

Construction I (Exodus 35:30-39:43) | Kevin P. Larson | 11.10.13 | KarisChurch.org

Each of us wants a life of joy. We all seek an existence that's blessed. But what we hope for seems to elude us. Or, rather, what we want we so often avoid. Maybe a joyful, blessed life is found in the place we least expect. Perhaps it's located in the place from which we most want to flee. Let's look at that life, that place together this morning. We see it here in what looks on the surface to be a dry text set in a dry place. God's people are building a tent in the middle of the desert.

We have spent the last two years here in the book of Exodus. We have two more weeks to go after today. The Israelites are doing what God says, making this tent. With three little kids, it's pretty common that Amy and I hear the sound of shattering glass or cracking wood in our house. We're trying to get them not to throw balls down the hallway or slam the doors to their rooms, but it still happens. We're trying to teach them to obey our instructions. We're praying they won't live lives of destruction. But too much of the time, they don't listen and things break. That's because they act too much like Mom and Dad. We look a lot like Israel, disobeying God, tearing things up. But here we see a glimpse of Israel in obedience. We see a picture of that life we all want. God's people come together and construct a tabernacle where the Lord will come and dwell.

We've planned from the beginning to take **chapters 35 through 39** together, even though it's a big chunk of Scripture. This section copies **chapters 25 through 30** almost exactly. In the previous section, we see God giving His people instructions for building the tabernacle. In this current section, we see God's people carrying it out. The two sections are so similar. Only the order of what is presented is changed. **Chapters 25 through 30** walk through what's to be built in terms of priority theologically. The ark where God dwells comes first. **Chapters 35 through 39** look at what's constructed in terms of priority architecturally. It makes sense to build the big tent first and then the stuff that goes in it.

In **chapter 36**, you see the building of the actual tabernacle. The craftsmen make the curtains, the frames, the bars, and the veil for that tent. In **chapter 37**, you see the construction of the furniture inside the tent. The workers make the ark of the covenant, the table, the lampstand, and the altar of incense. In **chapter 38**, you see the building of the articles used outside of the tent. The altar for burnt offerings is made. So is the bronze basin. So is the court that encloses everything. That chapter ends with a recording of all the artisans who do the work, as well as all the materials that are used. In **chapter 39**, the garments for the priests are made. All of it is then presented to Moses for his inspection and blessing. **The people do what God says. They construct this tabernacle.**

The Gifting of God's People

That's where we'll focus this morning, but I first want to quickly mention two things we've touched on before. **First**, you can't look at **chapter 35** without seeing the gifting of God's people. The Lord has equipped His people for this task. These are truly spiritual gifts that Bezalel and Oholiab and others receive from God. That's what **verse 31** says. They receive creativity, intelligence, skill, motivation from God. Even the ability to teach others how to do it all, says **verse 34**, comes from Him.

That's still true for us. It's not just people who stand up here to preach or teach who are spiritually gifted. It's all of us. That includes those of us who are really good with our hands. Nathan Pierce came over a couple of weeks ago and fixed one of those door frames that the boys had smashed. What would have taken me hours took him minutes.

Some of us don't think we're gifted. But we are. Carpenters and painters and quilters and sculptors all get that ability from God. So do writers and chefs and gardeners. Wouldn't it be amazing if each of us obeyed and used our gifts among the people of God for the building up of His Church? We can. We should.

The Giving of God's People

Second, we also see the giving of God's people here in **chapter 36**. The people of Israel freely, joyfully bring offerings each day. They bring so much, it says, that it gets to be too much. It reads, in **verse 6**, *"So the people were restrained from bringing."* What a crazy problem to have! Moses has to tell them to stop!

Now evangelical Christians give more than most Americans. But they still give only 4% of their income. If every Christian in American gave just 10% it might feel like here in **Exodus 36**. We wouldn't know what to do with all the money. But God still works in His people. He wants to move us toward generosity.

Some of us, though, think we have nothing to give. But that's false. In northeast India, in the state of Mizoram, Christian women set aside a handful of rice each time they cook a meal. They then give that to their church to fund world missions. While the average income there is \$400 a year, they've pooled their rice together to support over 1,700 full-time missionaries and give away \$4.9 million a year to global missions. Wouldn't it be awesome if we each gave faithfully, no matter what we had to build up His Church? We can. We should. **If we are faithful with our gifting and our giving, big things will happen.** For sure. Christ's Church will be built up as we obey. And that's what I want us to consider more fully now this morning.

