

Exodus 35:1–29

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Preacher: David Helm

[0 : 01] Moses assembled all the congregation of the people of Israel and said to them, These are the things that the Lord has commanded you to do. Six days work shall be done, but on the seventh day you shall have a Sabbath of solemn rest, holy to the Lord.

Whoever does any work on it shall be put to death. You shall kindle no fire in all your dwelling places on the Sabbath day. Moses said to all the congregation of the people of Israel, This is the thing that the Lord has commanded.

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, blue and purple and scarlet yarns, and fine twined linen, goat's hair, tanned ram skins and goat skins, acacia wood, oil for the light, spices for the anointing oil and for the fragrant incense, and onyx stones and stones for setting, for the ephod and for the breast piece.

Let every skillful craftsman among you come and make all that the Lord has commanded, the tabernacle, its tents and its covering, its hooks and its frames, its bars, its pillars and its bases, the ark with its poles, the mercy seat and the veil of the screen, the table with its poles and all its utensils, and the bread of the presence, the lampstand also for the light with its utensils and its lamps, and the oil for the light, and the altar of the incense with its poles and the anointing oil and the fragrant incense, and the screen for the door at the door of the tabernacle, the altar of burnt offering with its grating of bronze, its poles and all its utensils, the basin and its stand, the hangings of the court, its pillars and its bases, and the screen for the gate of the court, the pegs of the tabernacle and the pegs of the court and their cords, the finely worked garments for the ministering in the holy place, the holy garments for Aaron the priest, and the garments of his sons for their service as priests.

Then all the congregation of the people of Israel departed from the presence of Moses, 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 all the holy garments.

[2 : 37] So they came, both men and women, all who were of a willing heart, brought brooches and earrings and signet rings and armlets and all sorts of gold objects, every man dedicating an offering of gold to the Lord.

And everyone who possessed blue or purple or scarlet yarns or fine linen or goat's hair or tanned ram skins or goat skins brought them. Everyone who could make a contribution of silver or bronze brought it as the Lord's contribution.

And everyone who possessed acacia would have any use in the work brought it. 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 twine linens.

And all the women whose hearts stirred them to use their skill spun the goat's hair. And the leaders brought onyx stones and stones to be set for the ephod and for the breastpiece, and spices and oil for the light, and for the anointing oil and for the fragrant incense.

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.

[3 : 50] This is the word of the Lord. You may be seated. Well, good morning, and I want to extend my own welcome to you, Holy Trinity, this morning, especially those who are out of town who have returned, my dear friend Arthur and his family.

Arthur, I believe you've got a birthday coming up this week, and you still look young. You still look good. It's good to have you back in the house. Well, there's something attractive about the notion of starting over.

The idea of beginning again. Getting out a new, unmarked piece of paper. Crumpling up and throwing away the one that had all of the mistakes.

Of hitting restart rather than refresh. Implicit in the idea, though, of starting over is the reality that, truth be told, we made a mess of something first time around.

We botched it up. Whether we verbalize it or not, your desire to start over acknowledges a history of mistakes, missteps, errors, slip-ups.

[5 : 05] And then when you transfer the idea of starting over to a new beginning with God, it actually is an acknowledgement of personal sin, of wandering feet, of ways gone wrong.

You can't start over with God without looking up to Him and owning, owning the terrain of your own decisions, your own way, your own path, the places where your own feet followed fast, trying to chase down your wayward heart.

grooves of life that over time, you know as well as I do, have become ruts, well-worn, under our feet, deep gouges almost, and all of the personal destruction that it's caused along the way.

The wake of our lives and the need to start over. In our summer study of Exodus, the latter part especially, if it's shown us anything at all, it's proving to us that the God of the Scriptures is a God who is willing to make a fresh start with a sinful people.

It's a God of new beginnings. And this is, in a literary way, been hinted at from the earliest chapter in Exodus. In chapter 1, there was that repetition of the language that echoed Genesis 1.

[6 : 53] How this people of God were being fruitful and multiplying. The sense that Exodus is God's continuation of His promise to do something with the people who seem to constantly need to begin again.

In our text today, God, voluntarily, decidedly, willingly, rather than abandoning Israel after that disaster of the golden calf, a sin that in every way showed their heart bare, that they desired other things other than Him.

Nevertheless, in this text, God invites Israel to start again with Him. It's amazing. I want to explore it this morning. What does it look like when God and His people start over again?

