

# Participating in the Building Project

Exodus: Revelation and Redemption

Exodus 25:1-9; 35:4-36:7

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December 8, 2019

A couple of weeks ago, we began the final section of Exodus. The section that deals with building the tabernacle. It wasn't enough for God to save his people out of Egypt and to sanctify them at Sinai. He also wanted to settle among them in the tabernacle. He wanted to dwell with them so they could come to know him fully.

So far, we've seen two elements in God's plan to reside with Israel. A holy place, which is the tabernacle itself. And a holy people—the priests who serve in the tabernacle. But what about the rest of the people of Israel? Was God's plan to reside only for an elite class of people? No! God not only set apart a very holy place and very holy people. He also planned for the whole congregation of Israel to participate.

At the very beginning of the section on the tabernacle, before the architecture, before the instructions for the furniture and the priests, there's a call (in chapter 25:1) for the whole nation to contribute to building a dwelling place for God.

God has a long Christmas wish list beginning in verse 2. He wants precious metals like gold and silver. He wants the best fabric. He wants animal skins, wood, oil, and stones. And he wants his people to help with the project. That's like a mother who says, "All I want for Christmas is for you to help me around the house."

This is amazing. God could've drop-shipped the tabernacle from heaven. Or used free, two-day delivery to send it right to the doorstep of Sinai with no assembly required! But instead, God calls the people to contribute to its construction and to make the materials needed. That's how God works! Isn't it amazing?

Here's my sermon in a sentence: All God's people (not just those in full-time ministry) should participate in building his house.

Turn now to our primary text this morning in Exodus 35. I want to show you where I get this statement. Starting in verse 4, Moses spoke to all the congregation of the people of Israel. In verse 5, "Whoever is of generous heart, let him bring the Lord's contribution."<sup>1</sup> In verse 10, "Let every skillful craftsman among you come..." In verse 22, "So they came, both men and women." "All who were of a willing heart..." In verse 24, "Everyone who could make a contribution..." There is much more, but you get the point.

In verse 30, we see God set apart special craftsmen for the work, Bezalel and Oholiab. But notice in verse 34, their gifting included the ability to teach. So even though their skills and their job were unique, they were also called to empower everyone for the building project.

You'll notice the title of my sermon is participating in the building project. And you know the Elders are proposing we raise money for a building project in 2021. And we're encouraging you to

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<sup>1</sup> Scripture quotations are from The Holy Bible, English Standard Version® unless otherwise noted.

participate in that project through giving. Some of the more cynical in the crowd may be thinking, “I knew this was coming. They’re going to use a sermon series on building the tabernacle to tell us to help with the building project at the church.” Well, not really.

Some churches may make a direct correlation between Israel’s building projects and ours, but I don’t believe there’s a direct correlation between building the tabernacle in the Old Testament and any of our church building projects today. I think there is an indirect correlation, which I’ll talk about later, but not a direct correlation.

This passage points directly to a much bigger building project than any physical structure we could ever build. One we get to participate in! And I’m excited to share that with you at the end of the sermon. But before we talk about what our passage means for us today, we need to consider what it meant in its original context.

So, let’s begin by reading starting in Exodus 35:4.

### **Exodus 35:4-10; 35:20-36:7**

<sup>4</sup>Moses said to all the congregation of the people of Israel, “This is the thing that the LORD has commanded. <sup>5</sup>Take from among you a contribution to the LORD. Whoever is of a generous heart, let him bring the LORD’s contribution: gold, silver, and bronze; <sup>6</sup>blue and purple and scarlet yarns and fine twined linen; goats’ hair, <sup>7</sup>tanned rams’ skins, and goatskins; acacia wood, <sup>8</sup>oil for the light, spices for the anointing oil and for the fragrant incense, <sup>9</sup>and onyx stones and stones for setting, for the ephod and for the breastpiece.

<sup>10</sup>“Let every skillful craftsman among you come and make all that the LORD has commanded...

