

According to God's pattern

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[0 : 0 0] I know there are some of you here who have been involved in the past in building projects at various stages and that some of you are planning building projects in the future as well. I've never been the client for a building project myself but after we'd been studying at Oak Hill down in London for one year the college housing guys decided that they wanted to sell the flat we'd been in and move us into new flats that they were building on site. Shorter commute sounded good so that was all well enough. The moving date was set and to those of you more familiar with these things than we were then it will be no surprise that that date slipped back and back and back and as I recall we eventually moved in in something like November not July and before we moved in and for that matter for the few months after we moved in we kept on with what the site manager called the snag list. All those things that they hadn't quite got round to that the little mistakes they'd made along the way the doors that didn't quite shut and so on and so on. I'm assured that this is typical of a building project that even when it is supposedly complete that there is still a whole long list of things waiting to be done. Well not so the tabernacle. Did you hear it over and over again there in chapter 39 they did it just as the Lord commanded Moses and so when they finished all of these different things that they were commanded to build when all the cloth has been woven when the wooden frames have been put together when the gold and bronze covered furniture has been assembled when the silver bases have been cast when everything is ready when in verse 33 they bring it all to Moses to be inspected.

When Moses looks at what they have made and compares it to the design that God gave him up on the mountain the verdict in verse 43 is that it is just as the Lord had commanded. Read one quote from a guy who works in architecture and design who having read these verses pointed out just how very unusual it is for a project of this kind of size to pass inspection perfectly on the first attempt. There is not a snag list here. This guy said that this would only happen if the workers were highly motivated to please their client. In this case that client was the God who made heaven and earth and the God who had delivered them out of slavery and so for him no expense was being spared no corners were being cut no details were overlooked. The Israelites wanted to please the God of their salvation and as a result their work was as he intended and their work enjoyed the smile of his blessing.

The accuracy of this work, the perfection with which it is achieved, this point has been made perhaps slightly less directly over the preceding chapters as well. You or I, if we came to the recording that something that had been commanded had in fact been done, we'd be inclined to just write that, wouldn't we? And that's now in an era of copy and paste but a keystroke away. Still we would think it trivial to record everything all over again.

But Moses had to meticulously write out every detail of how the tabernacle was required to be built and then after all of that he chose to meticulously write out every detail of how the tabernacle was built.

Why? Because it matters greatly that it was in fact built precisely as God instructed. There's a few little details added here and there in the account of the construction that aren't there in the first instructions and there's a few points noted in the instructions that aren't in the report of the work being carried out but almost all of those are kind of accounts of how the equipment is going to be used and so not applicable to the actual construction. By and large with these minor variations, by and large the account of the construction is word for word identical to the instructions for what was required.

[4 : 32] Why? Well so that we will see over and over that it really was made correctly, that it was constructed according to the pattern. Why does that matter, that it was built according to pattern?

Well, just think about what happened the last time the Israelites made something that they intended to use in worship. Their previous attempt, when they did things the way that seemed best to them.

That attempt, that attempt was the, what shall we call it, the incident with the golden calf. That little episode almost resulted in the deaths of the whole lot of them.

Worshipping God is serious business. Worshipping God in a way that he has not invited us to worship him is deathly serious in the most literal sense. Since the days of Adam and Eve, sorry, since the days of Cain and Abel, there has been acceptable worship and there has been unacceptable worship.

And these chapters show us that when God says do this, that is what we must do. Not something a little bit like it. Not the parts of it that we like the sound of.

[5 : 48] Not the things that are convenient to us. When God says do it, that is what you do. It's true. It's true. God says he cares about the hearts of those who worship him.

He invites us to worship him in spirit and in truth. He says, I desire mercy, not sacrifice. Those things are true. But that doesn't mean that having your heart in the right place is the criterion.

2 Samuel chapter 6, we read about the Ark of the Covenant, this Ark that they've just built. We read about it being brought up into Jerusalem. And they've put it on a cart. And the oxen stumble and a guy called Uzzah reaches out to steady the Ark.

