

God is Near
Exodus 37 - 40

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I have some friends who are in the process of building a house. And every time I go over to their house do you know what I see? I see blueprints laid out. It's been this way for the past three years. Each time I go there they have their drawings out, trying to figure out the configuration of the rooms, how many rooms, what kind of siding to use, basement or no basement, the pitch of the roof? So many decisions to make. The building process is finally underway. And now, almost every day, they head out to the site of their next home to see the progress, and it's fun to see the work that is being done, from excavating to pouring the foundation, framing, and roofing. They are going there because it's fun and exciting, but also because they want to make sure they are building the house exactly according to the design. They spent years putting the perfect plan in place. They want to make sure it comes together just as they had hoped and dreamed. Some of you have built a house before, and you know exactly what I'm talking about.

That's the situation God's people are in today as we wrap up with our final week in the book of Exodus. In 24-31 God showed them the tabernacle that he wanted them to build so he could dwell among them. In 35-36 the people took up a very generous offering so they would have all the necessary materials. So much was given they had to be restrained from giving any more! So now, with the plans in place and all the necessary materials, the building begins. Take a look with me in **37:1 Bezalel made the ark of acacia wood—two and a half cubits long, a cubit and a half wide, and a cubit and a half high. 2 He overlaid it with pure gold, both inside and out, and made a gold molding around it. 3 He cast four gold rings for it and fastened them to its four feet, with two rings on one side and two rings on the other. 4 Then he made poles of acacia wood and overlaid them with gold. 5 And he inserted the poles into the rings on the sides of the ark to carry it. 6 He made the atonement cover of pure gold—two and a half cubits long and a cubit and a half wide. 7 Then he made two cherubim out of hammered gold at the ends of the cover. 8 He made one cherub on one end and the second cherub on the other; at the two ends he made them of one piece with the cover. 9 The cherubim had their wings spread upward, overshadowing the cover with them. The cherubim faced each other, looking toward the cover.** It goes on and on this way for the next three chapters. All the way to **39:32**, where we have a summary of the work: **So all the work on the tabernacle, the tent of meeting, was completed. The Israelites did everything just as the Lord commanded Moses... 42 The Israelites had done all the work just as the Lord had commanded Moses. 43 Moses inspected the work and saw that they had done it just as the Lord had commanded.**

And I want you to see something. Look how many times the Bible tells us that they did the work the right way: **just as the Lord commanded**. Three times! God gave very clear blueprints. He told his people precisely and exactly how he wanted them to construct his dwelling place, and then they did it just as he commanded.

And I think the application point for us is pretty clear. God is no longer dwelling in an earthly tabernacle made of gold and bronze and curtains. Where does he dwell now? As we talked about last week, he dwells in our lives individually and in his church. *This* is where God dwells (me).

This is where God dwells (us). And so what does that mean? Are you seeing the connections? Just as the people in Exodus constructed the tabernacle “*just as the Lord commanded*” that is how we are to build and order our lives. That is how we are to build and order this church! So often when it comes to thinking about how we live our lives, or how we engage with the church our default can be, “What do I want to do? What do I think is best? What makes me the happiest?” We end up designing our lives, and designing our Christian community according to our personal preferences. But God has already given us blueprints for what he wants our lives, our relationships, and our church to look like!

My friends who are building a home don’t want to show up to the site and see their General Contractor out there, freewheeling, taking liberty, putting his own artistic flair on the house. Can you imagine how that conversation would go if they saw something being done, not according to the design? “Hey, why are you doing it that way? That’s not what we talked about?” “I thought it was a good idea. I just kind of had a feeling it would work well. I assumed you’d like it.” “No, that’s not what we want. Here are the blueprints. This is what we asked for. Let’s stick to the plans!”

When it comes to our lives, our relationships, and the church, God has given us the master blueprints, the perfect plan. He has given us the example of Jesus Christ whom we are to follow. He has given us his Word, and he has given us the Holy Spirit to be our guide, every step of the way, helping us know what to do, and giving us the strength and power to do it.

Now, that’s just the introduction! Once God’s people construct the tabernacle, and it is just the way God wanted it to be, God’s presence appeared among them. **40:34 Then the cloud covered the tent of meeting, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle. 35 Moses could not enter the tent of meeting because the cloud had settled on it, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle.** Did you see that? Twice it says that **the glory of the Lord** filled the tabernacle. What does that mean, for God’s glory to fill a place?

The Hebrew word for Glory is **כבוד**, which is pronounced (*kavod*), and it means **weightiness**. It means to have substance and significance. Think of it this way. Imagine this tote, filled with water, represents a swimming pool. Imagine it’s not December and 20 degrees but July and 90. You’re in a friend’s backyard - people are swimming, grilling out burgers, playing cornhole, and kids are running around having a good time. Let’s say someone were to take a beach ball and throws it into the pool. What would happen to all the water in the pool? The answer is nothing. Why is that? Because the water is weightier, heavier than the beach ball. If you submerge this ball in the water, the water will push it back to the top, because weightier things displace lighter things. But now imagine I picked up a huge boulder, half the size of the pool, and I threw it in. What happens? Enormous waves, water flying everywhere. The rock will sink to the bottom and the water level in the pool will rise because that which is heavier displaces that which is lighter.

God is the creator and sustainer of the universe. When the Bible says that he is glorious it means that he is more real, that he has greater power, greater honor, greater majesty than everything and everyone else. It means that when anything or anyone comes into God’s presence, they are displaced. One of the greatest problems with our lives today, and with Christianity today, is that we have lost appropriate respect and appreciation for God’s glory. When we go to the grocery

store and buy apples or bananas, we can weigh them on a scale like this one. This scale registers up to ten lbs. What happens when you take this rock and put it on this scale? Even if it didn't break the scale, that scale would have no way of registering the weight of that rock. That rock is way outside of its league. We've been coming to God's little grocery store food scales, and God is thinking. "Seriously, that's all you got for me?! You better check out a Richter scale, because when I show up the mountains tremble."

