

Explore the Bible: Equipped

September 27, 2017

- The Explore the Bible lesson for Oct. 15 focuses on Exodus 25:1-9; 31:1-6

It might be common for church folk to react uncomfortably to a lesson or Scripture passage with the word “offering” in it. There is nothing wrong with offerings and giving of one’s self and resources to a worthy cause, yet culture teaches us to be wary of those who ask us for something.

Keep in mind God is approaching the people about a place where he would meet with them. His presence on the mountain indicated separation from his people. So, God brought a solution. And when God presents a solution, *God enables and equips his people to do the work he directs them to do.*

The Offering

This specific offering is asked of the Israelites because its purpose would be for the Israelites’ benefit. As Hebrew scholar Nahum Sarna writes, “The sanctuary is to serve the entire community, and its construction is therefore to be accomplished through the generosity of all” (Sarna, *Exodus*, 156).

Ask your group: *Was this offering a requirement? Was there a risk for the person who would not give?* Sarna’s quote reminds us of the powerful word and work of generosity. If giving is not stirred by a “generous heart,” then it is not an offering. Instead, it is an obligation, and God does not take pleasure in that.

For the modern church, we have a strategy when asking for gifts. We would not dream of asking for an offering until the entire purpose and plan is laid out clearly. However, that is not how God worked here. He asked for their

heart-full gifts before giving the purpose. This should strike us to see that faith is a vital part of generosity.

These specific requests were being asked of people who were exiting Egypt with little “carry-on” baggage. These were precious gifts that would be given, and the word for “offering” refers to a gift that is intended for sacred use. Being a generous giver includes sacrificial giving with faith that God’s purpose is greater than one’s personal preference.

The Purpose

Indeed, God’s purpose was great, setting up a tradition of meeting that would extend well beyond the present generation. Their sacrifice would be a long-term investment for the future of Israel.

Peter Enns points out: “God intends to be present with his people in a way he has not been before” (Enns, *Exodus*, 509). Moving from a name, a cloud, a fire and a thundering mountain, God would intend now to “dwell among them.” His intent obviously is to be closer to his people as opposed to being at a distance.

Talk about what it took for God to get closer to his people. Psalm 113:5-6 asks the question, “Who is like the Lord our God, the one who is enthroned on high, who stoops down to look on the heavens and the earth?” One response is that God is not above self-humbling, which causes us to ask why we think we are above being humble.

When God gives us a purpose, he is inviting us to participate in that purpose. Participating means we encounter his presence as Israel now would, allowing this tent of meeting to change the way they would meet God. *How would our worship gathering be different if God did not introduce this purpose to Israel?*

The Leaders

We not only should be grateful for such examples of skill and leadership, but also should be amazed at the meaning of their names in this story. Bezalel means “in the shadow of God,” and Oholiab means “the tent of the father” (Sarna, *Exodus*, 200). These two men of skill and divine call speak to us about purposeful call.

This is not to say we want to “be” these men, but we should seek to emulate their place in this story. For the purpose of a specific task, God’s Spirit made it so that these men were equipped to lead and work alongside others. They might not have been able to serve with the Levites in offering sacrifices, but they were able to provide the sacred place where offerings would be given.

Generosity is seen in how we give of ourselves where we are equipped and called to give. A personal friend and deacon once told me, “God is not looking for abilities; he is looking for availability.” His point is well received that willingness must come from the heart to both lead and work.

Allow time for people in your group to share which talents they feel they possess. Ask how people in your group are serving. The “leadership” of Bezalel and Oholiab is not the primary focus. Their God-given call and willingness to submit to God’s call are what we should emulate.

Conclusion

These five-plus chapters of context are far too dense to condense into one large thought. Yet, we may approach this with a reminder from James 4:8a, “Come near to God and he will come near to you.” God desires closeness, and in that closeness we experience God in a way that transforms us.

These stories that make up these chapters show the continual

transformation of God's relationship with his people, and they also show how our hearts and minds are transformed by God to become a generous people.

Consider closing with the words of this worship chorus as your closing prayer: "Lord, prepare me to be a sanctuary. Pure and holy, tried and true. With thanksgiving, I'll be a living sanctuary for you." We may see this story and our story wrapped within these prayerful words.

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