Obeying The Word of God

Friends, here is the big idea for today: **we're meant to experience the blessing of obeying what God says in building His Church.** Two things happen here. God's people obey. God's people build. **First, see how they obey.** Israel just does what God has told them to do here. And that should teach us something. Now here's a question that I have when I come to this passage: why is there so much repetition from this section here and the one previous? Remember? **Chapters 35 through 39** and **chapters 25-30** are almost identical. Why the repetition? **Here's the first reason:** the Lord wants us to see that they did what He said exactly. My wife likes to wing it when she puts stuff together. I go line by line, not deviating from the instructions. Israel does it the right way here. The text implies that they do what God commands down to the very letter. But this is emphasized explicitly here, as well. Look at **Exodus 39:1**. *"From the blue and the purple and scarlet yarns they made finely woven garments for ministering in the Holy Place. They made the holy garments for Aaron, as the LORD had commanded Moses."* That statement, that they make something "as the LORD had commanded Moses," occurs nine times here in **chapter 39**. It's found another seven times in chapter 40. They do what God tells them to do.

This is a reminder for us to obey the Lord, as well. God is in authority over us. He made us. He is Creator. He therefore owns us. He is Lord. He tells us what to do. We do what He says. We want to talk all the time about Jesus being our Savior, and that's good. But it's not quite as comfortable to talk about Him as Lord, as our Master. We are to obey Him. **James 1:22** says, *"But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves."* The book of Romans that puts so much emphasis on faith, begins and ends the book speaking of God's goal of bringing about the *"obedience of faith."* **1 Peter 1:2** says we were chosen *"according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, in the sanctification of the Spirit, for obedience to Jesus Christ and for sprinkling with His blood."* I could go on and on. We, too, are called to obey our Lord.

In his book *Shepherding a Child's Heart*, Tedd Tripp teaches that parents are to expect their children to obey "without challenge, without excuse, and without delay." That's what the Lord calls us to, as well. Is that you? When you read something in His word? When you're convicted about something by His Spirit? Do you do it "without challenge, without excuse, and without delay?" Do we obey Him? With our thoughts? Do we set our minds on things above, as **Colossians 3** teaches us? Do we fight for purity? With our words? Do we let our mouths become fires, worlds of unrighteousness that destroy as **James 3** talks about? Or do we build people up in love? What about our deeds? Do we serve? Do we count others more significant than ourselves, as **Philippians 2** tells us, or do we selfishly get what we want and hurt others? Do we obey our Lord?

One other area I want to bring up affects all three realms. It's sex. Do we fight against impure fantasies? Do we resist improper joking? Do we *"flee from sexual immorality"*, as **1 Corinthians 6:18** teaches? With our eyes? With our feet? With our hands? The Lord tells us to do that. **But here is one common objection to Christianity: aren't you trying to take away our fun?** Why do Christians have to be such kill-joys? Obey!?! In that same book, Tripp has this figure that we'll put up on the screen. It's built off of **Ephesians 6:1-3**. We refer to this all the time in our house. He calls this the "circle of blessing."

Eph. 6:1 Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. **2** "Honor your father and mother" (this is the first commandment with a promise), **3** "that it may go well with you and that you may live long in the land."

Here's the idea. If we obey - that's doing what He says. If we honor - that's desiring to please Him. If we do those things, we'll be in that circle of blessing. It's also a sphere of safety. Things will go well. Life will be long. But, if we go out, there is the promise of difficulty and hardship. Here and now, as well as later. We'll experience either blessing or cursing in this world and the next, depending on how we live. This is the reason we should discipline our kids. This is why the Lord disciplines us. Now, of course, in a fallen world, there will be trials. Not everything will be easy. In all that, though, we can have joy. But that's not the point I want us to see from here. Staying in that circle is a good thing. Big kids like us can think that getting out of that circle is where freedom and happiness is found. But that's really experienced on the inside. That's true joy. There we're really free. When we obey. Do we do what He says?

Here's one thing I'm really concerned about in our church and in our generation: we often think authenticity is enough. If we're real, God will accept us. Others will, too. That's all that matters. But God wants us to change. He wants us to grow. We should obey Him and that will be good for us.

But is that our main motivation for doing so? So we get blessing? No. It's that we might glorify God. We do that through our gratitude. Remember Israel is trapped in Egypt in bondage. They're crying out to the Lord. They deserve nothing from Him. But He rescues them and brings them out. There is gratitude on the banks of the Red Sea. There they sing songs of worship to Him. Then the Lord brings them out and gives them His law. He offers them life. But immediately they break the covenant. Moses is enraged. So is the Lord. But what happens? God gives them a second chance. He gives them His law again. How should Israel respond? With thanksgiving. With worship. They do. And that makes them want to build this tabernacle just like God says. Their motivation isn't that God would bless them and accept them. It's *because* He has blessed and accepted them.