When it comes to our image and understanding of God, we have to throw these little toys away and come with great expectations. When I was a teenager, one of my mentors taught me, "Dan, whatever size container you bring to God, he'll fill it. If you bring him a little thimble he'll fill it, but then you'll only have a thimble full. If you bring him a cup he'll fill it, but then you'll only have a cup full. If you bring him a wheelbarrow, he'll fill it, but you'll only have a wheelbarrow full. If you bring God an Olympic size pool, he'll fill it, but then you'll only have an Olympic size pool full." I think you get the point.

Glory is primarily about weightiness, but it is more than just size and density. It's also about **beauty**. When we see things that are beautiful, what do we do? We stop, not usually by choice, but by instinct, almost by necessity. Keren and I took our honeymoon in Italy. We spent a few days in Venice, and when we were **walking across this bridge**, we just stopped and stared. We stared for like 30 minutes because it's beautiful. We purchased a painting of this view that now hangs in our living room. If we understand being captivated by beautiful things, how much more should we be captivated by a beautiful God! We are not just displaced in his presence because of his weightiness, we are transfixed by his presence because of his beauty. We can't look away.

In this passage, these people constructed God's dwelling place exactly as he instructed them, and that's what we want to do in our lives. In this passage, they beheld God's glory, and that's what we want to do in our lives. We want to be displaced by his glory, captured by his beauty. The last thing we see in this passage is that God's people respond to his guidance and direction. We see this in 40:36-38 **36 In all the travels of the Israelites, whenever the cloud lifted from above the tabernacle, they would set out; 37 but if the cloud did not lift, they did not set out—until the day it lifted. 38 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 their travels.** Isn't that incredible? They knew exactly where to go, exactly how long to stay, and when they were supposed to make their next turn because God's presence guided them in unmistakable ways. Isn't that something we all want in our lives, too? Whether it's about who to date, what college to go to, when to start a family, should we try to grow our family, what job to take, what house to buy, when it's time to retire, what to do when you retire...wouldn't it be incredible to have the direction of God for all of our decisions in life?

When it comes to direction, there are several different approaches we can take:

Never go anywhere--sometimes these people have analysis paralysis...They just keep thinking through it and thinking through it and thinking through it and no matter what they never pull the trigger. Watching this in someone's life is kind of like being behind a person who is trying to merge into traffic. And clearly you want them to be safe, but no matter how wide the opening is,

they just sit there and keep looking! And behind them you are screaming! I could merge a 747 into that opening! Just go. Sometimes, when it comes to direction, that's what we can be like.

Then there are those who **Go without asking God.** Have you heard the phrase that is popular in leadership circles these days: "bias for action?" That's you. You never just sit still, you want to move, you are always heading somewhere and preferably you'd like to head there quick. And though there are times this is helpful, when it comes to our spiritual life, when it comes to character-impacting decisions, when it comes to how we worship, this isn't where God wants us to be. This often looks something like, "God, here's my plan, I hope you'll be with me, I hope you'll bless me" But what he wants us to say is, "God, what's your plan? I want to be with you, I want to bless you."

Then there are those who **ask God, but go without clear direction.** Have you found yourself in a situation like that? You are at a crossroads; you know a decision has to be made. You pray. You ask your friends to pray. But what happens when you don't get a clear answer? The clock is ticking so what do you do, go with your gut? Take the safest possible route? If you are anything like me, sometimes you guess right! More often than not, we wish we could take some of those decisions back.

Then there are those who **only go where God is leading.** That's what those in Exodus are doing. They aren't starting the journey and hoping God's presence is going to follow behind them. They only go where God's presence leads them. These are the people who are patient, they never try to rush God, they know that he works on a different timetable than we do. These people are content, they don't always have to be doing something, if God has them in the same place for a long time, if God has them doing something that is comparatively less exciting, they are fine, their desire is to be faithful, not novel. And these people are obedient when God moves, they follow, even when what he asks is costly, challenging, counter intuitive. Galatians 5:25 **Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit.**

I think about the family I mentioned last week who decided to adopt three kids. They didn't rush into it, they took 6 months to pray about it, they didn't do it just because they wanted to add chaos to their life, and though it was costly, when they knew it was what God was calling them to do, with obedience, faith, and expectant joy, they opened the doors of their home and their family.

Tell the story of how we came to The Creek...

When I'm driving things, it's **forced**. When God is driving things, it's **free**, there's effortless flow. When I am driving, I tend to do things in **isolation**, I make my decision in a vacuum, or as a false sign of wisdom, I opinion shop and ask around until I hear what I want. When God is driving things, I'm always in **community**, I proactively seek the wisdom from all the godly people in my life, listen to their counsel and submit to God's authority expressed through them.

Friends, that is what we want! We want to build our lives and community just as God desires, we want his glory to come down, and we want to follow wherever he leads! What a wonderful way to wrap up this series on Exodus. Have you loved this series? God has taught us so much. We

love Gods' word. When we come consistently and expectantly, he will reveal himself to us. And when we come obediently, he will shape us into his likeness so we look more and more like Jesus.

Next week we will talk about Christmas. To begin the new year, we will do a three-part series called first things, talk about putting Christ first, the kingdom first, and character first as we kick off the new year. And then, on January 26, this is a series that has been in the works for more than a year now. We are going to do a series called 317, and we are going to share about the vision, mission, and priorities of the church. God has so much in store for us in the Word. These are great series to bring a friend to. So think about the person who needs to be here, and be sure to invite them.

Prayer.