

Exodus 35:30-36:7 Nov.24 2013 topic/theme: Stewardship/management

What if your landlord or your mortgage loan officer said this:

"I've noticed you're struggling a lot right now with your living situation. Your house has structural issues. Things are breaking down all the time. It's kind of small. You don't have much of a back yard. Your neighborhood isn't safe. And I know it's impossible for you to get yourself into a better situation. You have debts and obligations that make it unworkable.

Tell you what: My Son worked to build you a home. It has everything your heart desires and more: it is a home beyond your wildest dreams. Beautiful yard. Safe neighborhood. And: it's free! It's my gift to you! While you're packing up and preparing for your move, spread the Word among your friends and family. There's one for them, as well. Don't worry, you won't have in-law issues or spats with friends. You won't be dealing with gossip, backstabbing, or cliques. You won't be competing for the best Christmas displays, either. You're going to get along with your neighbors perfectly.

You owe money on your present home? Liens on your property? I'll take care of those issues. I'll remove all obstacles.

You made a few dents in the wall from those bouts of anger you had last week? Your son scribbled crayon all over the walls? You stained the carpet? No worries. I've got that all covered as well.

You want to contribute something to this? Can't. It's all taken care of already. In fact your credit is so poor, any contribution on your part would be impossible."

You know the word of your landlord/loan officer. It is completely true. So the immediate question is: how would you thank someone who did so much for you?

Then you look around you, at the office of the one who worked so hard & gave so much for you. Here's your opportunity! "I'll bring flowers, to greet everyone who comes here." "I'll put up a nice sign out front, so people can see what he is offering here." "I'll take out flyers/cards, to direct everyone to the place I learned of such a great gift – a place meant to bring the same good news & benefit to others." "And if anyone needs it, I'll help them get here – a ride, or money to catch a bus/cab."

This (modern day parable) is an attempt to explain the response seen from the nation of Israel in Exodus 35.

Why did the people of Israel, so willingly and so generously, use their talents and gifts in service to God for building & furnishing the Tabernacle? The answer is in the Lord's compassion, grace, love, forgiveness and faithfulness – bounding up from the Lord's personal history with each of them.

The Lord had given His people every reason for what we see. The Lord had made them His people – calling them to *faith*. He had rescued them, when hope seemed almost gone, when they were helpless to escape their slavery in Egypt. The Lord rose up in a mighty display of power, broke their chains, piloted them through walls of water and crushed their enemies. He miraculously rained food down upon them in a desert wasteland (and forgave them when they later grumbled, "We detest this miserable food!") The Lord forgave *all* their sins – even their drunken idolatry and orgy before a golden calf that they built and hailed as their savior from Egypt. That ugly scene from Israel's history stains the pages just a couple chapters prior to Exodus ch.35. Listen to a few of the words spoken to Moses at Mt. Sinai following that episode: *"The Lord, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin" - Exodus 34:6-7.* These words were treasured & circulated among the Israelites from that day forward generation after generation (see the book of Jonah, as an example).

It is now approximately 3500 years since the events of Exodus. Sure, some things have changed from 3500 years ago. To show that:

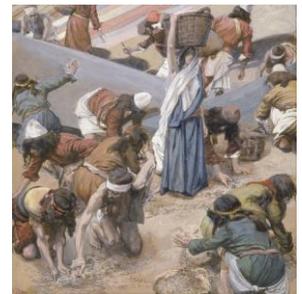
- Here is a rendition of what the Tabernacle of Ex.35 might have looked like.



The Tabernacle became their church of the day - the center for their worship. Compared with our church building, what would you conclude: same, or different? It looks markedly different.

- Here is an artist's attempt to draw Israelites from that time period.

Compared with the group of God's people sitting around you, what would you say: look about the same, or quite different? (Careful how you answer this, or you might get an earful from someone more fashion savvy than yourself.) Different.



- Here is a priest of ancient Israel dressed for service.

Compared to your Pastor today, as your servant at the house of the Lord: look the same, or somewhat different? (Remember. I'm watching as you answer.) Different.

Different buildings, different times, different clothing... but, let's highlight the things in common with our brothers & sisters in the faith from so long ago.

- *The Savior – the Savior promised has come. From the first moment our Savior was wrapped in his mother's womb, to the moment his body was encased in a burial shroud ~ in each moment of our Savior's life lived for you ~ in the horrible debt of Hell He paid for you ~ God had you and me in mind. Jesus said, "I did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give my life as the payment... so that I get to have you with me for all eternity – so that you are a people of my very own." (Matt. 20:28 and Mark 10:45)*
- *Now, before me sit a group of people - I am part of the group too - to whom the Lord has revealed himself: "The Lord, the gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abounding in love & faithfulness & forgiveness." Those ancient words live on.*
- *How wonderful this is! "You are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a people belonging to God that you may declare the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His wonderful light." (1 Pt)*

Grace. (Nothing in us – nothing from us – brings this.) God's undeserved love. That's the way it was for God's Old Testament people. Grace is the way it is for us. We have the same mighty loving God as the Israelites of old.

