

Exodus 35:4-5

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Date: 18 October 2009

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[0 : 00] Let me thank you once again for the welcome. We always enjoy, my wife and I, returning to the worship and the fellowship of the congregation here. I suppose for my wife particularly, having been born into this congregation, baptized here many, many years ago, it is a great privilege to return and share in worship with you. I'd like us to look again at the chapter we read in the book of Exodus, the book of Exodus on page 94 of the Pew Bibles, and read with you verses 4 and 5.

Exodus 35 at verse 4. Moses said to the whole Israelite community, This is what the Lord has commanded. 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. And then it goes on to enumerate a great many other items that they could bring as offerings. I must confess that I always find the last chapters of the book of Exodus rather difficult reading. Perhaps if I had a more visual imagination, perhaps if I were better in the area of arts and crafts, I was listening to David's prayer and agreeing totally with our prayers for those who use their skills and arts and so on for the glory of God. These, I recognize, are not really gifts that I've received. And that's why I often find in my personal reading year after year and at other times through the book of Exodus, that these last chapters, are the universe that describe the building, the construction of the tabernacle of the centre of worship that God ordained for his people, as they wandered through the desert. I find that all these lists of materials and measures and structures and the jewellery that they needed and the other things that were provided, I find it the jewelry that they needed and the other things that were provided. I find it difficult just to visualize all these things. And yet, when I recognize each time I come to Exodus, I try and make a special effort to get a better understanding of all these last chapters and all the descriptions they give. When I come to that, I do remember that this too is the Word of God. This too has been inspired by the Holy Spirit, that this is as much for our benefit as the Psalms or the Gospels. And so I always pray particularly that God would help me to get something new, something fresh from these rather lengthy and, in some ways, I confess for me, monotonous descriptions.

And God never fails to bring in fresh ways His Word through this part of Scripture. And when a couple of weeks or so ago I was reading through Exodus and reached these chapters, what struck me very forcefully is the repetition in this chapter and the succeeding chapters of what you have here in verse 5, where God says to His people, everyone who is willing is to bring to the Lord an offering and so on.

This willingness that God is looking for in His people is something that's repeated again and again.

[4 : 47] Look at verse 21, everyone who was willing and whose heart moved them came and brought an offering. Verse 22, all who were willing, men and women alike, came and brought these various things.

Verse 26, all the women who were willing and had the skill, spun the goat's hair and so on. Verse 29, all the Israelite men and women who were willing, brought to the Lord freewill offerings for all the work the Lord through Moses had commanded them to do.

And not only in this chapter, but right to the end of the book of Exodus, you find this constant emphasis on the part of God Himself that He was looking for people who were willing.

Willing to do what He had commanded. And that too is very interesting, because the willingness is in the context of God God commanding His people to do certain things.

Verse 1 of this chapter, Moses assembled the whole Israelite community and said to them, These are the things the Lord has commanded you to do.

[6 : 10] Verse 4, Moses said to the whole Israelite community, This is what the Lord has commanded. Verse 29, at the end of the verse, there's the willingness, and then to bring what the Lord through Moses had commanded them to do.

And you can go on through the various chapters and find the same thing. Here is the great God of heaven. He is their creator, their owner, their redeemer.

And yet, He is prepared to say to them, Look, I can command you all these things, and I do command them, but I want you to be willing.

It's almost as if God is bowing down and saying, Look, please, would you do this for me? What humiliation, in a sense, from the great God of heaven, to ask in this way that His people then and now would be willing.

And you find that this continues, not just in the particular context of the Old Testament, when they were building this movable tent, this tabernacle, as it was called, for worship, as they wandered here and there.

[7 : 40] You find it going right through the Bible and into the days in which we live, the days of the gospel. The Lord Jesus Christ, when He began His ministry, He began it with commands.

His first words were, Repent. Believe. And then you find further commands. Come. Follow.

And yet all of these are found in the context of people being asked willingly to respond, to respond to the commands of God for His glory and for their own good.

And you find in the Psalms, for example, how God constantly, while commanding, looks for willingness. Oh, that my people had me heard.

