

Equipping God's Servants

Pray

May Your holy Word, Lord, reach deep into my heart today, teaching, rebuking and preparing me for service.

Read

EXODUS 35:30—36:7

Meditate

CONSIDER • “From Thee all skill and science flow, All pity, care, and love, All calm and courage, faith and hope; O pour them from above” (Charles Kingsley).

THINK FURTHER • When God has a task to be done he does not stint in supplying and equipping the workers. The tabernacle building requires craftspeople—so God chooses and fills with his Spirit. English translations refer to Bezalel's “skill” (31), but the word is elsewhere translated “wisdom.” Is it surprising that the first person in the Scriptures of whom it is said that God “filled him with the Spirit, and with the wisdom of God” is an artisan? We may see some tasks as more “spiritual,” but God is involved in all aspects of life. Those chosen by the early church to look after the distribution of food were likewise to be “full of the Spirit and wisdom” (Acts 6:3,5).

It is also not enough that Bezalel and Oholiab are skilled artisans, they are given the “ability to teach others” (34). In this way the work is done by many who have “skill and ability.” Bezalel and Oholiab did not keep the work to themselves “because we are the

most capable;” skills were passed on, empowering others. Compare the way Christ gives leadership gifts not so that leaders do the work of the church, but “to prepare God's people” (Eph. 4:11,12).

People God has called and equipped for a task need resources. I am involved with a mission organization that has seen many people called into ministry with unreached peoples, but the question is, where are the financial resources? In so many Christian organizations much effort is spent managing on limited resources. Is this what God intends for people he has called and equipped for specific tasks? Is it too much to expect a result similar to here (36:3-7) where the workers are embarrassed by receiving more than they can use?

APPLICATION • For what service has God equipped you? How are you passing on that knowledge and ability to someone, so that your work will continue? Are you giving your best to the One who has equipped you (see Heb. 13:20,21)?

Pray

Because You have equipped us to do Your will, Lord, help me to be more faithful in doing “what is pleasing to” You today and every day.

Beauty Belongs with God

Pray

Lord, You made all things beautiful in Your creation. Help me to see it with new eyes of wonder.

Read

EXODUS 36:8-38

Meditate

CONSIDER • “God saw all that he had made, and it was very good” (Gen. 1:31a). Does your life reflect his beauty?

THINK FURTHER • “Take time to enjoy the flowers” was my wife’s comment. I regularly walk down the side path of our home but had only just noticed a particular flower which had been there for a week! Now I try to savor the beauty and aroma, to see the diverse artistry of flowers and shrubs, to observe and wonder at the ever-changing richness of God’s creation.

It would be easy to move quickly through today’s reading, especially having read the similar 26:1-37. Instead, pause to reflect on the luxurious *and* practical beauty—and remember that the inside linen hangings were designed primarily for God’s enjoyment. The only human eyes to see them were the priests, and that only at specified times. Here was beauty presented to God: the best skills, gorgeous coloring and the finest cloth. Picture the devotion and adoration—and the time—that went into each item, to bring glory to God. Here are people meticulously preparing the tent God has commanded for his

dwelling (the English “tabernacle” has borrowed a Latin word meaning “tent”). How amazing that God is prepared to be in their midst, especially given their sinful past. Beauty is fitting as a joyous response. The splendor of the tent reflects in microcosm the beauty of the universe God has created.

Similar wording is used when we read of Jesus, “the Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us” (John 1:14). Does this point to what God considers to be the actual and potential beauty of human beings? Amazingly, he now indwells us by his Spirit.

APPLICATION • The very best and most beautiful materials were used to build the “dwelling place of God.” Today, God dwells in human tabernacles, his people, who have been bought at a great price. What kind of material are you using to build his dwelling place in you? Can others see his beauty reflected in your life by your fruit (Gal. 5:22)?

Pray

Fairest Lord Jesus, may Your beauty be seen in me. May the fruit of Your Holy Spirit be evident in the way I walk and live.

Furnishing God's Dwelling

Pray

Lord, prepare my heart, Your dwelling place, to understand the awesome reality of Your presence.

Read

EXODUS 37:1-29

Meditate

CONSIDER • "God has two dwellings, one in heaven, and the other in the meek and thankful heart" (Izaak Walton, 1593-1683).

