



Exodus 25-40 (25:1-9)
 Journey to Freedom: Exodus
 “Sacred Stuff”

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Today we finish off our series in Exodus that we’ve been in this summer. Next week and the following will be a brief two-Sunday pair of messages that connect with Kick-off Sunday and Back to Church Sunday. They will be on what it means to be a disciple of Jesus and to be a part of a church. Then the last Sunday in September we will start a new series in the Old Testament book of Ezra. But first, we wrap up Exodus, with a look at the final 16 chapters.

Clearly, we’re not going to look at all 16 chapters verse-by-verse today. We wouldn’t leave the sanctuary for a few...weeks, if we did that. But we will cover significant themes and what they mean for us today as Jesus followers. So we’ve been reading about how God brought the Israelites out of Egypt – raising up Moses to be just the right person to work through; the back and forth with Pharaoh over letting them go; Finally doing so, but even then chasing them down with his military; the parting of the Red Sea; God providing for them in the wilderness, and the Covenant that God makes with them and that Israel agrees to. And that brings us to the last 16 chapters.

And, 13 of these 16 chapters tell us about the making of the Tabernacle. **The Tabernacle was a large portable sanctuary where they worshipped God and the priests would minister to the people.** We could think of it as a tent with a gold-covered wood frame. They could take it apart, set it up wherever they might be for some time, and then take it apart as they moved on to a new location. First, God gives Moses the design and materials list for the Tabernacle, and that takes up 7 chapters (25-31). Then the last 6 chapters of Exodus is about the making of the Tabernacle, and there’s a lot of repetition between the two when it comes to the materials, descriptions of the tabernacle and the worship items, the priestly garments, and so forth.

We might wonder where the people of Israel got all the materials – particularly the gold and silver. But earlier, as they were leaving Egypt, they had asked for – and were given – a bunch of gold and silver. Here’s what Exodus 12:35-36 says, **“The Israelites did as Moses instructed and asked**

the Egyptians for articles of silver and gold and for clothing.

The Lord had made the Egyptians favorably disposed toward the people, and they gave them what they asked for; so they plundered the Egyptians” (Exodus 12:35-36). They got a lot! And then some of the other resources – such as the different types of wood used – were available as resources around them, or they were able to make, and so forth.

Now, this Tabernacle, though it was portable, it was durable. It was used for the next 500 years until the Temple in Jerusalem was built by King Solomon (yes, probably needed upkeep and repairs, but still...). So this is no flimsy tent like you go camping in today.

In between the developing of the plans for the Tabernacle and its construction, chapters 32-34 tell of a few different things that happen. **The most famous of them is the idol-making and idol-worship of the people while Moses is up on Mt. Sinai.** Moses was gone so long that the people thought he had abandoned them. So, with Aaron spearheading the efforts and collecting gold from the people and with him turning it into a golden calf, they lift it up as the god who brought them forth out of Egypt.

Moses comes down the mountain and can't believe what he's seeing, he turns to Aaron, and he says, "Holy Cow! ☺ What have you done?" Aaron literally says, "Well, I collected gold from everyone, I threw it into the fire, and out came this golden calf!" He makes it sound like it's an accident, or almost even that God had a hand in it, and that he didn't really do anything. It's almost comical, even though it's also sad. They just recently agreed to the Covenant with God and promised to be obedient to everything. This is a clear violation of the covenant.

So, for the second Sunday in a row, we're having a classic "three points and a prayer" sermon, because there are three things that I want to highlight for us that come out of these chapters. There is certainly more that could be said and applied to our lives, but I think these are perhaps particularly pertinent (alliteration, anyone?) for us.

And I want to start with the golden calf incident. If you have been here the previous two Sundays, you've heard us go through the covenant that God made with the people of Israel. And so you've heard the Israelites say, as I reminded us a moment ago, that they promised to uphold their end of the covenant. In fact, three times – once in chapter 19 and then twice in chapter 24 – they affirm their desire to enter into this covenant, each time saying that they will do everything that the Lord requires of them.

