

God is honored
Exodus 35-36

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I read a story this week about a woman who was at an airport waiting for her flight to take off. She got hungry and bored, so she went and bought a newspaper and a bag of chocolate chip cookies. She sat down next to an older gentleman, opened her paper and began to read. To her shock, the man sitting next to her reached into her bag of cookies, grabbed one and ate it. She was blown away by how brazen he was, but he looked kind enough and he was old, so she let it slide, and she reached in and grabbed a cookie herself and ate it. He grabbed another. She grabbed another. It went on like this all the way down to the last cookie. She still couldn't believe what was happening. And she thought, there is no way that he will take the last one. No way. Sure enough, he reaches in, grabs it, to her surprise he broke it in half, handed her one half and then ate the other half with a smile on his face. Then he got up and walked away. She was kind of angry, but she was even more confused. She kept thinking "This is one of the most surreal things I've ever experienced." When it was time to board her plane she stood up, gathered her things, reached into her purse to get her ticket and as she did, she grabbed hold of her bag of chocolate chip cookies. He wasn't eating her cookies; she was eating his.

Knowing whether something belongs to you or to someone else makes all the difference. And we are going to see the exact same lesson play out as we continue in our series in Exodus. If you have your Bibles, open them with me to Exodus 35. Earlier in this book, we saw how God set his people free from Egypt. They had been slaves there for over 400 years. As slaves they had no personal wealth, no belongings to call their own. But God gave them a command as they were leaving Egypt. He told them to go to their Egyptian masters and ask them to give them lots of wealth and valuable possessions as they left. And at first blush that seems like an insane ask right? As your slaves are running away, it doesn't make sense to stop them and give them all your gold and valuables. But as crazy as it sounds, the Egyptians actually did it. The Egyptians gave the Israelites the wealth of the nation. And why did they do that? **Exodus 12:36 The LORD had made the Egyptians favorably disposed toward the people, and they gave them what they asked for; so they plundered the Egyptians.**

So God not only freed them from Egypt, he gave them the wealth of Egypt. And then if you look in Exodus 24-31, God shows the Israelites that he wants them to construct a dwelling place for himself, so that he can live in their midst. So there is the tabernacle, this portable tent that was kept in the very center of their community, the Ark of the Covenant, the altar, the washbasin, the priestly garments. And none of these things existed yet. They had to be built, and they had to be built using precious and valuable material. They are wandering through the wilderness. How are they going to get these materials? God is going to ask them to give from the abundance of the riches he provided for them when they left Egypt. We are going to see three movements in this story: The ask from the leader, the response from the people, the overwhelming generosity.

Let's begin by looking at the ask from the leader. **Exodus 35:4-9 4 Moses said to the whole Israelite community, "This is what the Lord has commanded: 5 From what you have, take an offering for the Lord. Everyone who is willing, is to bring to the Lord an offering of gold, silver and bronze; 6 blue, purple and scarlet yarn and fine linen; goat hair; 7 ram skins dyed red and another type of durable leather; acacia wood; 8 olive oil for the light;**

spices for the anointing oil and for the fragrant incense; 9 and onyx stones and other gems to be mounted on the ephod and breastpiece. Moses prompted by the Lord makes a really clear ask. Here's what God has asked us to construct and make. Here are all the materials that are going to be required... now that you know the need, will you consider giving?

Next we see the response of the people. **20 Then the whole Israelite community withdrew from Moses' presence, 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. 22 All who were willing, men and women alike, came and brought gold jewelry of all kinds: brooches, earrings, rings and ornaments. They all presented their gold as a wave offering to the Lord.** I love this. No one was pressured into giving. There wasn't a huge emotional appeal with people guilted into giving. Look! It's only those who were willing, whose hearts were moved. And they gave their gifts as a **wave offering**, which is a unique type of giving. Instead of giving discreetly and secretly, where I write out a check, fold it in half and then fold it in half again, so no one sees what I give, a wave offering is when you take your gift, you come forward, and you literally wave it back and forth, before the Lord and in full view of all the people, and then you offer it. Even though this gift was public, their motives were still right and pure. They didn't do this to gain honor for themselves, but to celebrate and rejoice in the privilege of giving their gift to God.