<sup>20</sup>Then all the congregation of the people of Israel departed from the presence of Moses. <sup>21</sup>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. <sup>22</sup>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. <sup>23</sup>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. <sup>24</sup>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. <sup>25</sup>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. <sup>26</sup>All the women whose hearts stirred them to use their skill spun the goats’ hair. <sup>27</sup>And the leaders brought onyx stones and stones to be set, for the ephod and for the breastpiece, <sup>28</sup>and spices and oil for the light, and for the anointing oil, and for the fragrant incense. <sup>29</sup>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.

<sup>30</sup>Then Moses said to the people of Israel, “See, the LORD has called by name Bezalel the son of Uri, son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah; <sup>31</sup>and he has filled him with the Spirit of God, with skill, with intelligence, with knowledge, and with all craftsmanship, <sup>32</sup>to devise artistic designs, to work in gold and silver and bronze, <sup>33</sup>in cutting stones for setting, and in carving wood, for work in every skilled craft. <sup>34</sup>And he has inspired him to teach, both him and Oholiab the son of Abisamach of the tribe of Dan. <sup>35</sup>He has filled them with skill to do every sort of work done by an engraver or by a designer or by an embroiderer in blue and purple and scarlet yarns and fine twined linen, or by a weaver--by any sort of workman or skilled designer.

<sup>36:1</sup>“Bezalel and Oholiab and every craftsman in whom the LORD has put skill and intelligence to know how to do any work in the construction of the sanctuary shall work in accordance with all that the LORD has commanded.”

<sup>2</sup>And Moses called Bezalel and Oholiab and every craftsman in whose mind the LORD had put skill, everyone whose heart stirred him up to come to do the work. <sup>3</sup>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, <sup>4</sup>so that all the craftsmen who were doing every sort of task on the sanctuary came, each from the task that he was doing, <sup>5</sup>and said to Moses, "The people bring much more than enough for doing the work that the LORD has commanded us to do." <sup>6</sup>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, <sup>7</sup>for the material they had was sufficient to do all the work, and more.

This is the Word of the Lord.

Remember the sermon in a sentence. God calls all his people to participate in building his house. So, I want to look at three elements of corporate participation: The specific ways God's people participate, the heart of participation, and the application of participation for us today in the church.

## THE WAYS WE PARTICIPATE

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Let's begin with the ways we're called to participate. We're called to contribute our treasure and talents.

### *Treasure*

Let's begin with treasure. In verses 5-6, God calls Israel to bring gold, silver, and bronze; blue and purple and scarlet yarns; and fine linen. What's going on here?

I was at Dillard's last week looking for a new sport coat. The salesman put one on me to check my size. The first jacket was wonderful. I thought I'd buy it. Then I looked at the tag. It was an \$1,100 Hickey Freeman. I told the salesman that I really liked it, but it was way too much for my budget. I loved his response. He said, "I'll never sell these if I don't try!"

God's list of materials starts with the most expensive and moves down. It begins with costly metals. Then it moves to very costly dye. The purple dye he requests came from a tiny gland in a snail. If you were going to dye one garment in purple, it would take about ten thousand snails. Only a very rich person had purple dye. The same was true with the fine Egyptian linen mentioned. It was very rare and very expensive.

When God calls the people to bring what they have, we may have a picture in our mind. Maybe we think of the can drive that USD 259 did a couple of weeks ago, like God's asking us to go to the cupboard and bring out inexpensive stuff we don't need. Or maybe we think of our wife asking us to run a box of clothing and used up kitchen appliances to the DAV.

But that's not the picture here. God's not calling his people to bring their leftovers. He's calling them to bring their best, the most precious and costly stuff they have.<sup>2</sup> It's no can drive. It's not a DAV run! It's sacrificial giving.