But then, right here, they break the covenant, particularly the “have no gods before Yahweh” and “worship Yahweh only” kinds of commands. So here's the first point: **Whenever we slip into sin and go down a path we know we shouldn't, there's usually something else – seemingly unrelated – that's driving it.** Frequently, making ourselves “feel better” about life or finding some comfort in life in the midst of stress or disappointment, is a driver of sin. It's why some people eat when they shouldn't, buy stuff they don't need and even run up credit card debt, it's why many people turn to pornography and become slaves to alcohol. There's a deeper felt need, even if it's not readily identifiable or easily connected to the sinful behavior. A person who is aware of these deeper needs and how the need is driving them to unhealthy decisions can better cope with things and learn to make better decisions that honor God. I'm not saying that's easy to do...but nonetheless, our behaviors and our sin are often driven by deeper things inside of us that might take counseling, journaling, and serious reflection to understand and get a handle on.

That's kind of what's going on here. **The underlying issue behind why they made the golden calf is that they lack trust and patience.** Here's what we read, for example, in 32:1, “When the people saw that Moses was so long in coming down from the mountain, they gathered around Aaron and said, ‘Come, make us gods who will go before us. As for this fellow Moses who brought us up out of Egypt, we don't know what has happened to him’” (Exodus 32:1).

They didn't trust Moses to come back. Maybe they thought something had happened to him, or maybe they thought he'd abandoned them. They also didn't trust that God would bring Moses back to them to lead them. So, they

got impatient and asked Aaron to fashion some idols to go before them and lead them. They needed more trust, and less impatience.

Whenever impatience overcomes us, it almost never leads to good results. We get ahead of God, it throws off timing, our Christian witness gets fouled up, and so forth. Some of you might recall the story I told a few years ago about a woman driving a car and she was obviously stressed out and in a hurry. She would honk at the car in front of her, which was doing the speed limit. She was using bad hand gestures, yelling, and when she missed the light because of that car, she was yelling and waving her fist out the window. Then she heard a knock at her window and a police officer was standing there. He told her he was going to have to take her to the police station, so he handcuffed her, read her her rights, and drove her to the station. She didn't know what she did that was so wrong. He came back after awhile and said, "I apologize and you are free to go. When I saw your car had 'What Would Jesus Do' and 'Follow me to Sunday School' bumper stickers, plus the Christian fish and other Christian signs on it, with the way you were acting toward the other driver - I just assumed you had stolen the car."

See? **Impatience will always get us in trouble.** It's even the exact opposite of one of the fruit of the Spirit that Paul lists in Galatians: "patience." To be impatient is to be living outside of the Spirit of God. So, God's people need patience. Sometimes God doesn't move as quickly as we'd like. We see it here in this passage. This is true at the individual level, too: maybe you need to patiently wait on God's timing. So, impatience, which really is born out of a lack of trust, leads them to make this golden calf. Let's not allow impatience to get the best of us. Let's trust God, stay focused on the mission he's given us, and be patient.

The second point I want to make then comes from the 13 chapters that focus on the plans for the Tabernacle and the construction of the Tabernacle. And here we see that patience is not the same as lethargy or laziness. **Patience does not mean sitting around and never doing anything: God wants willing partners in ministry.** In the passage we read a few minutes ago, we read these words, "The Lord said to Moses, 'Tell the Israelites to bring me an offering.'" And then it goes into a long list of the items needed – everything

from gold to goat hair. All of this is going to be used to build the Tabernacle and the different items used in worship and ministry that will take place in the Tabernacle.

Then in chapter 35 Moses brings this to the Israelites. We read, “Moses said to the whole Israelite community, “This is what the Lord has commanded: From what you have, take an offering for the Lord.” Then he goes on to list all the things that the Lord said earlier for people to bring. It’s the exact same Hebrew words, like it was just copied and pasted from chapter 25 to 35. Following each of these verses then, is more detail about the Tabernacle – in the first group of chapters are the plans, and in the second group that closes out Exodus are the carrying out of those plans.

There’s an interesting couple of phrases that are used, however, when it comes to who gives an offering to make the Tabernacle. When God gives the directions to Moses (chapter 25), the Lord says he wants an offering from “Everyone whose hearts prompt them to give.” And then in 35 as they’re preparing to build the Tabernacle, Moses phrases it, “Everyone who is willing...” The point I want us to take away from all of this is that: **It takes God’s people *desiring* to be a part of what God is doing in order for God’s plans to come about.** I mean, if the people were not willing to make the contributions, the Tabernacle would not have come together. And God isn’t going to force them to do it. God never forces himself. Jesus never forces himself. It’s for those who are willing...whose hearts prompt them to give.