Israel, my ways had chose. And God goes on then to say what He would have done. Defeated their enemies. Filled them with every good thing. But He was looking for a response, a willing response on their part.

[8 : 52] It's perhaps summarized very well in the words that the Apostle Paul wrote to his friend Philemon as he was returning to him, the runaway, now converted slave, Onesimus.

Therefore, says Paul to his friend, Although in Christ I could be bold to order you to do what you ought to do, yet I appeal to you on the basis of love.

And you can contrast all this with the kind of situation that most of us here, not everybody, but a lot of us here are in, in that we are commanded, we are obliged to pay taxes to our government.

And it's not that the tax inspectors or the relevant authorities, if for some reason or other we delayed or we forgot or we didn't pay what we should, that they would come in this kind of spirit and say to us very nicely, Please, would you like to hand over a little of that?

Rather, it's a command that is obligatory, laid upon us, and if we don't do it, we know the consequences, the extra interest, the fines and so on.

[10 : 11] So isn't it remarkable that God would come and say in this kind of way, Look, please, are you willing? Are you willing to listen to me?

Are you willing to do what I ask you to do? But taking this lesson from these kind of chapters with the description of the construction of the tabernacle and all these things that they had to bring, the gold and the silver and the goat hair and the ram's hair and the spices and the olive oil and so on and then the measurements for the wood and the constructions and the curtains and so on, we could well ask, How is all of that relevant to us so that we can learn this lesson of willingness? After all, it was three and a half thousand years ago that it all happened and the tabernacle has been dust for many, many a long millennium.

even then, it was a tiny affair, even when it became the temple later on. But there's a significant point that is given to us back in chapter 20.

When God first talks about the tabernacle and about that part of the tabernacle called the most holy place where the special annual sacrifice was made on the great day of atonement, there's a little phrase that is highly significant.

[11 : 47] God says, There I will meet with you. There I will meet with you. And God, not through a tabernacle, not through a temple, these things are no longer necessary.

For we ourselves, if we are believers in Jesus Christ, have become the temple of the living God. But God says still, There I will meet with you.

Many of you, most of you today, have come here to this building because that's what you want. You want God to meet with you and you want to meet with Him.

And you find particular joy and encouragement every first day of every week coming together here to meet with God.

And if you're listening to me this morning and you know in your own heart that that is not really true in the same way for you, perhaps you've come because somebody else persuaded you to come.

[12 : 59] Perhaps you've come out of curiosity. You've passed along here different occasions and it's rather surprised you in the kind of world we live in to see so many people crowding into a church building.

And out of curiosity you've come. Perhaps out of custom. It's the way you were brought up and well, that's it. And you'll give this hour on a Sunday morning and then get on with the rest of your life.

Well, I say to you today that though you may not be aware of it in such a personal dimension, God is saying to you, here, I want to meet with you.

And I'd like us to develop this thought of the willingness that God is expecting from all of us in our different contexts as He meets with us today.

In the first place, we notice this call to be willing to listen to God. Be willing to listen to God.

[14 : 10] The Israelites were being given a whole body of rules. Rules about their family life, rules about how they attended to their agriculture, rules about what they ate, rules about all sorts of things.

And at the heart of it, there was the moral code that we still call the Ten Commandments. And as the people were gathered together for this purpose, God says, and here again I'm quoting from chapter 20 back in the book, God says to Moses, tell the Israelites, you've seen for yourselves that I have spoken to you from heaven.

God is speaking. God is speaking. And God says to these people, the Israelites, so long ago, He says, are you willing to listen to me?

What about? Well, the various things I mentioned, but there were instructions about carpentry and instructions about weaving and spinning and instructions about jewelry making and so on, all for the sake of this tabernacle and the worship of the tabernacle.

But is that the heart of it? Of course it's not. And in order to see what it means for us, we have to ask ourselves, why all of this?

[15 : 42] Why was God speaking to them in this way about this particular construction, the tabernacle? tabernacle. And as you read through these chapters, you find that at the heart of the tabernacle, all that it was and all that took place there is sacrifice.

The priests, the special officers chosen by God, Aaron and his descendants, they were sacrificing men.