But it wasn't just for the rich in Israel. There were other options besides gold and expensive fabric. They could also bring animal hides from their flocks. They could cut down an acacia tree, which

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<sup>2</sup> Philip Graham Ryken and R. Kent Hughes, *Exodus: Saved for God's Glory*, Preaching the Word

were all over the place. Or they could bring some olive oil. Everyone was called to participate, but they were called to participate according to what they had (cf. 2 Cor. 8:11-12).

### *Talents*

The same was true with their talents. They weren't just called to write a check and put it in the mail. It's more personal. It's an all-hands-on-deck, full participation project. In verse 10, God calls for every skilled craftsman. We see skilled women in verse 25 spinning yarns and linen. Bezalel and Oholiab do the work of an engraver, designer, embroiderer, weaver, you name it (v. 35)!

God provided all the treasure and talents needed for the work. And Israel responded by bringing according to what they had. Think for a moment. Put yourself in their shoes. If you were at Sinai. If God was calling you to participate. If you were there, what would you have brought? What kind of contribution would you have made?<sup>3</sup>

We've seen *what* they were called to contribute. But *how* were they to contribute? What was their attitude? What was the heart of giving? That leads me to our second point.

## **THE HEART OF PARTICIPATION**

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Here's the heart of participation: We're called to give to the Lord generously because of his grace. This is repeated throughout the passage. The heart of giving is the heartbeat of the passage. Look at verse 5 where God makes his call: "Whoever is of a generous heart. Let him bring the Lord's contribution." Then look at verse 21 where the people respond, "And they came, everyone whose heart stirred him, and everyone whose spirit moved him." And verse 22, "All who were of a willing heart..." And verse 26, "All the women whose hearts stirred them to use their skill." And verse 29, "All the men and women...whose heart moved them...brought it as a freewill offering to the Lord."

This is the same heart of giving we find in the New Testament. In 2 Corinthians 9:7, Paul says, "Each one must give as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver."

In the Old Testament there was compulsory giving in the tithes, but the offering in Exodus is a generous freewill offering from the heart.

What motivated this heartfelt and generous response? It was based completely on God's grace. God had shown his grace in redeeming them from Egypt. God's grace was also seen in the silver and gold. The Israelites didn't earn the silver and gold. God promised that when they left Egypt they would be given silver and gold (Ex. 12:35). God also blessed their livestock so that it multiplied. God also gave them skill. In verses 30-35 God sets apart Bezalel and Oholiab. We're told in verse 31 that he filled Bezalel "with the Spirit of God, with skill, with intelligence, with knowledge, and with all craftsmanship." So, even their talents were from God.

All they had was a result of God's grace. But there's more. Remember the context of our passage. What happens right before Exodus 35? In Exodus 32-34 Israel sins grievously with the golden calf, but God forgives them graciously. So when we come to chapter 35, we see that their abundant giving was motivated by God's abundant grace. Grace comes before generosity!

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<sup>3</sup> Ryken

That's the same thing Paul used to motivate the Corinthians to give to the poor at Jerusalem. He says in 2 Corinthians 8:9, "For you know the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you might by his poverty become rich."

All that we have is a gift from God. Primarily our salvation, but not only our salvation. All of our possessions are a gift from God. And even our gifts and talents are a gift from God. The word used for spiritual gifts in the New Testament can also be translated as grace gifts.

We don't give to earn God's favor. We give because we have God's favor. In fact, if you aren't generous with the treasure and talents God has given you, it's probably because you don't have a deep grasp of God's grace in your life.

Have you received the grace of God in Christ? If you haven't, that's the first application for you today. We are all sinners who deserve God's judgment. But God has provided a way for us to be forgiven. He's provided a way for us to have eternal life. It's through the sacrificial death of Jesus on the cross. You are poor and needy in your sins. But Christ became poor so that you might become rich—rich in forgiveness and eternal life. If you haven't responded to God's grace, you're not ready for generosity. Today is the day to receive Jesus as your Lord and Savior.