And the Lord's anger burned against Uzzah because of his irreverent act. Therefore God struck him down and he died there beside the Ark of God. I think there Uzzah was trying to do the right thing in that moment.

He didn't want the Ark to fall off into the mud and so he tried to steady it. But the problem is that they'd already disobeyed God by putting it on the Ark in the first place. Remember it's been built with these rings and the golden carrying poles.

[6 : 56] It's not supposed to be pulled along by oxen. It's meant to be carried by the Levites. When God tells you to do something, that is what you do.

And that's true in all areas of life but perhaps especially true in worship. After all, if the purpose of worship is to glorify God, it is hardly true worship if it disregards his commands, is it?

It's nonsense to argue that somebody's heart is in the right place if they're meanwhile being willfully disobedient or not in fact striving for perfection.

Now, to be clear, I don't think that this means that there was no room for artistry in the construction of the tabernacle. We've already talked about that, that Bezalel and Aholiab weren't just doing paint by numbers but were genuine artists even within this very prescriptive pattern that they were given.

Because God doesn't demand, God doesn't desire mindless robots, does he? Jesus said the first and the greatest commandment is to love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.

[8 : 07] Folks, if we are to love the Lord our God with all of our minds, then it seems to me that that requires both obedience and intelligence. It means that we must actually consider what is wise.

It means we must use the mental faculties that God has given us. And sometimes that means we have to think about the best way to do things within what he has commanded us.

Today, clearly, there are aspects of worship that are within our discretion. Precisely which psalms we sing is not something that we have divine instruction regarding.

I don't think you can point to a chapter and verse that tells me how long the different elements of the service should be. Or tells us what we ought to sit on or for that matter when we ought to be standing up.

There's no 1 Timothy 42 that tells us to use a projection screen rather than books or to just rely on our memories. These are matters on which we are given divine instruction.

[9 : 11] Where we are required to use our heads, to use our wisdom, to see what best achieves the objectives, if you like, that God has made clear. But where God specifies, we must take heed.

We must read the instruction manual very carefully. We must consider God's prescriptions. When God says, do this, that is what you do.

But we can consider another aspect from these chapters as well. We can consider here also what a joy and delight it is to walk in obedience to God's commands.

Consider here what blessing can ensue from worshipping God in the manner which he desires. Yes, there's fearful consequences for failure to work in God's way. But there is tremendous blessing to be found in obedience.

It's always true that doing God's work in God's way, it's true that it always has God's blessing. And that God's people are blessed thereby.

[10 : 22] Now when we read in verse 43 of chapter 39, when we read that Moses blessed the people, seeing that they had done the work as the Lord had commanded, when we read that Moses blessed them, folks, it's not really Moses' blessing, is it?

Moses in and of himself does not have a blessing to bestow upon them. Moses pronounced the benediction, but he did it on God's behalf, if you like.

As the appointed covenant mediator, he had the right to speak to God on the people's behalf, and he had the right to speak to the people on God's behalf. Now, of course, if they had not done the work according to God's design, then Moses ought not to have pronounced the blessing.

And if he had, then it would have been a rather empty blessing, wouldn't it? But here, as they have obeyed, and as God blesses them, as Moses pronounces God's blessing, then here Moses not only places his own seal of approval, but places God's seal of approval on their work.

So Rikin says Moses' blessing was much more than a word of encouragement. This is not just, well done, chaps, go and celebrate. It's not just a word of encouragement.

[11 : 42] It meant that the powerful grace of Almighty God would be with them for good. That's what it is when Moses pronounces God's blessing.

That's his right as covenant mediator. And there is also an extent to which the same is true today. We speak of the Lord's Supper and of baptism.

We speak of them as signs and seals of the covenant. They function in this same way today, that they are a pronouncement of God's grace for you and for me.

The elders of Christ's church are empowered to administer these sacraments, not because we ourselves have the right to bless, but because we are called, charged, and empowered to proclaim God's blessing.

We do that in the sacraments, and we do that when we pronounce a benediction. Folks, I do not have any blessing to give you.