We see the ask from the leader, the heart-felt response from the people, and then the surprising generosity. **3 (The skilled workers to whom the Lord had given the ability to do the work) received from Moses all the offerings the Israelites had brought to carry out the work of constructing the sanctuary. And the people continued to bring freewill offerings morning after morning.** (Not obligatory offerings - this wasn't a tax. This was a free will offering) **4 So all the skilled workers who were doing all the work on the sanctuary left what they were doing 5 and said to Moses, "The people are bringing more than enough for doing the work the Lord commanded to be done."** They had gold, silver, bronze, leather, gems and other precious stones all over the place! All these valuables were actually getting in the way...**6 Then 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, **7 because what they already had was more than enough to do all the work.** Come on now! Did you see that?! The people had to be **restrained from bringing more!** They were giving so much the people had to be asked to stop. How many of you, show of hands, have ever been at a church service where an offering appeal was made and then a count was taken, and there wasn't enough, so they had to pass the plate a second or a third time? It feels kind of strange, kind of weird when that happens. This is the exact opposite of that! The plate doesn't even make it all the way around before the people have to be stopped from giving because they already have more than enough. What an incredible gift?!

We are in that season of the year when people are focusing a lot on gifts. Gifts on Black Friday...people rushing out and climbing over one another to get TV. Cyber Monday, people finding deals that will be sent to their house...We spend a lot of time this year thinking about the gifts we get ourselves, the gifts that we give to other people... Let me ask you, how much time do you plan on spending thinking about the gifts you are going to bring God this Christmas?

I don't know about you, but I am so encouraged, inspired, and challenged by this passage. The key element that stands out to me is this: **God's people gave willingly and abundantly**. These people didn't need to be pressured, or strong-armed, cajoled, or manipulated. It says, Exodus 35:21 **"Everyone who was willing and whose heart moved them came and brought an offering to the Lord."** God moved in their heart, they gave because they were stirred and motivated with joy. And then look one more time at what we read in 36:5 **"The people are bringing more than enough for doing the work the Lord commanded to be done.** They didn't have to adjust the plans for the tabernacle because they didn't have enough materials - they had more than they needed. Remember, they had to be kept from giving more!

That's what God wants from us as his people: willing and abundant giving. We inherently know that willing and abundant giving is desirable and admirable. No one hears a story about a miserly old scrooge who kept everything for himself or herself and says, "Wow, that's the kind of person I want to be someday. So wonderful. So inspiring. Let's call the local news station and have them do an inspirational story on their selfishness!" No! It's willing and abundant giving that inspires us.

And I got to tell you, can I brag on this church for a moment - I have seen a lot of that around here. I have some friends who are adopting three kids. This is such a wonderful family and there was a need that came their way, and though adopting wasn't part of their game plan, they prayed and felt like God was telling them to open their hearts and their homes and welcome these children into their family. When people in this church found out about it, they started doing everything they could to help out - buying beds and furniture, helping them remodel parts of their home, helping to make more space for these kids, without an ask. There were people who have never even met this family who found out about it and started handing me envelopes full of cash and \$1,000 checks. And I just kept on thinking about this passage in Exodus. God is moving in people's hearts. No ask was even made. They heard about an opportunity, were stirred in their heart, are more than willing and there was abundant giving!

Let me share a few other numbers with you:

978 That is the amount of Christmas presents we will be giving away this year as a church family so that every child in our community knows that they are valued and loved!

24,570 That's how many pounds of food this church supplied for families in need in our community for a Thanksgiving meal!

218,970 That's how many dollars have been given to our generous buckets since January, and they have allowed us to **287** families in our community in need.

When it comes to giving I think there are four common options.

