

God Dwelling with His People

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[0 : 00] Good morning, everyone. Good to see you. If you could turn your Bibles to Exodus 35. The official story is Exodus 35 to 40, but we only read the back half.

So if you turn to Exodus 35, we'll do a little bit of flicking throughout today. And as Glenn said, there's a question time. So any questions from anything in the series today, anything before? That'll be a bit later. Good. Today, because it's we're having a question time because we're concluding our series in Exodus today. And just to remind you, a couple of things that we've seen over the course.

It's actually two years since we did Exodus. So we've seen a burning bush, the raising of Moses as the leader, rescue from slavery, the defeat of Pharaoh, plagues, Passover, parting of the Red Sea, there's been manna from heaven, the Ten Commandments, the tabernacle, the golden calf. And now today, finally, God will dwell with his people. There might not be another book of the Old Testament where God is so active in the drama.

[1 : 10] And the reason why, I think it's because 17 times in Exodus he tells us that he wants to give us a gift of the Lord. in Egypt. It says God heard their groaning and he remembered his covenant with Abraham.

He looked on the Israelites. He was concerned about them and he steps into the pages of history and rescues them for a relationship. And Andrew and I have said that strap line. We've said it so many times throughout the series. I wonder if it now just washes over you. Maybe as New Testament believers, as Christians, we're overly used to the idea of loving and caring Jesus. That idea of rescued for a relationship just washes over us. But in the story here, we're supposed to be wowed by the idea.

Our God hears, he remembers, he covenants, he sees, is concerned and saves. He speaks, listens and protects. There's his son, his spirit, his family. Our God is relational. And I don't think there is a better claim in the marketplace of gods than the fact that God is relational.

You see, the Lord is not like the rest. He's holy. He's set apart. The only way to know what he's like, to compare him to, is the things he does. And in Exodus, the things he does, the thing he does, is rescues people for relationship. It's so special that we're supposed to say, wow.

Wow. But instead, his people gave their love to a golden calf instead. You see, last week, instead of judging them as they deserved, he was gracious and compassionate. He forgave their sin.

[3 : 34] And so that way, the relationship could continue. And as we'll see today, the main thing in the story is that they're a completely different people. So look at chapter 35, verse 21. Look at verse 21.

And everyone who was willing and whose heart moved them came and brought an offering to the Lord for the work on the tent of meeting, for all its service and for the sacred garments.

Do you remember when we calculated the cost of the tabernacle? We said they needed a ton of gold, plus three and a half tons of silver and bronze, not to mention all the other luxury items. We calculated all up. It's about \$60 million worth of materials. Someone at the nine o'clock service said, was it a unionized building site? And I don't know, but if it was, maybe four times the cost, maybe a quarter of a billion it would have cost if there was a union. Anyway, but so much was the giving of Israel that 36, verse 6 across the page, 36, verse 6, Moses gave an order, and they sent this word throughout the camp. No man or woman is to make anything else as an offering for the sanctuary.

And so the people were restrained from bringing more because what they'd already had was more than enough to do all the work. Can you imagine Glenn Cullen, our long-suffering church warden, can you imagine him getting up at Thanksgiving Sunday and saying, no, stop giving too much

money.

[5 : 03] You're all too generous. Can you imagine a church treasurer ever in the history of Christianity ever saying that? Well, that's what Moses said here. Stop giving. You've given too much. It's a sign of their devotion. This people, previously they donated some gold to make an idol calf. Now they devote all their gold to the one true God. They are a totally different people. It's a work of God's grace in their lives. They are devoted. But notice also how obedient they are. You see, if a few weeks ago the tabernacle was just at the design stage, today it's at the construction stage. And the striking thing to note in the construction is how perfectly the building matches the blueprint. I put it on your handout as a table, and it's also, please, a slide there. You don't have to read all of it, but the thing to note is how the design or the blueprint matches the building. It's word perfect for how they match. Obviously, it's also on the next screen. So that's the ark. That's the lampstand. And I put the table as well on your handout.

