

Gifts and Craftsmen

Exodus 35:20–36:7

By [Dr. J. Ligon Duncan](#)

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I'd like you to turn with me to the book of Exodus again: Exodus chapter 35, and we'll begin in verse 20 tonight. It would be easy to get lost in the details of this passage and to be lulled to sleep and to miss the repeated and obvious grand emphases that we find here, so there are several that I want to highlight for you. For one, you're going to see the enthusiasm and the willingness of the people to give to the work of the building of the tabernacle. That is all over this passage. It's repeatedly emphasized by Moses just how willing and enthusiastic the people of God were.

Secondly, you're going to catch something of the sheer pleasure of God's people in doing His bidding. One of the things that comes through loud and clear here is that the people of God are delighting in doing this; they don't feel like they're being forced to do it, made to do something against their will, doing something that they're hating every second of. They love what they are doing in giving for the building of the tabernacle. We'll talk a little bit about one big reason why they are so excited about it. But you get a feeling of the sheer pleasure of the people of God in doing this giving.

Thirdly, I think you're going to see something of the generosity of the people in their giving. One of the major sections of this passage indeed highlights just how lavishly the people of God gave. And then finally, we're going to see something of God's provision for the wisdom and the skills necessary to do His bidding. He's the one who's commanded the building of the tabernacle. He's given the designs of the tabernacle, but when He calls the workmen, the skilled laborers, who are going to pull this thing together, this passage will emphasize that He in fact ingifts them to be able to do His bidding, to be able to carry out His commands. And we'll look at each of those emphases in this passage tonight. So let's turn in our Bibles to Exodus chapter 35 beginning in verse 20; this is God's word:

Exodus 35:20-36:7

Amen. This is God's word, may He add His blessing to it. Let's pray.

Lord and God, we thank you for this Your word. Teach us from it tonight. This we

ask in Jesus' name, Amen.

Israel is in advent mode in this passage. Advent is that season of the church year in which churches that observe the extensive church calendar celebrate both the first and the second comings of the Lord. And Israel is in advent mode. Why? Because they are preparing the tabernacle so that God will come in His presence and dwell in their midst. So in this passage, this overflow of generosity is a reflection of the fact that Israel is in advent mode; they are enthusiastically preparing for the coming of the presence of the Lord. And that reality is driving, or rather enlisting, their involvement and supplying them with motive and with energy for generosity and service. This passage gives us a little flavor of that motive and energy and generosity and service. And I just want you to see three things. The passage really outlines around three “thens” in the passage. If you look at Exodus 35:20, you’ll see “Then all the congregation....” If you look at Exodus 35:30, you’ll see “Then Moses....” And then if you look at Exodus 36:2, you’ll see again “Then Moses....” Those are the introductions to three discrete sections in this passage and that will outline our study tonight from Exodus 35 verse 20 down to verse 29, “Then all the congregation.” This passage emphasizes Israel's willingness to give. Then if you look at Exodus 35 verse 30 over to chapter 36 verse 1, this passage beginning with “Then Moses said to the sons of Israel.” This passage emphasizes God as the one who supplies the wisdom and the skill for the doing of His bidding. And then finally, if you look at Exodus 36 verse 2 “Then Moses,” this passage emphasizes the generous giving of Israel. Let's look at each of these passages together.

I. The people were willing to give to God.

Let's begin in Exodus 35:20 and look down to verse 29. Here we see Israel's willingness to give. And what we're presented here with is a picture of a night unto universal and willing provision of the tabernacle. In verse 20, everybody leaves; Moses is addressing them and everybody leaves. There is going to be no on-the-spot coercion, “Okay, empty your pockets now.” You know, it's nothing like that. He gives a command, “This is what the Lord wants you to do, but He only wants those of you to do it who are willing to do it.” And so everybody goes away. Moses is left alone; they go back to their own tents, and that way they get to come back on their own. If they're going to give, that's going to be up to their business as to when and how much and what and all of that. No on-the-spot coercion. If they're going to give, they're going to have to come back and give on their own.

And then in verse 21 and following, what we're told is this, and notice the first word, “Everyone whose heart stirred him, and everyone whose spirit moved him came and brought the Lord's contribution for the work.” Now of course, that could mean only those whose hearts stirred them, but when you read the rest of the chapter, you can see that Moses' actual emphasis there is on the massive and

universal response of the people of God to this call. All the people were stirred to give, all the people were moved in heart to give, people from every aspect and walk of life, they were stirred in their hearts to give. This was almost a universal experience amongst the people of God. Men and women, people with gold or silver or bronze, people that had skins or valuable materials, people with stones, precious stones and spice and oil, rulers and tribal chieftains we're told here, but also women who spin and have skill in spinning; all of these people, everybody contributed. And we have here an emphasis on the universalness of the giving and the willingness of the giving.