Not just as an individual, as a people, as a church, as a congregation. What would a new day look like when all the previous days and all the well-worn paths of our wayward heart were for a moment put entirely to rest?

Well, for Israel, right here in chapter 35, verses 1 to 3, restarting with God meant picking up at the place where they had departed from Him long ago.

[8 : 31] It's an unusual little paragraph, isn't it? It's an assembly of the people who are told that the Lord has commanded them to work six days but on the seventh day rest.

In a sense, to keep the Sabbath day holy. And when you read it, it seems entirely unconnected from the whole chapter. out of place.

Yet, take a look just back a chapter or two, the very close of chapter 31. The very last words given to Moses by God on the mountain before he came down and entered into that golden calf moment. The very last thing that God had said to Moses when on the mountain, verse 12, you're to speak to the people of Israel and say, above all, you shall keep my Sabbath for this is a sign between me and you throughout your generations.

You shall keep the Sabbath. Look at there, verse 15. Six days shall work be done but on the seventh day is the Sabbath of solemn rest holy to the Lord.

[9 : 48] But then, of course, Moses did come down and while he had the sermon outlined, he never was able to preach the message. There was no pulpit to stand behind. In fact, he broke the tablets.

All of the entrance of the prophet in the midst of the people, we needed a different word on that Sunday. And it said, whoa, we have committed a great sin.

We've committed a great sin. But all that's now put behind that mediating chapters of 34 and are there where we're wondering, is God going to go on with them?

And he is. And so, really, what happens here in 35 is simply this. When you restart with God, that is Israel, it required that they sit down and hear the message that they should have heard on that Sunday long before.

Let me see if I can do something with that. You want to begin again? First thing you've got to do is you've got to sit down. It's not, I'm ready to go now, God.

[11 : 00] What do you want me to get done now, God? What work should I do, God? No. It's not going. It's not getting done.

It's not working. It's sitting down under the word that you haven't yet applied to life. to get on with God is to go back to the very place where we departed from God.

I remember a story of John Calvin. He was pastor in a church in Geneva, Switzerland in the 16th century. And man, the town was in an uproar because he felt they were kind of living out this golden calf moment.

Calvin said, I'm not even going to serve the Lord's supper this week. Nobody's taking the Lord's supper because this place is a mess. Well, the magistrates got on John and on Pharrell and on another third blind preacher at another pulpit and they said, you guys decide you're not going to even give the people the Lord's supper.

Well, we're going to expel you from the community. And indeed, they fired John and he lost his job. And he was actually expelled from Geneva. And two and a half years later, after the people had kind of sorted themselves out and realized they'd been wrong, they told John to come on back and they wanted him as their pastor again.

[12 : 25] And he got up in the pulpit after being gone for two and a half years and you know what he did? He preached from the very verse in the Psalms that he had left with before that week, two and a half years before.

He picked up where they had taken off. That's what's going on here. Chapter 35 verse 1 to 3.

There is a new, fresh beginning with God taking place and the first implication of a church, of a congregation, of a people isn't to go get something done for God.

It's to sit down, orient your life again around the rhythm of six days of work and one day of rest and to begin to treat the Sabbath day as God had intended it.

That's a message they had never applied. I think there's some things to say here. I'm in the PCA.

[13 : 32] I don't know if you know about that, but it's a denomination for better and worse.

instinctively we ordain people coming into ministry and there's one exception they almost all take and that's to the Lord's Day.

Because the Westminster Confession of Faith says the Lord's Day is a day of worship, supposed to be a day of rest, supposed to be a day where you know, he rules, you rest. Every minister coming into the denomination, while I do take exception to the Lord's Day as a day of rest, I believe the Westminster Divines got this wrong, you know, every day is as any day and any day is as every day and Jesus himself said that man was made for the Sabbath, not Sabbath for man and I don't know that the Sabbath command has ever been quoted in the New Testament and they go on and they go on and they go on as though the principle of rest and work no longer applies.

But in fact what Jesus is making clear in the New Testament is you never were to relate to God according to rules, but relationship. And your relationship with God requires that you sit, you give Him His due, and you have faith that He can get something done.

I think, well, I'm getting old I guess, God, I think that we would do well to restart with God by thinking differently about our rhythm of work and rest.

I'm going to sound old school here, I'm going to sound antiquated, I already know I'm an old man who in some sense is outdated. but if you want to begin with God once a week, put yourself down in a chair and listen to somebody explain God's word.