Obviously, it means that the tabernacle didn't come from Ikea. Have you ever built an Ikea flat pack? You know, at the end, you've got a handful of screws and maybe a bracket left over, and you're thinking, hang on, have I messed up something in the assembly? And you're looking through, did I do it right? Well, the building here perfectly matches the blueprint down to the letter. It's the author's way of showing how meticulous they were in their obedience. In fact, 25 times in our passage today, the author comments that they made everything just as the Lord commanded. You see it especially in chapter 39. Flick over two pages to chapter 39.

So 39.32. So all the work on the tabernacle, the tent of meeting was completed. The Israelites did everything just as the Lord commanded. And so now the gold that was meant for the ark is used for the ark.

The silver that's meant for the furnishings is used for the furnishings. The author's showing us that they're a completely different people to what they were a few weeks ago. They're wholehearted in their devotion and now wholehearted in their obedience. And that is the difference that finishes off the story today. It's not that the Lord has changed. He's always the same, always faithful.

But because of his grace, Israel now are finally who they were supposed to be. Do you remember time and again when Moses was negotiating with Pharaoh? God said, let my people go that they may serve me.

[8 : 02] And now as the tabernacle is being built, that's exactly who they were. Devoted, obedient, right down to the nuts and bolts. Thanks for the slide. That's okay. And the idea of obedience is just as important in the New Testament for us Christians as it is for Old Testament Jews.

Our relationship with God is equally tied to our obedience, not our salvation. God is the saviour, whether it's saving from Egypt or dying on a cross. God is always the saviour alone.

But our ongoing relationship day to day is tied to how obedient we are to his word. So Jesus himself says this in the New Testament. This is just in one passage which we read, if you love me, you'll keep my commandments. Whoever has my commands and keeps them is the one who loves me. Jesus replied, anyone who loves me will obey my teaching. Anyone who does not love me will not obey my teaching. You can see the tight link between love and obedience. And this shows us the state of Israel's heart way back then. 25 times in the story, the author comments that they did everything just as the Lord commanded. Thank you. That's okay. And you can see this most clearly. Look at 39 verse 42.

39, 42. The Israelites had done all the work just as the Lord had commanded Moses. Moses inspected the work and saw that they had done it just as the Lord commanded. So Moses blessed them. And I don't know if you realize, but those sequence of verbs are the same words used when God created the world, when he saw all that he had been doing, when he finished the work that he had made and he blessed the seventh day. It's like the tabernacle is a picture of a totally new creation that has started.

[10 : 06] The next verse, 40 verse 1 says, the tabernacle was set up on the first day of the first month, which means it's a new year's day. It marks a new era in their history, a totally new creation.

And the trigger for all of this was Israel's obedience. They're a totally different people. And so the only thing left is verse 34. Look at verse 34.

Then the cloud covered the tent of meeting and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle. In English, we say, don't we, when something is under a cloud, that's not a good thing. So if you went home and wanted to build your own tabernacle with the way things are with the building industry, your whole process would be under a cloud. I'm going fishing later. I might end up in Tasmania.

The whole thing is under a cloud. But in Exodus, it's a good thing because the cloud is how God manifests his presence in the world. You see, ever since they came out of Egypt, there's been this cloud following them in the wilderness. So it protected them from Pharaoh's army when they fled from Egypt. When they whinged about having no bread, the Lord appeared in a cloud and promised manna from heaven. When Moses received the Ten Commandments, the cloud descended on the mountain and everything trembled. Moses, he had to be hidden in the cleft of the rock because the glory of the Lord came down in a cloud. Normally in English, if something is under a cloud, it's a bad thing.

But in Exodus, it's a great thing because it represents God's presence amongst his people. Verse 35 says, Moses could not enter the tent of meeting because the cloud of the Lord had settled on it and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle. In all the travels of the Israelites, whenever the cloud lifted from above the tabernacle, they would set out. But if the cloud did not lift, they did not set out until the day it lifted. So the cloud of the Lord was over the tabernacle by day and fire was in the cloud by night in the sight of all the Israelites during all the travels.

[12:11] And that is the end of the book. But I don't know if you realize that is a real high point in the Bible. Did you notice how Moses couldn't enter the tent because the cloud, the glory of the Lord had filled the tabernacle? It's the exact same scene when Solomon erects the temple in Israel.

