

## Adult sermon notes

### Exodus 35:1-10(19); 40:34-38

Last week we explored the incident of the golden calf and noted how the repentance of the people of Israel was symbolised by taking off their ornaments. Part of financial discipleship is recognizing and repenting of wrong attitudes to money. Sometimes we need to do that. This passage also teaches a positive approach to handling our money. God invites the people to give generously to the construction of a tabernacle, a luxurious portable tent where he would dwell in the midst of his people. When we give our gifts we must give the best we have if we know the God to whom we are giving.

### The grace of giving

Firstly, an invitation is extended to all those with a generous heart (Exodus: 35:5) to bring their gifts to build the tabernacle. This is important because Christian giving is about giving from a glad and cheerful heart. Paul wanted the Corinthians to give gladly (2 Cor 9: 5). He calls it 'the grace of giving' because all giving is a joyful response to the grace of God. God loves a cheerful giver because true giving comes from a thankful, joyful heart.

### Costly grace

It would be nice if gracious giving was easy but unfortunately it is not. We have to learn obedience in giving just as we do in all other aspects of our Christian life. For the people of Israel the bringing of their gifts was costly and our giving should also have an element of sacrifice. Giving should be a priority in our expenditure, something we plan to do not just something that is given from what is left over at the end of the week or month.

But with the obedience also comes the promise of blessing. It is easy to twist this into a worldly promise of material blessing but that is not what the Bible teaches. Paul makes it clear (2 Corinthians) that spiritual blessings come to those who give. This includes a freedom from the tyranny of possessions.

Dr Henry Drucker puts it brilliantly, though not writing here for a Christian audience: *generous giving 'is difficult. In this act we disenthral ourselves by overcoming our slavery to possessions. We demonstrate that there are values in the world more important to us than our own selfish aggrandisement. True giving is an act of self-liberation. It becomes one of the major achievements of our life.'*

Learning to give generously is important because reluctant giving does not bless the giver, or free him or her from the wrong kind of attachment to possessions. As we grow in the discipline of the grace of giving we grow in spiritual freedom. Billy Graham comments that when we learn to be obedient in the area of finances it frees us in many other areas of our lives as well.

### A resting place

Thirdly, God reminds the people about the Sabbath (Exodus 35:1-3). This is something we touched on in Session 2 – the story of the manna. It is interesting that of all the commands of God it is the command to take Sabbath rest that Moses mentions when he speaks to the people before inviting them to bring their gifts for the tent of meeting. The Sabbath is a day of rest. Instead of focusing on producing or consuming, we must learn to trust in God's provision, in God's rhythm of life. As theologian Walter Brueggemann comments, rather tongue in cheek, there is no evidence that Pharaoh took a day off! He was too busy keeping power - and it all slipped through his fingers. He needed the leader of an enslaved people to bless him. We can work continuously to get what we want and still need to be blessed. Working, accumulating, possessing without rest, without Sabbath, leaves us spiritually dry and spiritually hungry.

### Declaring the presence of God

Finally it is important to note that the people were giving in order to create something that would declare the presence of God in the midst of his people. The tabernacle was to be rich and impressive, made of the best that the people could bring. But its main purpose was to declare the presence of God among his people.

So today the money we give to the church is not simply to maintain the 'house of God', but to declare the presence of God among his people – not just the house but the household of God. Our giving supports people, supports 'ministry' and helps to change lives for the better. Our giving provides the resources needed for the church's ministry so that in every baptism visit, funeral call, sermon preached, Alpha course, confirmation class we are declaring the presence of God in our community. Link the close of the preaching series to the Giving in Grace literature that will be or already has been distributed to the church. This is their invitation to give to declare the presence of God in their church and community.