[15 : 42] Because when we don't, that's where we go off. I've heard a guy gets on vacation finally, this is a little ironic for me to be preaching since last Sunday at this time, I was not in a church service but on an airplane.

But at any rate, the guy said, are you going to church? His wife says, are we going to church? We're on vacation. Are we going to church? The husband said, I'm not going to church, I'm on vacation.

That's where it begins. And all of a sudden we start to find the rhythms of life where we're not sitting under the word and pretty soon the day is about what I want to do and not what he wants to accomplish.

I'll get off the hobby horse. I can only tell you that in the text, this is the truth. When they restarted with God, they had to apply the word of God that they should have heard but didn't.

Because they were out doing their own bells and whistles, their own gig around the calf, and they should have been sitting on Sunday waiting for that preacher to come off the mountain and deliver something from God.

[16:57] That's not all. Take a look at the next part of the chapter. There's other things that happen when a church restarts with God. Not only do they sit back down at the place where they left him, but we see in verses 4 to 9 God invite Israel to take a donation that he calls to the Lord.

And then notice verses 10 through 19 to make a dwelling place for the Lord. Those are the verbs there. Take, verse 9, from among yourselves a contribution to the Lord.

Take a donation to the Lord. Verse 10, make all that the Lord has commanded.

When they restarted with God, they were to take a contribution to the Lord and they were to make a domicile for the Lord. In other words, they were invited by God. You want to begin again?

Then give something to me and build something for me. Contribute and create.

[18:08] Donate and design. Fund and fashion. And notice, it's to the Lord. not to Moses. Not to Moses.

It's to the Lord. And notice, the construction project is for the Lord. It's not something they're doing for themselves and they're part of the woods.

It's for the Lord. And let me paraphrase all of what takes place there in the detail of chapter 4 through 19. they were invited by God to have a personal role that would put him back at the center of life.

The tabernacle that they were to make from all that they did take was a dwelling place of God at the center of life.

In fact, when you get to the book of Numbers, chapter 2, when that tabernacle finally gets erected, the 12 tribes of Israel will all pitch their tents around it in a spherical-like form, like spokes on a wheel, and they will all be facing what's built here in these chapters.

[19:24] In other words, restarting with God means putting God back at the center, making a place for God. The irony is, of course, when we leave off with God, we begin taking from others and making off with it ourselves.

Don't miss the evocative aspect of the text here. This is an invitation from God to Israel where they can join themselves to his work. He's asking for them to join him in making him the center of all life. God to God to do it. I'm not going to manipulate this text and turn this into a sermon that requires your benevolence and the construction of a building.

God to start with us. What ought to strike us is that Exodus is revealing to us a God that is not only willing to restart with us, but that he is eager to allow us the privilege of contributing to his work.

That's amazing. God is willing to receive things from Israel. This is the Israel that danced around the calf.

[21:02] This is the Israel that was known for being stiff-necked. They have something that he will accept. Let me put it to you this way.

You have something that God would be pleased to receive. Think about that. Not merely that he's got something for you, but in spite of your past, God invites you to co-labor with him in ways that will make him known in the world.

The kindness of God in this respect ought to move us. This is on the heels of the golden calf. They do the golden calf thing and God says, he actually says, I'd love to receive something from you.

I mean, this is a strange God. This is a God of grace that ought to cause your heart to marvel. Let me put it to you in as paraphrased way as I can.

What I hear God saying here is, hey, Israel, let's do this together. Let's do this thing together, you and me. I'm not only a God who forgives, I want you to know I'm not one who goes on by continuing to keep you under my thumb.

[22:29] Give me what you got and let's get on with showing the world how great I am. That's quite an invitation. Four to nine is an invitation. What does it look like to restart with God?

One, to pick up right where you left off. Start giving yourself to his word. Two, in the text, the language of take up a donation and make a dwelling place for God in the world.

I love the literary symmetry and the beauty of verses 19 and 20. I mean, take a look at these little verses here. Actually, it's verse 20 and 21. Then all the congregation of the people of Israel departed from the presence of Moses and they came.

But that verse 20 is really beautiful. The invitation has been given and then there's that one momentary lull in the text where all the congregation of Israel departed from the presence of Moses as if they all went back home.

And then the text seems to read they all got what they needed to get. and they all came back by the next week.