THINK FURTHER • The style and type of furniture can have a powerful impact in a home or a public building. It provides insights as to the character of the occupants, their values and activities and often their place in society. Of course, furniture is not the person, and outward appearances can be deceptive, yet we all recognize the symbolic value. Today's reading describes the making of the furniture (the placement comes later, 40:1-8). Here is furniture fit for a king—using wood that is hard, long-lasting and lightweight, overlaid with "pure gold," designed to be functional and portable, along with vessels made of gold. The ark was designed to hold the two stone tablets given to Moses that are "testimony" of the covenant, and hence also called "the ark of the Testimony" of the Lord (Exod. 40:20). The lid with its cherubim pointed to the throne of God, the place where God appeared in the cloud (Psa. 80:1). Significantly the two functions where people will come to the ark, into God's pres-

ence, are the receiving of commands and the annual Day of Atonement; the King both expects obedience and provides for the ongoing "at-one-ment" (25:22). The ark with its cover is a powerful reminder of the covenantal relationship initiated and maintained by a gracious and merciful God.

Any dwelling has items needed when a person is home, and so there are the table with serving implements for bread and drink, a lampstand and lighting implements and an altar and oils for the burning of incense. The lampstand was not only to provide lighting but its shape, a stylized tree, symbolized the "tree of life." These symbols, when in place and continually used, provided a vivid picture of God being present.

APPLICATION • Yesterday's reading affirmed Christ's authority, promising his presence. Today, thank God again for the reality of his royal presence and for the ways in which you are reminded of it. Then ask yourself, is God "at home" in my heart, or are there things there that I need to replace? What does the "furniture" of your life say about the "real you"?

Pray

Cleanse my heart, O Lord, so that it may be a fitting place for You to dwell. Shine through me, Lord, so that Your love and beauty may be seen in me.

It All Adds Up

Pray

Lord, remind me, "All that we have is Thine alone, a trust, O Lord, from Thee" (W. Walsham How).

Read

EXODUS 38:1-31

Meditate

CONSIDER • When we are giving to God and handling his money, honesty and integrity must be foremost.

THINK FURTHER • Material for the tent has been completed. Now attention turns to the courtyard, with its sacrificial altar. Unlike other altars built of stone (20:24-26), the "altar of burnt offering" is portable and so also made of wood. But as the altar, basin and implements are designed for human use outside the tent, they are covered or made with bronze, not gold. There is still nevertheless attention to detail and craft, and the courtyard curtain (18) repeats the beauty of the tabernacle curtain (36:35-38).

The report of the people and material involved in the whole process is amazingly meticulous (21-31). There is careful accounting of each component. For the first time we are told that a priest gave oversight, but the workers came from other tribes—and later readers would think of one from the south (Bezalel from Judah) and one from the north (Oholiab from Dan), representing the whole spread of the people, as it were. Further, the whole community had contributed.

No one could claim that "we contributed more" or "we were excluded." This is God's people contributing generously in response to his grace, and it is leadership being accountable for what is done with the gifts. The biblical scholar Walter Brueggemann has said that "this audit suggests a report with no questions outstanding and no bills left unpaid"—a model to be emulated! In our age, which is calling for more integrity in accounting and in the management of resources, Christian organizations can set the pattern in full and open disclosure, and in expenditure by leaders that treats with respect the costly giving of the people.

APPLICATION • In a day when high debt seems the norm, how well is your church fellowship using the tithes and offerings received? What can you learn from this passage in the handling of your own finances? Is your giving to the Lord's work a high priority in the use of your income and your giving to God (see Malachi 3:8-10)?

Pray

Lord, because You have given me so much, I too must give, showing my love to You. May I experience the joy of giving You my tithes and offerings.

Appointed to Represent

Pray

As I come to You now, O Lord, may I be still and know that You are God (Psa. 46:10a).

Read

EXODUS 39:1-21

Meditate

CONSIDER • Ponder with wonder that God welcomes you into his presence.

THINK FURTHER • The tent and furnishings were made with materials and design that honored God and displayed something of his character and how he related to the people. The same applied to the apparel of the high priest who alone came into the presence of God. Again it is made explicit that everything was made, not according to human design but as the Lord commanded. He determines what clothing is fitting for the chief representative, not people (1,7,21). The clothing portrays the role. Only priests ever saw the beauty of the tabernacle's interior, but all the people could see the beauty of the priests' garments. The colors and material were brilliant and expensive but matched those of the interior and curtains of the tabernacle; their splendor was to reflect the glory of God's dwelling. In this way priests visibly represented God to the people, just as they were to verbally represent God in their teaching.

Their garments were a continual reminder also of their interme-

diary role, representing the people before God (6-7,14). Representing the "sons of Israel" in precious stones suggests they had a beauty comparable to that of the high priest. He is not superior to them, having a higher status, rather he is before God as their representative. Our thoughts naturally turn to Christ, our High Priest, who always intercedes for "those who come to God through him" (Heb. 7:25). Through our relationship with Christ, a further dimension is added. Like Israel we are made "a royal priesthood," both showing God to those who do not know him and praying on behalf of all people (19:6). Here too is a role of significance and beauty—with great responsibility and honor.

