

Power for the Mission

Exodus 35-40

We reach the end of the book of Exodus today, and it's been a long journey, yet in the overall history of the people of Israel, we're still just getting started. At this point they've been out of Egypt for about a year – they're still in the wilderness at Mt. Sinai, still a long way from Canaan, which was still occupied by dozens of kings and thousands of people that weren't about to leave without a fight. The Israelites were numerous, but many of them were elderly or children and they didn't have a lot of provisions or weapons. So they had a long way to go with many obstacles in their way. How are they going to make it? How are they going to get all the way to the Promised Land, take possession of it, and carry out God's purposes for them? It doesn't seem possible if you look at their circumstances.

It makes me think about where the church is at in our journey and in completing our mission. Christ has called us out of the world and saved us from sin to join in his mission of making disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey all of his commands. And he tells us in Matthew 24:14 that the gospel must be proclaimed throughout the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come. That's when Christ returns and we reach our Promised Land. But we aren't there yet. We have a long way to go and we face resistance, opposition, and an enemy who is trying to prevent us from getting there. How are we going to make it? How are we going to complete Christ's mission?

Today we are going to see the people of Israel receive something that would give them exactly what they needed to accomplish all God called them to do. And what they received is the same thing need to accomplish our mission as well. Christ didn't give us a mission without also giving us what we need to accomplish it and I want us to be encouraged by that today.

Last week we talked about the golden calf, which was a huge failure and near catastrophe for the people of Israel. It nearly ended in their destruction, but they repented and were forgiven – the covenant was renewed, and they were ready to keep moving forward. Now it's back to business and that business was to build the Tabernacle. Moses had received all the instructions about how to make it, and

now it was time to put everything together. Exodus chapters 35-40 describes this process.

Moses began by gathering and addressing the people and calling everyone whose heart moved them to give contributions for what was needed. He also called all the skilled craftsman to come together to make everything. And here's how the people responded.

Read Exodus 35:20-29.

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.

God moved in their hearts and there was an amazing response among the people. It's a beautiful thing when God's people work together in unity to do what God calls them to do. You can see that this was a community wide effort – everyone whose heart moved them took part in bringing what was needed.

It reminds me of the church family and how the church is supposed to function. Each of us has a part – God designed it that way – and when everyone contributes and does their part the church is built up and strengthened for the work of the ministry. A good example is Hope Alive where many of us came together, both

from East Lincoln and other churches, to serve the community in the name of Christ. It was a lot of work, but with everyone doing their part it was a wonderful beacon of light to our community and very rewarding as well.

That's what was happening in Israel as they prepared to build the tabernacle, and chapter 36 speaks of the overwhelming outpouring of support.

Read Exodus 36:3-7.

And they received from Moses all the contribution that the people of Israel had brought for doing the work on the sanctuary. They still kept bringing him freewill offerings every morning, ⁴ so that all the craftsmen who were doing every sort of task on the sanctuary came, each from the task that he was doing, ⁵ and said to Moses, "The people bring much more than enough for doing the work that the Lord has commanded us to do." ⁶ So Moses gave command, and word was proclaimed throughout the camp, "Let no man or woman do anything more for the contribution for the sanctuary." So the people were restrained from bringing, ⁷ for the material they had was sufficient to do all the work, and more.

Wouldn't that be a nice problem to have? "Stop bringing offerings – we've got too much!" It was an amazing outpouring of support. God stirred in people's hearts and they responded with overwhelming generosity. And as the materials came in, the craftsman went to work. The details are written in chapters 36-39. They were led by two men, Bezalel and Oholiab, whom God specially anointed with the skills necessary to build all the holy objects for the Tabernacle. They carefully made all the curtains and the frames to build the sanctuary, along with the veil and pillars that separated the inner chambers. They made the ark to go in the Most Holy Place, the table, lampstand and altar for the Holy Place, and the bronze basin and altar for the courtyard. Exodus 38 records the weight of metal that was given – after doing the conversion, it was over 2100lbs of gold, 7500lbs of silver, and 5300lbs of bronze. That's worth over \$67 million in today's currency! And to complete the preparations, they carefully made all the garments for the high priest that we looked at a couple weeks ago. This gives you an idea of all that went into it...

Read Exodus 39:32-43.

Thus all the work of the tabernacle of the tent of meeting was finished, and the people of Israel did according to all that the Lord had commanded Moses; so they

did.³³ Then they brought the tabernacle to Moses, the tent and all its utensils, its hooks, its frames, its bars, its pillars, and its bases;³⁴ the covering of tanned rams' skins and goatskins, and the veil of the screen;³⁵ the ark of the testimony with its poles and the mercy seat;³⁶ the table with all its utensils, and the bread of the Presence;³⁷ the lampstand of pure gold and its lamps with the lamps set and all its utensils, and the oil for the light;³⁸ the golden altar, the anointing oil and the fragrant incense, and the screen for the entrance of the tent;³⁹ the bronze altar, and its grating of bronze, its poles, and all its utensils; the basin and its stand;⁴⁰ the hangings of the court, its pillars, and its bases, and the screen for the gate of the court, its cords, and its pegs; and all the utensils for the service of the tabernacle, for the tent of meeting;⁴¹ 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.⁴² According to all that the Lord had commanded Moses, so the people of Israel had done all the work.⁴³ And Moses saw all the work, and behold, they had done it; as the Lord had commanded, so had they done it. Then Moses blessed them.