[12 : 45] What you need is God's blessing. Think about what the priests were instructed a little later on in Numbers chapter 6. The Lord said to Moses, Tell Aaron and his sons, This is how you are to bless the Israelites.

Say to them, The Lord bless you and keep you. The Lord make his face shine on you and be gracious to you. The Lord turn his face toward you and give you peace.

So they will put my name on the Israelites, and I will bless them. Now there's all sorts of things we could unpack there, but for now, notice the first words of verse 24.

The Lord bless you and keep you. It's not a blessing that Aaron and his sons have themselves to bestow. The source of the blessing is not them, but God himself.

And yet, verse 27 makes it clear that as Aaron pronounces this blessing, that something actually happens. In this manner, he says, They, that's the priests, will put God's name on the Israelites, and God will bless them.

[13 : 59] It is in the act of the blessing being pronounced that blessing comes. So it is part of the design of a benediction, of a pronouncement of blessing. It is part of the design to communicate the grace that is promised in it.

That is as true today, when the benediction is pronounced at the end of our meetings together, as it was when Aaron first pronounced it thousands of years ago. It is God's blessing which you need, and it is God's blessing that you receive.

Because of their faithfulness to God's instructions, his people receive his blessing. And if there was for them, if there was any doubt at all about God's degree of satisfaction with the work that has been done, well, come with me into chapter 40.

The first 33 verses of the chapter describe the tabernacle being set up for the first time. The inspection was undertaken on the kind of disassembled articles, and now it's put together.

And as Moses hangs the curtain at the entrance to the courtyard, as he performs this last final act of setting up the tabernacle, as the ribbon is cut, as it were, then the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle, says verse 34.

[15 : 22] Moses had pronounced the blessing when he did the inspection, but I guess you could forgive the people for still being just that little bit nervous. How can they be completely sure that they have done it right?

How can they be certain that God is satisfied? Well, it would be hard to imagine a more convincing demonstration than this, wouldn't it? They've been led on their wilderness journey by the pillar of cloud and fire.

They've seen the cloud on the top of Sinai. Chapter 24 says, when Moses went up on the mountain, the cloud covered it, and the glory of the Lord settled on Mount Sinai. And now, now that same glory cloud comes to rest not on the mountain up there, not out of reach where the people aren't allowed to go, but right in their midst, right in the tabernacle.

The presence of God is no longer localized on this one mountain, here in this particular bit of geography. The presence of God has, if you like, become portable. Remember from the outset, the tabernacle is designed to move from place to place.

The furniture has these rings. It's built as separate curtains so it can be disassembled and move with them. God's presence moves with his people.

[16 : 38] And once again, once again, the weight of God's glory is such that even Moses can't approach. Verse 35, he could not enter the tent of meeting, so overwhelming was the glory of the Lord filling it.

Now, if you turn the page into the book of Leviticus, you'll see him being summoned in again. This is not that he is no longer welcome before God, but in the meantime, we're reminded that not even this covenant mediator can endure the fullness of the glory of God.

These verses as God's glory descends on the tabernacle, these verses show us show us that God is both imminent and transcendent.

It shows us the fulfillment of the promise of chapter 29, verse 45, then I will dwell among the Israelites and be their God. This promise is fulfilled as God's glory comes down.

God is here dwelling among his people just as he said he would. God is foreshadowing the fuller dwelling among the people that would not be realized until the coming of Christ.

[17 : 49] God is here in their midst. He is a close, near God. And at one and the same time as he is near, he shows them his glory.

He illustrates his immense power. He demonstrates his overwhelming holiness. Calvin says it's as if God's majesty were visibly presented to them.

And therefore, these closing verses of chapter 40 aren't just the fulfillment of the promise of chapter 29 that he would dwell among his people, though they are that. These verses are therefore also a fitting conclusion to the whole book of Exodus.

The story at this point, of course, is not over. The journey needs to continue. They haven't reached the promised land. They still don't fully realize what it will mean to be God's people.

And yet, there is a conclusion to this chapter. This episode of the Exodus concludes in some sense here. Because time and again through this book of Exodus, God has declared that his aim is his own glory.