Notice again, "Everyone whose heart stirred him and everyone whose spirit moved him came and brought to the Lord's contribution." But look again in verse 22, "All whose heart moved them;" verse 24, "Everyone who could make his contribution;" verse 25, "All the skilled women;" verse 26, "All the women whose heart stirred;" verse 27, "The rulers." The emphasis here is the range and the willingness of all the people. People from every walk of life: the rich, the poor, the rulers and women who were experts in spinning yarn; all people, everyone in between bringing different kinds of gifts were moved of themselves.

In other words, we're seeing an example here of a free and willing worship. Remember that had been commanded back in Exodus 25 verses 1 and 2. In contrast to the golden calf where Aaron said, "Okay, I'm going to make an idol. Everybody has to bring such-and-such and we'll make an idol." In contrast to that in Exodus 25 verses 1 and 2 we see God's command about the tabernacle, "Only those who want to give, give." And here we see that working itself out in practice. The people willingly, freely give and we're seeing something here of the attitude of all people who love the Lord. All people who long for the Lord's presence and are looking for His coming will be willing in the way they give to His kingdom. We're working to build a building, too. And that building is not First Presbyterian Church, although we have to do that from time to time. I'm not talking about the church building at First Presbyterian Church. I'm talking about the body called First Presbyterian Church and then the larger kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ of which we are only a component part of that body. We're working to build that building, the house of God, the people of God, the fellowship of God, the church of the Lord Jesus Christ. That's what we're desirous of building because what does the New Testament say? That is the place of His dwelling, which is the place of His presence.

If you want to be in the presence of God, where do you meet Him? You meet Him when His people gather in the household of faith, the people of God, the assembly of the holy ones. We're working to build that. We want people who are not part of that assembly to be part of that assembly. We want people who are in that assembly to be focused on that goal, glorifying God, enjoying presence with Him forever and ever here and hereafter. We're working to build the Lord's house. It's not a physical structure, although we have to do that from time to time in terms of helping the people of God to grow and ministering to them.

But the point is here: all the people who long for the Lord's presence and are looking for His coming are willing in their giving to the kingdom. And that makes us ask some questions ourselves, doesn't it: how willing, how generous are we in giving to the kingdom? Not just giving of our money, not just giving of our material resources, but in giving of ourselves to the work of the kingdom and giving to one another and giving to the Lord in sacrifice. And what's our attitude?

You know, the thing that depresses a teacher the most is to hear that dreaded question, "Is this going to be on the test?" Because it means that that student doesn't really care about this glorious nugget of knowledge that you're imparting. He just wants to know if he's going to be tested on it. He has no investment in the learning itself, in the knowledge itself. And is that kind of our attitude? "Do I have to do this? Do I really have to study...? Do I have to memorize this? Am I going to have to regurgitate it on a test?" That attitude is not the attitude of the one who is looking for the coming of the Lord. It's not in "Is this going to be on the test? Do I have to do this?" That's not a spirit that becomes those who are looking for the coming of the Lord. There's no grudging disinterest in serving the Lord when you're looking for the coming of the Lord. So, "Do I have to give?" or "Do I have to serve?" or "Do I have to come to church?" Those sorts of questions are not becoming of those who are looking for the coming of the Lord. All the people who long for the Lord's presence and are looking for His coming are willing in their giving to His kingdom. They want to give Him praise, they want to give His people help, they want to show His people love, they want to see that His people are fed in the word and taught and built up, they want to give so that evangelism can be done, they want to share the gospel themselves; that's characteristic of people who are looking for the presence of the Lord and we learn that from this passage.

II. God gives gifts to His people to serve Him.

But there's one thing; there's another thing too. Look at verses 30 in chapter 35 through the very first verse of 36. God is the in-gifter of His people and we see this in these verses. The filling and the gifting and the equipping of the builders of the tabernacle clearly comes from God. This passage here is a parallel to Exodus 31:1-11. That was the passage where Bezalel and Oholiab were first appointed by the Lord to have this strategic position. But there are several noticeable differences in this passage from that passage and let me just highlight three of them. For one, there is a stress here on God's equipping Bezalel first with the wisdom and expertise he needed for the craftsmanship and design of the tabernacle. Though God had give the general outlines, there was a lot of design work that remained to be done and what you needed was kind of a combination architect and designer. You had to have somebody who could do some design of stones, that could design patterns in precious stones but who could do some basic architectural rendering. So Bezalel has to be sort of part-architect, part

designer. That's the first thing.