Give nothing... When I think about not giving, the image that comes to my mind is of watching little kids play on the playground together. Some are glad to share; some refuse to share. They scream and cry and flail about when their parents tell them to let Johnny play with their toy. The hope is that when we grow up we would grow out of that greediness, but not everyone does.

Some people don't give at all; others only **Give meagerly**. This is the majority of people in the US. The average American gives 1.9% of their income away. When a need comes up, they'll

write a \$50 check. When they come to church, they'll put a 20 in the box. It's giving, but it's not yet comparatively significant, and it's not yet become a way of life. It's not a priority.

Then there are those who **Give obediently**. Throughout the Scriptures, especially the Old Testament, there is a command to tithe, to give the first 10% of your income to the Lord. And I know a lot of people, specifically those who are mature in their faith who say, the Bible says it, so I am going to do it. It's black and white. That's what God has called me to do and I'm going to do it. Obedient giving is a good place to be. Obedience is way better than disobedience. But I don't think it's the best place to be!

God wants us to **Give cheerfully**. Those who cheerfully give are not only giving a lot away, they are giving a lot away with a spirit of joy and excitement. It's not just obedience based. It's not obligatory. It's the contagious overflow of a grateful heart. These people aren't asking, "*How much do I have to give?*" They are asking, "*How much can I give.*" And even though they enjoy new clothes or a new car or a fun vacation, by far and away, the thing that gives them the most joy is when they get to give to God and invest in the kingdom. That's what we are seeing in this passage.

Now, if I can speak to you as your pastor, honestly and lovingly, we have people in all four of these groups, but in talking to a lot of different people, as well as looking at the numbers, here's what I've seen. The majority of our people are in one of these two groups (**meagerly give, obediently give**). We have a lot of people who give a little bit here and there, and we have a lot of people who give a tithe. They see it in the Bible, know it's what they are called to do, and want to do it because it's the right thing. And though all giving is a way to honor God, I think what the Lord really wants for us as a church is that no matter where we are at today, we all should move to this place where we are **cheerfully giving**. And hear me, I'm not saying that because we have a budget. I'm saying that because that is the ideal possible condition of our hearts, and it is also what God wants most. Listen to what we read in 2 Corinthians 9:7 "**Each of you should give what you have decided in your heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.**" Did you see that? What kind of giver is God looking for? "**God loves a cheerful giver.**" That word cheerful in the Greek is pronounced "hilarious." We should be giving so freely and so abundantly that it makes people laugh. That's crazy. We should be giving so much away that we think...this doesn't even make sense, but I have so much joy right now!

So that begs a great question. How do you become a cheerful giver? If right now, giving is hard for you, unnatural and not easy. How do you go from being either a stingy giver or a reluctant/hesitant giver, an obligatory giver, to being a cheerful giver? I think it all comes down to that attitude of your heart and your motivation for giving. Think about the Israelites, I think they were so motivated to give for three reasons, and I think when they gave it was their way of saying.

God...

Thank you for saving me!

Thank you for blessing me!

I care about your dwelling place!

Think about that from the perspective of the Israelites. They had been slaves for 400 years. Slavery is all they had ever known. God set them free, and they were grateful. And God didn't just save them, he blessed them. When they left Egypt, God changed the hearts of the Egyptians so that the Israelites left with the wealth of the nation, they plundered their captors, and they were grateful. And now God was going to dwell among them permanently in the tabernacle. They wanted it to be beautiful. They wanted it to be majestic. They wanted it to be worthy of his presence!

Think about how true these sentiments are for us! God has not set us free from Egypt, he has set us free from sin and death. His grace has covered over our worst mistakes, welcomed us home into the Family of God, and ensured our eternal salvation. And God has not just saved us, he has blessed us! The Scriptures teach that all good gifts are from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights. He has given us everything we have. Every dollar. Every cent. Every relationship. Every breath. God is so good! And hopefully, just like the Israelites, we care about God's dwelling place.