[19 : 01] God promised to fulfill his covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. He promised to lead them to the promised land. Why? Well, so that he would be glorified as the God who keeps his promises.

He acted for Israel's good and for his own glory. Why was Pharaoh told to let the people go? So that they could go into the desert and worship him. So they could praise his glory.

Why did God send the plagues on Egypt? So that he would be glorified above all the so-called gods of Egypt, powerless in the face of this one true God. Why did God cause the Egyptian army to pursue his people?

So that, he says in Exodus 14, he could gain glory through Pharaoh, his chariots, and his horsemen, so that the Egyptians would know him as Lord. So that his own people would sing to the praise of his glory, declaring in chapter 15, he is my God and I will praise him.

My Father's God and I will exalt him. God's people praised him as they crossed over the Red Sea and they praised him again when they reached Mount Sinai. They worshipped him for the giving of his law.

[20 : 09] They built this glorious house. This was always God's plan, that his people would be saved for his glory. The Exodus was all for the glory of God.

Folks, that was true when God brought his people out of Egypt and it is true today. God's highest aim, even in saving you and me, his highest purpose in that is not your good.

His greatest purpose is his own glory. Psalm 115 verse 1, not to us, Lord, not to us, but to your name be the glory because of your love and faithfulness.

What an earth-shattering day that was when God's glory descended and came and filled the tabernacle. This is what it has been building towards. This is the purpose that God's glory might be made manifest.

This is the climax of the Exodus journey. This is the climax of the book of Exodus. This is the climax of God saving his people out of Egypt. But folks, this is not the climax of redemption.

[21 : 22] This is not the high point of God's dealings with his people. This is not the point at which God's glory is most fully demonstrated. Even as it descends and fills the tabernacle to the point that even Moses can't get in, this is not the highest demonstration of God's glory.

That day was yet to come. That majestic glory that so filled the tabernacle was like a flickering candle compared to the fullness of what God had planned.

Hebrews chapter 1 tells us the sun is the radiance of God's glory. Why? Because he shows the full revelation of God's purposes.

Because he is the exact representation of his being. Sustaining all things by his powerful word. Because after making purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the majesty in heaven.

It is in so doing that he became as much superior to the angels as the name he inherited is superior to theirs. Friends, God's glory is fully manifest in the sun.

[22 : 32] In that, it is fully manifest in his sacrifice. The radiance of God's glory is displayed at Calvary. There's a Puritan prayer that I read to you on Good Friday last year and that I want to end with tonight.

It's called Love Lusters at Calvary. Let's pray. My Father, enlarge my heart, warm my affections, open my lips, supply words that proclaim love lusters at Calvary.

There grace removes my burdens and heaps them on thy son, made a transgressor, a curse and sin for me. There the sword of thy justice smote the man thy fellow.

There thy infinite attributes were magnified and infinite atonement was made. There infinite punishment was due and infinite punishment was endured.

Christ was all anguish that I might be all joy, cast off that I might be brought in, trodden down as an enemy, that I might be welcomed as a friend, surrendered to hell's worst, that I might attain heaven's best, stripped, that I might be clothed, wounded, that I might be healed, a thirst, that I might drink, tormented, that I might be comforted, made a shame, that I might inherit glory, entered darkness, that I might have eternal light.

[24 : 28] My Savior wept there all tears, in order that tears might be wiped from my eyes, groaned that I might have endless song, endured all pain, that I might have unfading health, bore a thorny crown, that I might have a glory diadem, bowed his head, that I might uplift mine, experienced reproach, that I might receive welcome, closed his eyes in death, that I might gaze on unclouded brightness, expired, that I might forever live.

O Father, who spared not thine only Son, that thou mightest spare me, all this transfer thy love designed and accomplished, help me to adore thee by lips and life, O that my every breath might be ecstatic praise, my every step buoyant with delight, as I see my enemies crushed, Satan baffled, defeated, destroyed, sin buried in the ocean of reconciling blood, hell's gates closed, heaven's portal open, go forth, O conquering God, and show me the cross, mighty to subdue, comfort, and save.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.