For those of you who have received God's grace, you need to grasp its depths. The heart of gratitude only comes if we get God's grace! For Israel, at least in Exodus 35-36, they get God's grace, and so they give generously. And notice, in verse 22, they didn't give to a building project. They gave to the Lord. "Everyman dedicating an offering of gold to the Lord." In verse 29 they brought their freewill offerings to the Lord. They are returning to the Lord what the Lord gave them by his abundant grace.

And notice how abundant their gifts were in chapter 36. Beginning in verse 3, we see that "they kept bringing him freewill offerings every morning." So in verse 5 the craftsmen go to Moses and say, "The people bring much more than enough for doing the work that the Lord has commanded us to do."

Isn't this amazing! Can you imagine if during our offering this morning we said to stop bringing your offerings to us? Give to other ministries. We have more than enough! This amazing giving is because Israel gets God's amazing grace. What about you?

## THE APPLICATION FOR TODAY

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Well let's turn now to our final question. How does this apply to us today in the church? We're called to build up the body of Christ.

The New Testament picks up on the building language from Exodus, but it doesn't speak of building a physical place. In Ephesians 2 we learn that if we're in Christ we are "members of the household of God, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone" (vv. 19-20). In Christ the church "grows into a holy temple in the Lord" (v. 21). We "are being built into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit" (v. 22).

Christ came to dwell with us. That's what we celebrate at Christmas. But now, if we are in him, he dwells in us through the Spirit. He builds the church into a dwelling place for God.

But in Ephesians 4, there's an amazing turn. We're told that we get to participate in this building project. Paul tells us that we're one body (v. 6), but a grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of Christ's gift (v. 7). When Christ ascended to the Father, he gave spiritual gifts to everyone in the church (vv. 8-10). He also gave spiritual leaders, like pastors, to the church (v. 11). But their main job is like Bezalel and Oholiab. Their main job is to equip the whole church for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ (v. 12). Everybody is called to work on the building! To work on the dwelling place of God until we all become like Jesus (v. 13).

This building project is the mission of the church—to make disciples of Jesus Christ. It's a much bigger project than building the tabernacle. And it's certainly bigger than any capital campaign a church may engage in. It will last forever, into eternity.

So let me return to a question I asked earlier. I asked you to imagine yourself at Sinai. I asked you to imagine God was calling you to participate in building the tabernacle. And I asked, "What would you bring?"

But now let me ask you a bigger question. In light of what Christ has done for you, to save you from your sins and give you eternal life. In light of his eternal building project in the church. What will you bring?

Will you bring your talents, the grace-gifts God has given you for a special purpose of building up the body of Christ? Will you serve the church sacrificially and generously? Think about that. Imagine what it might look like for you to give the best of what God has given to you. Are you using God's gifts to build golden calves? Or are you using them to build his people into the image of Christ.

And what about your treasure? What does giving look like in your life? Are you bringing the best and most precious of your resources or are you just giving God your leftovers? Is your giving in proportion to what you've been given? Do you have gold? If so, are you bringing it, or are you only bringing wood? Do you have goat skin? If so, are you only bringing olive oil? And are you giving out of compulsion? Or are you giving willingly and cheerfully in gratitude for God's grace?

We're engaged in a glorious building project, friends. And God in his wisdom delights to use all of his people to build his house. Are you participating fully?

With that said, I do need to ask the question, how does all of this relate to our remodel project? How does this relate to Renew 20-21? Well like I said at the beginning, I don't believe there's a direct correlation between Old Testament building projects and our capital campaigns today. But there is an indirect correlation.

We use this building to build the church of Christ. We use this building to equip the saints for the work of ministry. This building is a hub for missions too. And I believe, to the degree that our building serves the primary purpose of building the dwelling place of God, that it's worthy of our generous contributions.

So, I'd like to ask you to consider giving above and beyond your normal giving to help us achieve our goal for Renew 20-21. But I don't want you to feel guilty or pressured. I want you to want to give to it out of a willing heart. I want you to give because you're amazed by the grace of God in Christ.