Now the dwelling place of God is no longer in a tabernacle - it's the church, it's his people! When we give to the church, we are saying, "God, I care about your dwelling place." In no way is God confined to the four walls of our church building, but this is the place we come to worship, the place we come to hear the Word of God preached, the place where we engage in community, the place where every year hundreds of people give their lives to Jesus and are baptized in that water right over there.

Let me share with you some numbers that detail what God is up to in this place:

27. That's the number of people who have been baptized at this church in the last month! Almost one every single day.

96. That's the number of teenagers who gave their life to Jesus at this church last year!

758 The number of people at our church who have gone through Rooted this year and got plugged into a life group.

4 That is how many safe houses your giving has helped to build to rescue young girls from human trafficking and bring them into an environment where they will be safe and nurtured.

When you give to the church, that's what you are giving to help support! This church is a safe place for people to come no matter what they are going through in life. This is a place for people who are struggling with addiction, who are wrestling with depression, who have lost a loved one, who need help in their marriage. When they come here, they find the grace of God. Just last week we celebrated with over 100 people who finished a 14-week journey toward freedom and hope in Christ. People shared where they were at when they started, and where they are at now. People said, in their own words: Before they started they were: empty, exhausted, anxious, afraid, hopeless, lonely, hurt, insecure, unsure, broken, closed off, fearful, worried, alone. Now they are: free, hopeful, enlightened, whole, excited, equipped, deeply loved, adored, stronger, peaceful, secure, grounded, thankful, blessed, God-centered, God-focused, prayer, joyful, full of light.

When you give to the church, that is what you are giving to. Sometimes people ask, “Do I have to give to the church?” I think that is the wrong question. Friends, you should go to a church that you want to give to! If you can’t be excited about entrusting your finances to the church you are a part of, how are you to have confidence entrusting the care of your soul to the church you are a part of? You should go to a church you want to give to! Giving to a healthy, flourishing, Bible-based, Christ-centered congregation is not only one of the most strategic things we could ever do with our money, it’s our way of saying to God, “I care about God’s dwelling place. I want to give to build up your body, to support and resource the family of believers I am a part of.”

There are a couple more numbers I’d like to share with you as an update to where we are at with our vision for **freedom**. In January we spent a few weeks casting vision for freedom at The Creek, freedom from debt, freedom for impact. We said we wanted to pay off our 3.5 million dollars of debt, so that we can take every cent given to this church and put it directly toward ministry. For years, as we have been paying off this building, we have been putting 600,000 a year toward a mortgage. And instead of paying that to the bank, we want to put that toward ministry. We also wanted to see additional funds come in to help us improve our facilities and technology here, to invest into the next generation, and to increase our impact around the world. We said that we could accomplish all of this if, over the next two years, people gave not 10% but 15%. And so many people have committed to giving. So many of the stories I’ve heard have been beyond inspiring. We have older people living on a fixed income who are giving 15%, high school students who are working part-time jobs giving 15%, and we also have people with extra resources who are giving, many of them above and beyond 15%. We have seen checks of 10,000, 20,000, 40,000, 100,000, very generous stock gifts. It has been absolutely incredible. For those of you who have given above and beyond, who have given willingly and cheerfully, I want to commend you. I want to honor you. I want to thank you!!

In terms of where we are at, this year, we had hoped to see 3.5 million dollars given above our budget. What has actually been given is 752,000 above our budget. So about 25% of our goal. And the analytics tell us this: About 25% of people increased their giving. The rest has kept their giving about the same.

So as we are spending time in the book of Exodus looking at their giving, this is a time for us to celebrate and champion those in our church who, just like them, have been giving abundantly and cheerfully. And it might be time for those who have not been giving, or who have only been giving meagerly or obediently to pray and ask God, how do you want to stir in my heart? All I have is yours, what do you want me to give, and how do you want me to give?

When we talk about giving, we look to Jesus! The Bible says that Jesus, though he was rich, he became poor, so that we, through his poverty might become rich. In light of who Jesus is, and how much he gave, how could you not want to follow his example and give what we have, as well?

Prayer....Take my life...