But then notice this very interesting thing that is said in verse 34, "He has also put in his heart to teach." You see, Bezalel couldn't just have this knowledge in and of himself, he needed to be able to tell other people how to do this stuff because he couldn't build the tabernacle on his own. And so he's not only a gifted artisan who is sort of part-architect and part-designer, he's also able to teach, he's able to convey to others how to do that, which is totally unlike my Greek professor in seminary. I didn't go to RTS or I'm sure I would have had a Greek professor who could really communicate, but my Greek professor in seminary, if you didn't get it the first time and you said, "Dr. so-and-so, I didn't understand that. Could you explain it again?" Now he wouldn't say anything differently the second time but he would move closer to you and say it more slowly and louder. It was sort of like you were talking to a foreigner, you know, "I said..." and so here it came. And the problem was the guy -- he was a graduate of the University of Pennsylvania -- he knew like 17 languages, languages came totally naturally to him, but he did not comprehend poor mortal dolts like myself that needed help in learning Greek and Hebrew and other languages like this. And so he just looked at you with this conservative look and repeated it again. And you weren't going to ask again, "I still don't understand" so you just sort of shook your head and then you asked the buddy in your class, who was good in Greek, to help you after class was over. Well Bezalel, by God's grace, was not like my Greek professor. He was capable of teaching and conveying this truth, but notice it specifically said "God is the one who gave him that ability." Just like God gave him the ability to be an architect and designer, God gave him that ability to teach. Hold that in the back of your mind.

One last thing: a third difference is that we are told that Bezalel had the ability to actually implement the design and perform the task of building. So he has to be not only part architect and designer and teacher, but he also has to be engineer and construction manager. I mean you want to talk about a multi-talented guy, he is a jack-of-all-trades, he's a master of all trades. And this is the man that God puts in charge. But what's the emphasis of the passage: that all the gifts that this man has come from God. God gets the glory; God's the one who gave us this man. You notice he doesn't say, "Boy, if it weren't for me you guys would be in trouble." No, God gives him everything that he has, everything that he has to do what God told him to do. When God calls us to serve He provides the competencies required for our services so that when, by His grace, we accomplish the work that He gives to us, He gets the credit, not us.

You remember Augustine's beautiful phrase, "Lord, the good in me is due to you, the rest is my fault." Don't you get that here: every good thing that Bezalel has came from the Lord, came from the Lord and that's always the way. The Lord gives us gifted people; we praise God for that. But it's not to their praise, it's to Him. He could take it away just like that. It's His; He gets all the glory. Not to us O Lord, not to us but to you be the glory.

III. Israel gave abundantly, over and above what was required.

One last thing. If you look at verses 2 through 7 of chapter 36 you'll see something of the super-abundant giving of Israel. This response is so great that Moses, as opposed to starting a building campaign, has to start a "stop-the-giving campaign." You know, every preacher that reads this passage is salivating, and he's saying, "Lord, just once in my life let me be able to do a stop-the-giving campaign." Don't you think I haven't thought of it, folks, don't you think I haven't thought of it.

And so Moses calls the leaders and the other craftsmen and tells them to go to work in verse 2, and they begin going to work and they begin assembling the material that's being given to them in verse 3. And then in verses 4 and 5 they all get together and they go to Moses, and you get the impression that this happened real quick; this wasn't like weeks that they went. We're not told exactly how long, but you get the idea pretty quick they come to Moses and say, "Moses, we don't need anymore." And he replies, "Say what?!" and they say, "We don't need anymore. We have everything we need. You need to tell the people to stop giving." And so Moses has to go out and make a proclamation and a decree to stop giving. He has to start the "Israel, stop building the tabernacle" campaign or "stop giving to the building of the tabernacle" campaign. We read in verse 5 that the men said that the people were bringing much more than enough for the construction work that the Lord commanded us to perform. And so Moses, in verse 6, issues a command and circulates a proclamation throughout the camp saying, "Let no man or woman any longer perform work for the contributions of the sanctuary." So that the people are restrained from bringing any more, Moses issues an order to stop giving.

What's the point here? The point is that the people were generous in their giving, and that all the people were generous in their giving because they longed for the Lord's presence. Just like they were willing in their giving because they wanted the Lord to be in their midst. They were generous in their giving because they wanted to have the tabernacle so that the Lord would dwell in their midst. You see, all the people who long for the Lord's presence and who are looking for His coming are generous in their giving to His kingdom because they love Him and they long for Him and they are saying always in their hearts, "Come, Lord Jesus, come quickly." And that's what they want more than anything else and so their giving reflects it. The all of their givings, not just their stewardship of material resources but giving of the totality of who they are reflects that they long for the Lord's presence and they are looking for His coming.

I think the relevance of that to us is pretty apparent, isn't it? This passage could have been written for us today. The Lord has given us much -- does our giving to Him reflect His giving to us? And does it reflect a real desire on our part to be

with Him, to dwell with Him, to know communion with Him, and to enjoy His presence. Pray God so, that if not, may God change us. Let's pray.

Heavenly Father, we thank you for your word. Change us by it; make us generous. We thank you for this beautiful picture of Israel. She is not always so comely in the wilderness. Sometimes we despise her and look down on her, but in your mercy you granted her heart to be generous and free in her giving. Make us like that. We ask it in Jesus' name, Amen.

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