They went with the animals, the animals were slain, their blood was sprinkled for the atonement of sin. And that brought that people back. And it brings us back to the very beginning of things.

There where God created our first parents in the Garden of Eden and gave them the most wonderful of environments and yet laid upon them a duty to be obedient, to listen to his voice, which they did not do.

They chose to go their own way. They committed the first sin, the sin that continues down till today. And it meant, the Bible teaches us, a separation from God.

[16 : 52] God there in his holiness, Adam and Eve there in their sin and a great barrier between them. And yet, as you read through the Bible, coming up to the book of Exodus and further on, you find that this same God who had said, the day that you eat of that fruit, you will surely die.

And who says it in our language, the wages of sin is death. This God longed that there might be a way back and provided a way back.

And the way he did it was through this whole sacrifice business, bringing these animals, their blood was shed and atonement was made.

Now, any intelligent Israelite knew all along what the book of Hebrews says in the New Testament, that it's impossible that the blood of bulls and goats can take away sin.

They knew that an animal could not of itself forgive their sin and make them new men and women. But God was teaching them that through these sacrifices, he was showing them the seriousness of sin and that one day something was going to happen.

[18 : 06] One day somebody was going to come and all of this would be seen in its true light. And those priests who were mediators between them and God, they couldn't dare to enter his presence by themselves because of their sin.

But these priests, that was their job. They were the mediators, go-betweens, between a holy God and sinful men and women. A whole host of them, a whole line of them down through the centuries. And then God is saying, there will come another mediator, another sacrifice, another mediator. And truly that happened. As John the Baptist, the great forerunner of God's chosen servant, cried out to

all the people, Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world, pointing to Jesus Christ, the eternal Son of God, made man for us and for our salvation.

And so all that is presented here and all the bringing of these precious metals and these textiles and these particular woods that they brought and so on, bringing a tabernacle together, it was all so that there, men and women might be able to meet with God, forgiven through atoning blood, able to come into His presence unworthy though they were.

And here today, God is saying, are you willing to listen to me and to turn in your sin? Very different. That was mentioned in the prayer also this morning.

[19 : 56] As we are different, so our sins may be very different. And yet, they constitute this barrier between us and God. But are you willing to come with your sin and your need?

Come to, not the bulls and the goats that were sacrificed in this tabernacle about which we read in the book of Exodus, but come to the cross of Calvary where the Lord Jesus laid down His life and shed His blood for sinners.

And God says, there, there, I will meet with you. And yet, amazingly, God says, are you willing? Are you willing to listen to this word of salvation?

Are you willing to be freed through Jesus Christ from sin and enter into the family of God? So, as we look at this call for willingness to this ancient people and also to ourselves, there's first of all, are you willing to listen to God?

But then also, you'll notice a constant emphasis on another aspect. Are you willing, God says, to give to God?

[21 : 14] Willing to listen to God? Willing to give to God? Now, the context here, as we've seen, is of all the things that they were being asked to give.

blue, purple, and scarlet yarn, and fine linen, goat hair, ramskins, and so on and so forth. But it is striking.

It's not specifically referred to in this chapter, but you'll find it elsewhere in Scripture. It's striking that when God asks his people to give in this kind of way, he first of all asks them if they are willing to give themselves to God.

King David, centuries later, is dispensing with the tabernacle because he wants to build a better place of worship, the temple.

And he gathers all the people together, first of all, the leaders and so on, because he wants them to provide the funds and so on that are needed. But at the outset of his call to all the people in 1 Chronicles chapter 29 at verse 5, he says this, Now, who is willing to consecrate himself today to the Lord?

[22 : 38] And as you go down through the centuries into the Christian church, and you read what we're told about Christians in the town of Corinth in the country of Greece, where Paul is urging them to help others, he gives the example of Christians further north in the land of Greece in the area of Macedonia, and he says this highly significant thing about them, They gave themselves first to the Lord.

They gave themselves first to the Lord. And if that's true of you today, if you can say, well, by God's grace, I have given myself to the Lord Jesus Christ.