That should be our motivation to obey. Jesus has rescued us. He forgives us when we stray. That should result in thanksgiving. Obedience. We can't let an escalator get turned into stairs. That's what a broken escalator is, right? Stairs? God's grace rescues and carries us upward, in obedience, like an escalator. But we want to try to turn His salvation into stairsteps - where we make the effort, where we get the credit, where we earn it. But God won't stand for that. The Lord wants to take us on a ride. It comes by His grace. It's for His glory.

And escalators are more fun, right? Stairs are boring. We don't want to take away your fun. We want you to experience deeper joy. That's the gospel. But maybe this is the version of Christianity you've heard: you kill yourself to obey. He grudgingly accepts you. You begin a joyless existence with Him among these weird people. But we hate that. And Jesus does, too. Christianity is being rocked by grace, being overcome by joy, and then being moved to obey.

You might ask, "What if I don't feel like it?" Well, you might not be a Christian. If we have truly been rescued, we won't perfectly obey, but we'll desire to do what He says. When we fail, we'll repent. But Christians go through periods where they struggle. You can't just wait until you feel like it. You do what He says anyhow. Often I don't want to get up here. I must obey. But we can't be content with just going through the motions. We have to get in the word and preach the gospel to ourselves. We have to pray and ask the Lord to refresh our hearts. We have to be around others who can remind us of both. Israel does what God says. He wants us to do what He says, too. And what they do here is build.

Building the Tabernacle of God

God's people construct this tabernacle here. **Second, see how they build.** Throughout these chapters, the words "**He made**" is repeated. God's people, and particularly Bezalel and his peeps, obey and build. We're meant to see that. But, this whole section of chapters again repeats what we've seen in Exodus already. One reason is so we'll see they do it exactly as God says. **But here's a second reason:** it shows the importance of what is built.

This is no tent Moses grabbed out of the sporting goods section at Wal-Mart. This is the tabernacle of God. It's the purpose for which God saved His people out of Egypt.

What do I mean by that? The Lord set His people free from bondage. He gave them words of life. But He did all this for a greater reason. It's so He could dwell among Israel. So they could have fellowship. So they could worship Him. We'll see in **chapter 40** the Lord taking up residence there. This is a huge moment in history. God is dwelling among His people. All they have to do is keep their end of the bargain. They have to obey.

But obviously Israel has trouble doing this. This is just like the garden. And this is almost like a new creation. The apple doesn't fall too far from the tree. They eat the one their ancestors eat, too. We do the same. We try but fail to obey. We can't stay in that circle, can we? Therefore, God planned a solution. Look at **John 1:14** with me. It reads, *"And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth."* This "word" is Jesus. There's a Greek version of the Old Testament called the Septuagint. What's interesting is that the Greek word "dwelt" in John is used in the Old Testament to speak of the tabernacle. **John 1:14** basically says Jesus pitched a tent among us. That tabernacle pointed ahead to Him. He is God dwelling among His people. For fellowship. For worship.

Now that temporary tabernacle becomes the more permanent temple in the Bible, right? In **John 2:19**, Jesus greatly confuses but royally hacks off the religious leaders by saying, *"Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up."* What's Christ doing? The Jews think He's talking about the temple there in Jerusalem. Jesus is talking about His death and resurrection. But He's also calling Himself the true temple. That building pointed ahead to Him. God is dwelling among His people. For fellowship. For worship. In Jesus.

But what about after the resurrection? And the ascension? When He goes to heaven? Is God still dwelling among us? Well, yes. And that's where the application for us comes in. Check out a few key passages in the New Testament with me. **1 Corinthians 3:16** says, *"Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you?"* **1 Corinthians 6:19** says, *"Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God?"* Interestingly, that's the reason why we're given to flee sexual immorality. Our bodies are temples for God. But they're also coming together with others to be a temple for Him as the church. **1 Peter 2:5** puts it like this: *"You yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ."* What's the point in all of this? We're now the tabernacle where God dwells and is worshipped. Israel built it. We're to build it, too. That's one massive way we're called to obey.

We're to obey and build up the church, the people of God. I'm not talking about a building. We are the building. We are to build up that community, the church. We're to envelop others in that community on mission. That's what we're to be about if we're Christians. Last week, we asked how we use our time, talent, and treasure. Today, I want to ask - what about our energy? What in your life most wears you out - in a good way? What do you lay in bed and think about? What gets you worrying? What's makes you rejoice? Your blood, sweat, tears, laughter - where does it primarily go? It should go to build up His church - even if you're not in vocational ministry. He made you to work and create. Those come from God. Those vocations. They are good, in and of themselves. But you do those things with view to His kingdom, as part of His people. You don't just try to build up your own personal kingdom. You live for His. That is built up through His Church.

This might mean you fix a door for somebody in your MC. It might mean that you replace one for a widow down the street. It might look like you and your family getting on board with a new MC that's launching. And, by the way, we have a bunch starting in January. It might look like you becoming a part of a new church plant. And yep, we're starting one in Jeff City in January, too. We want to see the church healthy and growing. We want you to give your lives for that - here in Columbia on your street or across the globe in Tokyo.