Everyone who was stirred by the Lord did their part. Those with material goods gave them, those who had skills shared them, the community came together and there was more than enough to complete their assignment. Everything was ready. Now it was time to put it all together.

Exodus 40 tells us that exactly one year after they departed from Egypt, Moses set up the Tabernacle in the camp before Mt. Sinai and put everything in it. Here's a reminder of what it would have looked like: (Picture) After setting it up, he anointed it all with oil to consecrate it to the Lord and make it holy. In the Holy Place he put the bread on the Table, set up the lamps on the lampstand and burned fragrant incense on the altar. He offered the burnt offering and the grain offering on the bronze altar and put water in the bronze basin for washing where he, Aaron, and his sons were washed and then anointed for the priestly service. Everything was set up just as God had said, and the ministry of the Tabernacle was fully functional.

All of that work – all the contributions given, all the preparations and set up – was for one thing, and that hadn't happened yet. There was still one thing missing. And that was the key component in all of this. Without it, all the work would have been for nothing and the people would have been stranded and powerless, unable

to move forward and fulfill the purposes God had for them. Without it they'd never accomplish their mission. But with it, they would. They'd be able to do the impossible. And once the Tabernacle was set up and everything was ready, it happened... This is how the book of book of Exodus comes to a close...

Read Exodus 40:34-38.

Then the cloud covered the tent of meeting, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle. ³⁵ And Moses was not able to enter the tent of meeting because the cloud settled on it, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle. ³⁶ Throughout all their journeys, whenever the cloud was taken up from over the tabernacle, the people of Israel would set out. ³⁷ But if the cloud was not taken up, then they did not set out till the day that it was taken up. ³⁸ For the cloud of the Lord was on the tabernacle by day, and fire was in it by night, in the sight of all the house of Israel throughout all their journeys.

The glory of Yahweh descended from the mountain and filled the Tabernacle. God came to dwell in their very midst. And it was his presence among them that gave them everything they needed to move forward, take possession of the Promised Land and fulfill God's purpose for them. As you read through the Old Testament you see story after story where the people of Israel faced impossible obstacles but were able to overcome them because God was with them, in their midst. He went before them, empowered them, and made a way.

That's how the book of Exodus comes to an end. When we started the people of Israel were slaves in Egypt without hope or purpose – they weren't a people – just slaves of Pharaoh. Now they were God's people – the people of Yahweh. He was their God and they were his people and for the first time ever, he came to dwell with them in the tabernacle.

How are we going to make it through the journey that's set before us? How are we going to accomplish Christ's mission? After preparing his disciples for three years, then dying on the cross and rising from the dead, do you know what Christ told his disciples to do? You'd think he'd tell them to get out there and start spreading the good news. But he didn't. He actually told them to wait. It says in Acts 1:4-5: *“And while staying with them he ordered them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the promise of the Father, which, he said, “you heard from me; ⁵ for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy*

Spirit not many days from now.” And then he said in verse 8: “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.”

They were to wait for the outpouring of Holy Spirit, because it was through the power of the Holy Spirit in their lives that they would be able to do what Christ had called them to do.

The Holy Spirit was poured out on the Day of Pentecost, like the glory of Yahweh filling the Tabernacle, and the disciples received power to preach the gospel, even in different languages. God moved in people’s hearts and about 3,000 people turned to Christ on that day. The church began. The mission was moving forward. And that mission has continued to move forward today because of the presence and power of the Holy Spirit in his people.

We are called by Jesus to continue that mission today and the power we need to carry it out comes from the Holy Spirit as well. We can work hard and make all kinds of preparations and do all kinds of good things – and it’s good for us to prepare and work hard – that’s part of the Christian life. But the power to do what we’ve been called to do – to change hearts, open the eyes of the blind, transform people’s lives, and turn people to Jesus – that comes through the Spirit of God living in us and ministering through us. His presence in us makes all the difference.

We receive the Holy Spirit when we believe and are born again, but we must also cooperate with the work he’s doing in our lives. Transformation needs to happen so that we walk by the Spirit and not according to the flesh and it’s a process of learning to live in submission to him so he’s working in and through us to carry out his will. We need to yield our lives to him every day and seek to be filled with the Spirit so that he leads us in the way we should go.

It’s easy for me to get caught up in my own agenda and forget the Holy Spirit and Christ’s mission. So I need to start my day by humbling myself before the Lord and yielding to his plans and agenda, and I need to keep doing that throughout the day. I’m learning how to do that, and it isn’t always easy – life is busy and I just want to get things done. I want to get caught up and I can push aside and neglect the most important things which are loving God and loving other people. So I’m

learning to make it a practice to surrender my life and agenda to him and ask him to fill me and use me, rather than just doing my own thing.

I encourage you to make it a practice each day to connect with Christ, ask him to fill you with his Spirit, and yield your life to him. Surrender your plans and your agenda to him and ask him to make you sensitive to his leading.