By God's grace, I have, in David's words, consecrated my own life to God. God, then there follows this call, a willingness to give not just ourselves, which is primary, but to give all that we have and are to him.

you can find how this reference is constantly before us here in this chapter, the willingness, are you willing to give in the way that you are able to, that God has enabled you to do?

You find it there in 1 Chronicles 29, the chapter that I quoted. We read, let me just mention some verses, verse 6, the leaders of families, the officers, the officials, the commanders, they gave willingly.

[24 : 28] Verse 9, the people rejoiced at the willing response of their leaders, for they had given freely and wholeheartedly to the Lord. And then at verse 17, I have seen with joy how willingly your people have given to you.

And going on over the centuries into the city of Corinth, Paul mentions again in his urging them to be holy, God's people, and to listen to God's call.

Are you willing? Are you willing to listen? Are you willing to give? He says this, for if the willingness is there, the gift is acceptable according to what one has, not according to what one does not have.

So when there is this challenge to us, to be willing to give to God, what's it for? There in Exodus 35, it's obvious what it was for, to build this mobile tent that could be dismantled and put together again for their place of worship.

But for ourselves, let me suggest very, very briefly indeed, three aspects of this giving that come out of this passage but are also relevant to us as Christians today.

[25 : 50] Firstly, it was to facilitate worship, to facilitate worship. The worship of the tabernacle expanded then with the temple, the various elements of worship, there is the sacrifice which of course we do not need as they need because our sacrifice, the Lord Jesus, gave us life long ago for us and our sacrificial Savior is here.

But you think of what else they did when they gathered, either at the tabernacle or at the temple. There was a reading of the law. Think of Ezra reading it for hours on end to the gathered people, the reading of God's word, the Bible reading that we have at the heart of our worship. There was the singing of God's praise, largely the Psalms when the temple was built, but then we find other passages here and there that were used for their worship and their praise. And here they are, as we do, singing praise to God as we gather in his worship. There are the Levites and the priests leading the people in prayer into the very presence of God.

And so you have the reference to the priests and the gatekeepers and the musicians. You have a reference in chapter 38 here in Exodus, to the women who served in the tabernacle.

[27 : 22] We're not given details, exactly what their service was, but there was scope for a great variety of people to be giving for the worship of God.

And for us there is a very specific challenge. Here we are as a congregation of God's people. We worship him, Lord's Day by Lord's Day, and on other occasions we gather together.

And we are called, willingly, to give in order that worship might be facilitated. For the buildings, they would be the best buildings they can be for the worship of God.

For all the materials we use, our Bibles, our psalm books, available for any visitors who come in. we are not living in, what, a thousand, one thousand, five hundred or so years before Christ came when this would have been written.

We are living two thousand years further on. And so we think of the ways that we can facilitate worship. I am very impressed by your website.

[28 : 31] I read it regularly. And I am sure that it can be used by God to reach out to others. some who are looking for a place of worship who are already Christians, others who are not.

And all these things take resources and the willing, generous, heartfelt giving of God's people can be used in these and think of other ways to facilitate worship.

But also to support ministry. It talks here about the Levites, about the priests. they weren't allowed to work.

They couldn't earn their normal living like everybody else did. They were dependent on the people of God for their service. And you can see how it's not only those who are involved in that kind of way, in the preaching and the sacrificing as it was then.

Think of this man of whom we read at the end of the chapter, this man Bezalel. he's the one who's a craftsman and a very valuable member of the community for this area of worship.

[29 : 43] Now, he was in the desert. He couldn't set up a chain of jewelry and craft shops. He was dependent, since he was giving his time to the service of the tabernacle, he was dependent for the bread on his table on the gifts of God's people.

So, here is the call to be willing to not only facilitate worship, but to support ministry. And also, when God says, are you willing to give, as he does say here, it is in order to promote fellowship.

You remember the various offerings that were given, sacrifices of different kinds, the different names, the burnt offering, and the sin offering, and so on.

There was one offering called the fellowship offering, sometimes called the peace offering. And one of its characteristics was that, while part was indeed offered on the altar, most of it was eaten by the people.

And it tells us that they rejoiced together, as they had fellowship one with another, at the place of worship, glorifying God as David was saying earlier on, to the children, in their eating and in their drinking.

