship is everlasting fellowship with the living God.

There's one other thing. Look at verse 9. In verse 9 we read, “According to all that I'm going to show you.” This is the pattern of the tabernacle. “And the pattern of all its furniture so you shall construct it.” In other words, you do it just like I showed it to you on the mountain.

Now turn down to verse 40, “And see that you make them after the pattern for them which was shown to you on the mountain.” Moses is instructed here to do exactly as God showed him in the construction of the tabernacle and the furniture. And already we see here the emphasis on God's instructions, and an emphasis on our obedience to God's revealed instructions. We are to do only what God tells us to do in worship. We are to worship God according to His directions.

The repetition of a phrase, “And Moses did all that the Lord commanded him,” which will be repeated over and over in the end of this book, also emphasizes this point. In other words, God's worship is to be carefully ordered according to His instructions, not according to our taste, our whims, our desires. God demands that the tabernacle and its furnishings be made after the pattern shown on the mountain.

And that is the essence of what the reformers talked about, when they talked about the scriptural or the regulative principle of worship. That is, the content, the

motivation, the aim of worship is to be determined by God and God alone. We're to sing the Bible. We're to read the Bible. We're to pray the Bible. We're to preach the Bible. We're to administer the sacraments which confirm the promises of the Bible. These are the things that God has told us to do in worship, and you need to ask yourself again, "When I evaluate the worship of God, not as a detached spectator, as if I'm a literary or a dietary critic of some sort, but when I evaluate the worship of God and the house of worship that I'm privileged to come into to worship the living God, am I evaluating it according to my own tastes and inclinations, or am I evaluating it according to what God has commanded in His word? Do I care that the thing that is central is the word of God? That word is read and it's preached. That scriptural songs are sung. Not necessarily directly out of the Scripture or directly out of the psalms, but the stuff that we're singing is suffused with scriptural theology and content? That prayers are being lifted up? That the people of God are singing praises? That the sacraments are being administered?" Are those the things that you care about? The further we get away from a concern about what God wants in worship, and the closer we get to a concern about our own personal tastes or evaluations of style, the further we are away from biblical worship and perhaps the less we actually worship. There's a message in Exodus 25 for all of us. God determines how we worship Him, because just as who you worship determines what you will become, how you worship will determine in the end who you worship.

Let's pray. Our Lord and our God, we ask that You would teach us from Your word about worship. And that we would be willing worshipers freely giving praise and glory and adoration to You, because of the free gift of Jesus Christ to us. We ask now that You would receive our prayers and that You would aide our worship. And that You would bless our fellowship and You would give us Yourself. In Jesus name, Amen.

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