And it’s not like God is prompting some hearts to desire to give and others not. The prompting is not passive. In fact, in the Hebrew of chapter 25 for this phrase, it reads more literally, “every person that gives willingly with his heart.” So, no excuses of, “Well, God didn’t prompt my heart to give.” No. They can’t blame God for not giving; It’s on them. And God’s not going to force you or me, either. It takes a willing heart. God is looking for us to bring what we have to offer for ministry, and to do so with a willing heart.

Lastly, we see that everything that goes into making the Tabernacle is sacred – even the gold that was supplied by their captors in Egypt – but

the most sacred thing of all is the people. When we think of “sacred stuff” in a church today, we think of the sanctuary, the Bible, the cross, the Lord’s Table, and so forth. But the most sacred part of it all – besides the presence of God – is his people. The body of Christ, the Church, is sacred. You are sacred. You are holy, pleasing to God, and made in His image.

And when you offer yourself for God to work through – whether it’s constructing a Church building, praying for someone, teaching Scripture, visiting someone in the hospital, or singing a worship song – when you offer yourself and God moves through you it’s a sacred offering. It starts by being in relationship with God – being in covenant partnership with him as we’ve looked at the last couple weeks – and from there, with God’s grace sustaining us, it becomes our willing hearts offered to the Lord so that He might work through us. **When we offer ourselves, God’s church flourishes, his mission is accomplished, and peoples’ lives are touched and transformed by his love and grace.** We will need patience – the first point we talked about – to get there; we’ll have to offer to the Lord all that we can, just as they did in building the Tabernacle. But God’s mission will be accomplished when we are yielded to the Lord’s leading, and offer ourselves to him. You are sacred stuff. More sacred than any of the stuff they built, and more sacred than any worship space or item we have today.

As you may know, they believed that God dwelled in that Tabernacle. Not in the sense of it being where they thought God lived, but in the sense that it was a holy place where God would meet them. In many ways, we often think that same way about a church’s sanctuary – here or at any other church. But God meets us in a lot of different times and places. And the New Testament tells us that you and I – your body, my body – are the temples where the Spirit of God dwells. You really are sacred, holy, designed by God to bring him glory.

And if you’re here thinking, “I don’t feel holy. I don’t feel sacred. I don’t feel like I can offer myself or anything to God to be used for his mission and purposes and glory...” If that’s you, then just let yourself be ministered to by Jesus. Let his grace, his love, his healing, his forgiveness be the place where you find your rest, and get rejuvenated there. Hebrews 10 says this, **“Day**

after day every priest stands and performs his religious duties; again and again he offers the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. But when this priest [Jesus] had offered for all time one sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God” (Hebrews 10:11-12). You see, the Tabernacle – and the Temple that was built after it – didn’t have any chairs. No one ever sat down. But now, Jesus, who covers our sins, makes us whole, brings us into covenant relationship with God...Jesus sits at the right hand of God. Why? Because Jesus finishes the work. He’s done what needs to be done. His Spirit still moves, and the effects of Jesus’ work continue on...but he’s taken a seat that no human mediator between us and God could ever take. And his work makes us holy. You are part of his sacred stuff, to be offered for his glory.

So, Exodus is about the Israelites being freed. **But it’s not just what they are freed *from* that matters. It’s where they ultimately find true freedom that matters. And true freedom is found in their relationship with God.** The Tabernacle is the symbol of that, and Exodus ends with it because the whole point is God frees his people to be in relationship with him, to worship him, to turn to him for forgiveness, to be in covenant partnership with him.

This is still true today, as Jesus gives us a new covenant, built on the old one, that we access through faith in Him. I pray that would be the reality for each of us. I pray that we would be in covenant partnership with Father, Son and Holy Spirit, and with each other as we carry out the ministries that God has given us. May we, like those who have gone before us, be some of the sacred stuff that God works through for His purposes so that Jesus would be glorified. Let’s pray...Amen.