In that story, wise old Solomon, he scratches his head and he says, God, will you really dwell here on earth? The heavens, even the highest heavens, they can't contain you. How much less this tabernacle that I have made? And Solomon was right. Can God really dwell with his people? He's a holy God.

We're an unholy people. Israel, they look good today, don't they? Very obedient and devoted. But you all know what happens tomorrow, don't you? Because tomorrow they'll do this and then they'll do that and then they'll do this and then they'll do that over and over and over again.

And so Exodus 40, the end of the book, it's a temporary happy ending, but it points us to a permanent happy ending at the very end of the Bible. And so on the screen, please, this is the end of the Bible. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them and they will be his people and God himself will be them as their God. Can you spot the Exodus themes? Dwelling, relationship with God? See, Revelation 21, the end of the Bible, that's the ultimate happy ending of which Moses' tabernacle and Solomon's temple are just a taste. But they highlight from beginning to end, God's desire is to dwell with his people. That is to have relationship with us. In fact, Jesus says the very same thing on the next slide.

Anyone who loves me will obey my teaching. My father will love them and we will come to them and make our home with them. Can you hear the Exodus themes? Obedience, dwelling. The point is that Jesus wants what Yahweh wants. And in our lives as Christians, he has done for us what it took 40 chapters to do for Israel. I wonder as we went through the story of Exodus, if you could catch a glimpse of Jesus on the pages. Or if you heard echoes of your own salvation story, let me jog your memory. So God rescued Israel from their slavery to death. He defeated a powerful and rebellious overlord. They were spared from God's judgment by the blood of a spotless lamb. God forgave their sin.

He was gracious and compassionate when his man stepped in to intercede on the people's behalf. And in chapter 40, this changed and obedient people has come to a golden sparkly city or tabernacle where God's God and them will finally dwell together. Do you catch a glimpse of Jesus in the story? Could you hear the echoes of your own salvation story throughout the drama of Exodus? You see, the value of Exodus for New Testament believers is that it plays out our salvation story in the drama of the Old Testament.

[15:37] Jesus says, if we love him, we'll keep his commandments. But Exodus shows how important obedience is when it comes to our relationship with God. The New Testament says that Jesus is returning to judge. But it's not until you read Exodus and you see the plague stacked one against another that you realize how serious and chilling God's judgment is. Jesus says he will send us his spirit to be with us forever. But it's not until you read Exodus and you see the cloud of the presence of God filling the tabernacle. Do you realize how amazing it is? The New Testament time and again says that our bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit. But it's not until you read a golden shiny tabernacle that you realize what a privilege it is that God would actually dwell in you. That means we should have a care, doesn't it, for how we use these temples. It would be scandalous to take this temple to certain places on the internet.

It would be scandalous to involve this temple in angry and hostile discussions. It would be a scandal to involve this temple in non-peace and acts of hostility towards others. It would be a scandal to devote this temple to another God such as money or myself. It would be just as scandalous as if Moses had had a drunken party in the center of the holiest of holies. See the value of Exodus for New Testament believers is that it acts out our salvation story on the pages of the drama. Finally the New Testament constantly tells us that we're in God's family, that we're his children, that we're brothers and sisters in Christ. But it's not until you read Exodus and you see the lengths he goes to for relationship that you realize what a privilege that is. It is unique in the marketplace of gods. It's so special we're supposed to be wowed by the idea that he doesn't just want worship like other gods but wants us to get to know him, that he loves us and wants us to love him in return.

The value of Exodus for New Testament believers is that it takes all the elements of our salvation story and plays them out in a drama of God and Moses and Israel. And so I'm going to pray. We're going to finish. There'll be a question time in a few moments. Father God, we're so grateful. You are so holy and amazing but you want us to know you, that you love us, you want us to love you and obey you as well. We're so amazed, Father. Thank you so much that you want a relationship with us, that you rescued us for this purpose. And Father, please give us a care about our obedience. Help us to be fearful about disobeying you.

[18 : 58] Help us to have a care with how we use our bodies. Please would Exodus show us how special and set apart your temple is. And so would we use our bodies in the same way, with the same caution and care.

Please, Father, help us never get over that you love us, that you actually live in us by your Spirit, that you'd bother to send your only Son to die for people like us. We ask all these things in his name. Amen.