[31 : 07] And also, as you see that fellowship being promoted, you see that it was inclusive, the tithes that were offered to bring in the poor, to bring in the outsiders, the foreigners who had

attached themselves to God's people.

You have it in the words of Nehemiah, in chapter 8, verse 10, where he says to the people, go and enjoy choice food and sweet drinks and send some to those who have nothing prepared.

And God comes and he says, he says to every Christian congregation, to you here today, are you willing, willing to give to God in order to facilitate worship, to support ministry, and to promote fellowship, that this would be truly a vibrant, loving, growing family of God in the heart of this great city.

And then the last thing that you find here, God is here present, saying, bowing down as it were, saying, are you willing? Are you willing to give?

Are you willing to listen? And also, are you willing to work for God? Look at verse 10. All who are skilled among you are to come and make everything the Lord has commanded.

[32 : 32] The description that you have of this man Bezalel is really most remarkable. Verse 35, God has filled them, Bezalel and his assistant Aholiab, God has filled them with skill to do all kinds of work as craftsmen, designers, embroiderers, and weavers.

When we think of the filling of the Spirit of God, the anointing of the Holy Spirit, we do tend to think, first and foremost, don't we, of that anointing and filling for evangelism, for missionary work, for the preaching of the Word.

We think of it with regard to the call to live godly lives. But here you have, in a most remarkable way, God saying, in order that this man will do a good job planing the wood and making it ready for the various parts of the tabernacle, sewing and embroidering and polishing the jewelry, God says, in order that he will do that, I have filled him with the Spirit of God.

And it's striking how, as you think of this man Bezalel, you see how it expands. God says, I'm calling you, are you willing to work for me?

Not just the priests, there was only one Aaron, there was only one priestly family, there was only one tribe of Levites who did all the work connected with the tabernacle, there was only one Joshua who later took the place of Moses, only one of these, but God had a host of others whom he desired to be willing to work for him and to serve him.

[34 : 35] They were all the covenant people of God, and to me and to you today there comes the same call, even as you read in 1 Corinthians 12 of the huge variety of gifts that God still gives to his own people, spirit given, but how amazing, the God who pours out so generously all his gifts to all his people, he still says, are you willing, willing to use them for my glory?

I've never become one of those ministers, quite a few in the free church now, who like to entertain us with their blogs, a sort of diary, a kind of diary of what they do and what they think, and you switch on to the internet and there they are.

I don't think my ramblings would be of great interest, but I must admit I do read other peoples. And recently I was reading the blog of my successor as minister in London, David Strain, and he related a very interesting incident in the church where he now is minister in Columbus, Mississippi.

They were needing another teacher in their Sunday school, and those of you who know the American set up will know that in most churches they have an all-age Sunday school, where adults of various ages have their classes as well.

And it was for an adult class. So he asked one of the deacons in the church, for those of you who may not be, who are visitors here, may not be familiar with that, the deacon is the person who usually attends to benevolent funds, and the fabric of the buildings, and the financial side of things.

[36 : 42] So he asked this man, would you be willing to teach one of our Sunday school classes? And the man, he says, was a bit taken aback, and said, give me time to think. Well, in a few days' time he came back, and he said, David, I do recognize that God has given me certain gifts, and I do want to use them for his glory and for the benefit of the congregation, but I know that one of my gifts is not that of teaching.

I just know I couldn't do it as well as it should be done. And then he quoted what the man said, I'm content to hand out bulletins, to welcome visitors, to balance budgets, to serve the hurting behind the scenes.

And as you think of that kind of thing, thanking God for a man of that Christian humility, but also Christian commitment, listen to God's voice to you.

Are you willing to listen to God? Are you willing to give to God? Are you willing to work? for God. In this congregation, the opportunities are endless.

And as your prime motivation, remember this. Remember the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, who though he was rich, yet for your sakes became poor, that you through his poverty might be made rich, with such an example, how else can we respond when God says, are you willing?
[38 : 38] Let's bow in prayer. . hear you. , hearingmoi SHDIO through it, is yourel, is your heart ,