APPLICATION • "You are a chosen people, a royal priesthood...a people belonging to God..." (1 Pet. 2:9). How does your life reflect this holy calling? How do others see this in your actions and appearance? How will you reflect Jesus in your life today and bring him glory?

Pray

"O to be like Thee! Blessed Redeemer, this is my constant longing and prayer...Come in Thy fullness, stamp Thine own image deep on my heart" (Chisholm).

THROUGH THE BIBLE IN ONE YEAR: 1 Samuel 7-9 / Mark 10

Everyone's Done Their Part

Pray

Help me, O Lord, in all my ways to acknowledge You, for You will make my paths straight (Prov. 3:6).

Read

EXODUS 39:22-43

Meditate

CONSIDER • "...in all things God works for the good of those who love him" (Rom. 8:28).

THINK FURTHER • "So Moses blessed them" (43). How different to the situation with the golden calf in ch. 32! The Lord had given orders to Moses concerning his "dwelling" (chs. 25-31), but God's very presence was threatened because of the people's rebellion. In his mercy, however, God confirmed, with a covenant, his ongoing gracious presence. Up to this point, five chapters have told of the peoples' joyful response, implementing the Lord's instructions, given by Moses. Now the results of their generosity and Spirit-filled skills are brought to Moses. Every part has been done "as the LORD commanded Moses" (26,29,31, 32,42,43). Note how vs. 33-41 repeat 35:10-19, so affirming the comprehensive, detailed obedience.

The pattern here follows that seen first in Genesis 1. God gives commands ("let there be..."), there is detailed, exact implementation, followed by approval and "blessing" and a note that the work was "completed" (Gen. 2:1-3). It is seen again in Genesis 12:1-4: God gives a command to Abraham to "leave"

and Abraham "left, as the LORD had told him," with the promised "blessing" following. There is blessing when the created order, including people, conforms to God's purposes. It is easy to see this as a reward somehow earned (like an ice cream promised to a child "if you are good"), but a better comparison might be the blessing of good health and energy that results from a balanced diet and exercise. Blessing comes when we live according to the pattern designed by the Creator. Moses can bless the people, confident that they have obeyed, and in anticipation of God's action.

APPLICATION • Are you giving God your very best in whatever you do, knowing it is the Lord you are serving (Col 3:17,23)? In your work today, whatever it might be, will you do it as unto the Lord?

Pray

Lord, trusting You, I want to give You the very best I have, both in my love and in my service, remembering You laid down Your life for me.

A Fresh Start

Pray

Thank You, Lord, for Your promise to lead and guide. Remind me of that again as I read today.

Read

EXODUS 40:1-16

Meditate

CONSIDER • “For anyone united to Christ, there is a new creation: the old order has gone; a new order has already begun” (2 Cor. 5:17 REB).

THINK FURTHER • All is ready; now comes the command to set up the tabernacle on “the first day of the first month” (2,17). Still today, the New Year in many cultures is the time for a fresh start. Some express this in new year’s resolutions, but here it is God, not us, who has initiated the new beginning, as he did on the same date after the flood (Gen. 8:13). On both occasions God acted in mercy and forgiveness after human rebellion, guaranteeing a way forward. The tabernacle, including its courtyard and symbolism of the cherubim, is a sign also of God’s intention from the beginning, when he walked in his pleasure garden with the man and the woman (Gen. 3:8). Now, in the tabernacle, God will continue to meet with people. As elsewhere in the ancient world, it was a microcosm, picturing the broad sweep of God’s ordering of the whole universe. Worship is to be a reminder of something bigger than ourselves, bigger than our present context.

In chs. 35-39 Moses has been repeating the Lord’s commands given to him in chs. 25-31, but in today’s reading the Lord speaks anew. The materials are ready but the go ahead is given by the Lord, the initiative remains his. Anointing (9-15) too highlights the dedicated function of both objects and priests, blessed by God. Every part and activity shows that here is God’s provision for meeting with him.

How much more is this so, now that we experience God meeting us in Christ through his Spirit? God’s initiative in our lives brings newness, and beyond God’s present provision we look for yet more wonderful changes. His presence in our midst is a pointer to his purposes for the whole of his creation.

APPLICATION • How do you prepare yourself to meet with God each day? Is his presence real to you? What do you pray for and expect to receive from God? Is confession part of your preparation?

Pray

Thank You, dear Lord, that though I fail You many times, I have Your promise to forgive and give me a “fresh start.” Lead me in Your way today.

THROUGH THE BIBLE IN ONE YEAR: 1 Samuel 12,13 / Psalm 48