[23 : 52] It's a beautiful thing. Notice what they did. The invitation was received. Verses 20 to 29.

The congregation brought things to the Lord. Eight times the word brought. God. How do you restart with God? Well, sit down, listen to his word, take up a donation in your heart that makes something for him where you're giving yourself to him being the center and just bring whatever it is you can bring to the table.

I mean, the gifts here are extraordinary. This really reminds me of one time when I was in upcountry in the country of Kenya at a small village church. And it came time to the offering.

And I pulled out a few Kenyan shillings or whatever the denomination was. I might even have it wrong. And I was going to bring it up to the table. And the congregation began to bring their offerings to the table.

And it was literally, you know, two big stalks of sugar cane. And a little bit of, I don't know, beans here, corn there, and the whole table was filled with the things needed that they had to bring.

[25 : 12] A free will offering to the Lord. The congregation responded to the invitation in the most beautiful way.

I want to say four or five things on these last nine verses. It's really the emphasis of the chapter. To restart with God, according to this text, it was a heart response of the people.

That's what I want you to know first. It was an internal response. Verse 21, And they came, everyone whose heart stirred him.

Now the word heart is going to come about six times in the text. In fact, it already came at the beginning of the text, verse 5, whoever is of a generous heart.

So, restarting with God is an internal response, not external rule-keeping, but internal desire to be in relationship. It's the heart.

[26 : 13] Now the heart in the Hebrew scriptures can at times refer to the physical organ that beats within your body, but it doesn't refer to the heart in that way here. It's used in a literary, in a metaphorical way, in the Hebrew scriptures to speak in some sense of the internal conviction of the soul.

In other words, the heart is the very seat of power in your life. Your heart, their heart, was the animating center of their being.

It's what would move you to action or not. Your heart would reveal your pursuits and it's your heart then at the end that actually is the governor of your life.

Jesus later will say, well, show me where your treasure is and I'll show you where your heart is. I'll show you the very center of your being when all those things are revealed. And in some respect then, all you've got to do to know what really matters to you is to ask yourself what you pursue in your mind all the time.

What are the desires of your heart? And in particular, as evidenced by your actions. Because that will reveal the true state of your soul. So here, in the text, five or six times over, we hear what's happening within the heart of the people.

[27 : 46] And at this point, they would settle for nothing less than seeing God have a rightful place in the world. That was their heart.

what are you on about? I'm on about God getting back to the center. That's my great desire.

That's my single pursuit. God is the animating center of my thinking, my living, my doing, my reflecting.

God is what my mind moves toward. God is the object of my speech. God is the catapulting force of my actions.

Really, then, for the first time since the Garden of Eden, what you have in this text is the heart of the people of God completely aligned with the heart of God.

[28 : 46] It's amazing. They are wholeheartedly in pursuit of doing all they can to make sure that He will have His way with them. We haven't seen that because back in Genesis 6, God looks at the heart of man after the sinful condition and it's always evil continually and moving this way and that.

And there's this complete disjunction between the desires of a people and the desires of God. And here, in your little text, Exodus 35, that heart is now completely aligned.

God's heart and the people's heart are the same. Heart within a heart shall my desire be. One within the other in perfect harmony.

It is a stunning text. This is a stunning response. They had an internal movement that said, Oh, for a heart to praise my God, a heart from sin set free, a heart that always feels thy blood so freely shed for me.

That's one. The response was internal. Two, their response was voluntary. By that I mean it was uncoerced.

[30 : 07] No TV preacher. No Hyde Park pulpiteer. No emotional manipulation.

no leveraging of God by giving to God. No sense of it's about time God will do this for me if I do this for him.

No turning of the screws to tweak out every dollar they could give. It was completely not only internally motivated out of purity and truth and gratitude at the invitation, the stunning invitation of being able to do something for God knowing who I am.

But it was voluntary. I mean that's the way the text actually ends. The whole thing. It is a free will offering to the Lord. This is not a guilt offering.

This is not a let me buy you back offering. This is a free will offering. Nothing but gratitude. Nothing but thankfulness. Nothing but I cannot believe God wants something from me.

[31 : 27] Voluntary. The two words used here, four times is this word about a generous heart or the heart that is moved. It's actually talked about a willing heart.

Verses 5, 21, 22, 29. A generous heart. Two times it's a word that in the Hebrew means like lifted up. The word that you're going to see in the text called stirred.