Thinking back, this wouldn't have all come together if it weren't for our elders deciding to plant roots here and invest. Rob sticking around and giving it his all. Aarik saying he'd stay and write for the Trib. Ryan putting vocational ministry on hold. They said they'd build His Church. That's where your energy should go. It will if it's your identity. Do you view yourself as part of a people? As a church builder? Who we are determines what we do.

Think about the motivation of the Jews again. There's a sense of gratitude. But they surely saw it as a privilege, right? Shouldn't we? I hate putting up tents! Not this one! We get to be a part of this place where God dwells. We get to be a part of building it, of spreading it. What a privilege! Do we see it in that way? Grateful to be a part of His people? Grateful we get to build it up together?

But one thing that concerns me here in Karis and in the church is that we can easily think this community is good enough. We can like seeing the same people each week, having the deep relationships we have, and not care much about building this thing. He wants His church to grow. More people reached. More MCs started. More church plants launched. Scotty Smith says, "The gospel comes to us that it might run through us." He wants us to obey Him and build this together. We must give our all energy to see His kingdom spread throughout our city, throughout the world.

But maybe you don't want to be a part of building the church. It's too messed up, you say. That's one objection I hear. People are hypocrites. People don't obey God there. And if they are, you don't want a part of *that* God. But, I've already said that Christianity is not this message of obeying so you get accepted. You don't get your crap together and then become a part of the team. It's the opposite. God accepts you as you are and makes you a part of the team first. Jesus hung out with the weakest and most sinful people of His day. That's who He still comes to today. Those are the people that embrace grace. Christianity is about owning our sin and humbling ourselves. So therefore, we should expect the church to be pretty messed up. In fact, if it's reaching people with the gospel, it will look really messed up. And Karis, I think we should look a lot more messed up than we are!

But hear this: the Lord is about, by His Spirit, enabling us to obey. He's making those who are ugly beautiful. He's making the wicked righteous. It's a mess, but it's a beautiful mess. One that's becoming beautiful, at least.

A Building That's Blessed

It's a mess that He blesses. Have you seen those signs in kitchens? "Lord, bless this mess!" That's generally a prayer of desperation. But we can trust the Lord will do that in us. Look at **verse 43** again. ***"And Moses saw all the work, and behold, they had done it; as the LORD had commanded, so had they done it. Then Moses blessed them."*** In Exodus, the Spirit enables them to build the tabernacle just as God wants it. They get a few moments of excellence. Moses blesses them. Or rather God does so through Moses. But they soon get messy right after that. But here they obey, they build, and God blesses.

That's what God wants for us, also. Again, it doesn't mean there aren't trials from our sin or suffering. It doesn't mean there won't be ups and downs. But the Lord wants us to obey what He says, build up His church, and be blessed in doing it. In obedience, in staying within that circle, there's blessing. Anything else leaves us a bitter taste in our mouths. Think about it: what stands between these two sections describing the blueprints and construction of the tabernacle? The making of the golden calf. They disobeyed. They built something else. They worshipped it. They were left empty. That's where we all turn. But that's why Jesus came. He came to save us out of that idolatry and destruction. Trust in Him. He obeyed on our behalf.

But He also came to enable us to obey. Trust Him for that, also. If we're Christians, we *can* obey. We can experience blessing. We can't obey enough to earn acceptance. But if we're accepted, He then moves us and enables us to do what He asks. This Old Covenant that we see here points ahead to a New Covenant that Jeremiah and Ezekiel talk about. God would write His law on their hearts. He would enable them to keep His commands. That's us. By His grace, for His glory, through His Spirit, we can obey. We don't just have to go around breaking stuff. We can build something. There is blessing and joy there.

In his article, "Obedience is Possible," Kevin DeYoung argues that we see holiness as too far out of reach. We think all we can do is screw up. But, through Christ, he says obedience is possible, prescribed, and precious. It's possible - through the work of His Spirit. It's prescribed - He tells us to obey Him. It's precious - our Father delights to see His grace at work in us when we obey Him. Darrin Patrick says, "Grace doesn't give you the right to do what you want. Grace gives you the power to do what you should." But let me say, the more He's at work in us, the more we'll *want* to do what we *should*.

So Karis, let's stop wallowing in our sin and having too low of expectations for ourselves. Let's see Christ in us. Let's obey His word. Let's build His Church. With Him among us. For the good of the world. And, let's experience that blessing together. There we'll find that joy we search for, as surprising as it may be. We'll see every other thing we put our energy into just won't satisfy. **We're meant to experience the blessing of obeying what God says in building His Church.**