So: what's the first thing that comes to mind for you *when you reflect on each act of our loving God*? "How can I thank him-praise him?"

See in Exodus 35:30-36:7, 3 principles vitally important in offering our talents & gifts for service to the Lord:

1. Note the source of our talents & resources for service. "*The Lord **filled** Bezalel with skill, ability and knowledge in all kinds of crafts.*" "*The Lord **has given** both him and Oholiab the ability to teach others. He **has filled** them with skill... and every skilled person **to whom the Lord has given** skill and ability...*" So the source is... (wait for people to say an answer) God.
2. Note the diversity of the talents & resources for service. "*He has filled them with skill to do all kinds of work as craftsmen, designers, embroiderers, weavers... They received all the offerings the Israelites had brought...*" God gives a wide variety of ways to serve – resources offered (material possessions given), skills offered (time and talents given). Both are notable and valuable ways to serve. Some people to teach, some to do the various tasks, some to give the supplies, some overlap between all those groupings of individuals.
3. *And the 3rd principle: "Filled with the Spirit of God... every skilled person who was willing to come and do the work... the people continued to bring freewill offerings..."* Earlier in this chapter, it is recorded: "*...everyone who was willing and whose heart moved him came and brought an offering to the Lord for the work... all who were willing, men and women alike, came...*" (35:5,20-22,26,29). Were you to attempt a 1-word summary of the attitude, what would it be? Willing. This is thankfulness to the Lord for his free and faithful love to them.

As we turn and look this direction (motion to congregation), use God's Word to get an accurate snapshot of what you see. "*We have different gifts, according to the grace given us*" [Romans 12:6-8]. "*Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father*" [James 1:17]. "*There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit... different kinds of service, but the same Lord... to each believer gifts of the Holy Spirit are given... he gives them to each one...*" [1 Corinthians 12:4-11]. And, to return to the underlying principle of attitude: "For Christ's love compels us, because we are convinced that One died for [us] all... and was raised again" [2 Cor. 5:14-15].

As you go about in our world, eager to offer service to our Savior, expect to face temptation on multiple fronts. There is the temptation – in our always fast-paced, often self-absorbed society – to get so busy... and to follow the pattern of thinking: "What can I get out of this? I'm sacrificing my time/resources. Is it worth it?"

You may find yourself tempted in this way: to appreciate the talents God has given to you~ to even bask in the attention they bring from others ~ but to forget to thank the Giver. Or you might do the opposite: overlook the gifts God has granted, and struggle with feelings of inadequacy, a low sense of worth, or even resentment.

Time with God is the answer. His Word (the Bible) fills you with the truth about how much he values you, his gifts to you, and your place in his family – alongside fellow blood-bought believers. "Daily he forgives all my sins. The times I forget all about what he's done for me. The times I forget to serve because I got entangled in selfish, worldly thinking. My Lord Jesus washes me clean. Through faith in Jesus I stand holy in my God's sight."

You notice: everything is turned upside down from the world's way of thinking. He, our Head and Master, has served us. And now everything is right for us. We *want* to offer our service to him & others. Our thanks.

So let's think of the opportunities. Look at the modern day diversity of gifts for service:

- to some God has given skill in working with their hands (think: work days, church cleaning, altar care, sewing projects, etc.).
- There are those with the gift of language & communication skills (think: greeting visitors & inviting others, like for upcoming events: the concert on Dec.6th, the Christmas for Kids & other Christmas services; think of a pattern of getting into deeper conversations with the people here at church, in order to support in a greater way).
- We see people with skills in music (think: cantors, choirs, keyboardists & instrumentalists); continue to encourage the younger members, so that we have new & varied & continuing gifts put to service in this arena of our worship.
- Some people have interest in technology (think: website page; think: sound system setup; think: digital recording & posting of sermons on the web, which we'd like to do).
- & Some gifts will always go unnamed – maybe unnoticed. They are put to work behind-the-scenes. They are not unimportant. They are service, in thanks to the Lord who has saved us.

As you hear these examples, say a prayer of thanks/appreciation for all the people God has placed around you to serve us in these ways. Say a prayer-request: Lord, continue to work in me a willing heart, with eyes attune to ways to serve.

God-given gifts, distributed according to God's wisdom, with a Spirit-worked willingness to offer them in service. Just like everyone could take part then (Holding poster of tabernacle), everyone has ways to serve now. Some have more material resources to offer than others. Some may be able to offer more in another way: their skills willingly offered, the labor of their hands freely put to use.

To close, we return to the sight of Jesus: As he washed his disciples' feet, he said: "Unless I wash you, you have no part with me." Then, he went on to tell them: "You are clean." [John 13:8-10] He says, "I am among you as one who serves... and I confer on you a kingdom... so that you may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom..." [Lk. 22:27-30; Matt. 25:34] He describes the Last Day: He, the Master, will dress himself to serve, & he will have his servants [us] recline at the table and he will wait on them. [Lk. 12:35-37] So humbling. So amazing! We are recipients of God's abundant grace. See that and you see your reason to offer your thanks and your very selves to Him. Amen.