Their hearts were stirred. Their hearts were like lifting up action. Uncoerced. Absolutely free.

This is one of the rarest moments in the history of Exodus. This is one of the rarest moments in the history of the world. God's people. This is the day that there was no king in Israel and every man did what was right in his own eyes and that would have meant that every man's eyes wanted to do what was right in God's eyes.

Which gets me to this next point. It was not only internal, not only voluntary, it was inclusive. I mean the text is very clear to talk about men and then women and then men and women and leaders.

[32 : 45] It's inclusive and the role of women in the text is especially noted. So they came, verse 22, both men and women, all who are of a willing heart.

Take a look at verse 25, and every skillful woman spun with their hands and they all brought what they had spun in purple, blue, and scarlet yarns and fine twine linen.

Verse 26, all the women whose hearts stirred them. Verse 27, and the leaders. Verse 28 and 9, all the men and women, the people of Israel.

It's restarting with God is an internal response. It's a voluntary response. It's an inclusive response. The men and the women. Finally, it's a complete response. By that I mean it's comprehensive, it's universal. There's an allness to it.

[34 : 00] You got to see this. Verse 20, then all the congregation of the people of Israel departed, and they came, now look at the word, everyone whose heart stirred, you might think, well, maybe two or three, everyone whose spirit moved him.

But then by the time you get to 22, so they came, both men and women, all who were of a willing heart. But then you find out, verse 23, everyone who possessed purple or blue or scarlet, they're engaged.

Verse 24, everyone who could make a contribution of silver or browns brought it. Again, verse 24, everyone who possessed some kind of wood that could be used brought it.

Verse 25, every skillful woman, the leaders, verse 29, all the men and women, the people of Israel. There's a sense where the love of God broke out upon the people rather than a plague.

The plague from on high was the love of God universally encompassed. It touched everyone. It ran through the whole room. This was no Hyde Park morning where the pastor stands at the back and two people say, that word ministered to me.

[35 : 15] And the rest say, see you next week or don't say anything at all. This was a week when the whole joint was touched by the Spirit of God. Unbelievable.

This is what revival actually looks like. This is so unusual. What a moment in the biblical record the very people who are described as stiff-necked towards God universally to the man, to the woman, to the child, are now showing signs of being single-minded in a collective effort to walk with God. Unbelievable. Can you imagine it? What must it have been like to live in a day when the people of God were universally stirred all at the same time? With a heart that wanted to, no, I mean more than that, not that merely wanted to, with a heart that was moved with the gratitude of such deeply embedded felt conviction conviction that they were going to give whatever they could to make a way for God in the world.

Not a person here, another there, but all of them. What a privilege to have seen it. I don't know if you've ever witnessed it.

I'm 56. I've seen it only a couple times, but I have seen it. I've seen seasons in our life of the church when not just the whole church, but wow, just like the wind of the spirit, came across everybody with democratized, universally applied desire for God.

[37 : 28] It happened in Acts chapter 4. The early church, they had generous hearts. It speaks of, Luke picks up on the allness sense.

This thing is just like running, growing, spreading. Well, let me finish.

Israel restarted with God. They did so in the following way. They picked up with God where they had left off with them before.

And that's what you've got to do too. Your heart, if your conscience hasn't been totally downgraded because of the repetition of your stubbornness, there's still a little bit of the conscience in there that knows where your feet ran off from his word.

And I pray this morning that there would be an internal sense of coming back under his ways.

Secondly, he invites you to take up a donation to God and to make a dwelling for God.

[39 : 02] for Israel, the tabernacle was intended to be an object that would point, typify, later, the Lord Jesus Christ being the center of life and in our midst.

So to get on with God again, you have to actually begin to elevate Jesus as the object of your affections, to proclaim his greatness, to pitch your tent where the opening of your canvas looks to him as the center of all things.

And then to come and give your whole heart to him. The day that this church stops lifting up the person and work of Jesus Christ is the day you should stop releasing your purse strings upon the work of the ministry where there is no proclamation of Jesus.

May the Lord be pleased to find no contributions made in his name. And may we, may we one day live to perhaps under the blessing of a season like the day in Exodus 35.

Our Heavenly Father, it's a heart issue. It's a heart issue. Our return to you is a heart issue. So give us a new heart.

[40 : 52] Apply it by your spirit. And empower us by your name. In Jesus name we pray. Amen.