

**Exodus 35: the Tent of Glory**

**Aim: God has graciously come to live among his people, so we should serve gladly and give generously for his Glory**

**INTRODUCTION**

Do you (did you enjoy) enjoy camping - in the summer holidays?

Are any of you going to a Christian camp - SPREE, Creation Fest, New Wine this summer? Would it be good to have a relatively local church camp?

Camping can be simple -a backpack with sleeping bag, tent and some food, or it can be a major expedition with trailers and roof-boxes. I prefer simpler, but the longer we are away from home, the more we want those extra luxuries to make life comfortable.

9.30am: Did you remember everything you need from the camping shop at the back? **What about matches?**

Our bible reading was an excerpt/summary of a much longer part of Exodus -ch. 25-40 -, which describe how God has planned to go camping with his people. The LORD tells Moses how to build a tent - or Tabernacle and all the furniture to go inside. The instructions, followed by the constructions, take almost 1/3 of the whole book, so it is clearly very important. It would be too long to read aloud at a service, but it is worth reading. It may seem repetitive, but some things are so important that they have to be repeated, (do you have a check list for going on holiday?) and the telling builds up our anticipation of what is to come. For the whole purpose of Exodus- and the Bible- is that **God graciously wants to come and live among his people: so we must serve him gladly and give generously for his Glory to be known in all the world.**

**POINT 1 The GRACE OF GOD**

I mentioned that the whole section runs from ch 25 to 40, and we read part of that story last week - the terrible story of how while Moses was up Mount Sinai with the LORD, the people turned away and made a golden calf. The LORD was rightly angry, and threatened to destroy the people, or send them on to the Promised Land alone, without him, but Moses boldly interceded for them, and God forgave his people. This is sheer grace: there was nothing that Moses or the people could give to God, but we know that God forgave them

in his grace and mercy: at the end of ch 34 last week we heard how Moses came down the Mountain with the Commandments on new stone tablets, to show that the Covenant has been restored, and his face glowed with the glory of God. Moses would meet with God outside the Israelite camp. But the LORD wants to dwell with his people, so he graciously carries on with the project to build a tent or Tabernacle, a tent of meeting:

**POINT 2 GLAD and GENEROUS GIVING**

In Ex 35.4 Moses tells the people: “This is what the LORD has commanded:

<sup>5</sup> From what you have, take an offering for the LORD. Everyone who is willing (ESV generous heart) is to bring to the LORD an offering of gold, silver and bronze; <sup>6</sup> blue, purple and scarlet yarn and fine linen; goat hair; <sup>7</sup> ram skins dyed red and hides of sea cows; acacia wood; <sup>8</sup> olive oil for the light; spices for the anointing oil and for the fragrant incense; <sup>9</sup> and onyx stones and other gems to be mounted on the ephod and breastpiece.

The Book of Exodus began with the people as Pharaoh’s slaves, being forced to make bricks without straw. Now they are commanded to build for the Lord, and Hebrew uses the same word for slavery and worship - ‘abodah’. But what a difference! It is commanded, but only those who are willing, who have a generous heart, need respond. Perhaps some were still sulking or grieving for the golden calf. The LORD waits for them to heal.

So for Christians today, 2 Cor 9.7 Each one must give as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.

Where were they to find gold and silver, acacia wood, sea cow hides?

Remember that when they left Egypt, the LORD commanded them to take treasures from the Egyptians - not so much plunder as back-pay for slavery. 12.36 “They asked the Egyptians for silver and gold jewelry and for clothing.”

The LORD had provided all that they had, so that now they were able to give. We are asked to give from what God has given. “All things come from you, and of your own have we given you”

Everyone can give something - it is part of our worship. IT may seem little to us, but if it comes from a glad and willing heart it is pleasing to God

Moses also commanded those with skills to use them. Not everyone can spin or weave, carve wood or cast metal, and we meet Bezalel and Oholiab, the first people in the bible to be filled with the Holy Spirit. They have skills, surely learned in Egypt, to design and create, and to teach others, but when used with faith, they are spiritual gifts, and can be used to the glory of God.

The tabernacle was a place of beauty. It was rather small: the holy of Holies would fit in our chancel, the Tabernacle itself would reach the 3rd row of pews, and the whole tent of meeting was enclosed in a courtyard 150 x 75 metres wide. But the beauty was veiled by curtains. (Hang Curtains)

There is a model by the church door if you want to look.

There is a whole theology of art and design to be explored here. There is a place in our world and in our worship for skill and beauty - in our buildings, fittings and our music. They can still speak of the glory of God, and people still come to churches and cathedrals and are sometimes moved in wonder to worship. We should look after them - keep them clean and in good repair. I am hoping that we will soon replace the doors and the lights, and paint the walls. We may ask for your help to pay for that when the plans are ready. But we are not called to build a replica in every parish church, because the building is no longer the place where God's glory dwells, as we shall see. We need to desire and expect the glory of God among us, not just beautiful buildings.

### **GOD'S GLORY DESCENDS**

The climax of the story comes at the end - Ex 40.34-38. "the cloud covered the Tent of Meeting, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle." In each verse it is repeated, the cloud covered, the cloud settled, the cloud lifted, the cloud was over the tabernacle and fire was in the cloud by night.

(bring cloud and fire down aisle into chancel)

God's glory came down: God is with his people. It was God's permanent presence, and He guided them on their journey through the wilderness, telling them when to march and when to camp, and yet - the cloud and the glory were hidden away in the Tabernacle, and now not even Moses can enter the Tent of Meeting. Curtains keep us away. God is among his people, but they cannot come close, because as we saw in the story of Sinai and the Golden Calf, God is holy, and we are sinners. God's holiness is dangerous and deadly to sinners.

Yet this is not how the LORD wants it to stay. At the beginning, the LORD walked with Adam and Eve in the garden. But after they sinned, they were driven out of God's garden to wander the earth. The LORD has promised to bless his people, all people through his servant Abraham, but they are still travelling towards a promised land. When they settle in the Land, David

prepares and Solomon builds a temple on the same pattern as the Tabernacle, and the glory of God fills it and remains until the flagrant sin of God's people drives him away, and he abandons the Temple to destruction. But still God's desire is to dwell among his people, all the people of earth.

In Jesus God comes among us in a new way: God himself becomes a human being: as it says in John's gospel: "the Word became flesh and dwelt (tabernacled) among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth." Jesus told the Temple authorities that he was the new temple: Jn 2.19 "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." - he was speaking about the temple of his body."

And Jesus promised to come and live among us, his people who believe in him, through his Holy Spirit. God's glory came like fire to dwell with his people on Pentecost. So St Paul says:

Eph 2.19 you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, <sup>20</sup> built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, <sup>21</sup> in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. <sup>22</sup> In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit. 1 Cor 3.16 Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you?

We as God's Temple are here to glorify God in our lives- to show the world what God is like by how we live and love God and one another.

And One Day, when Jesus returns, God's glory will fill the whole earth. The book of Revelation ch 21 describes the Holy City. Its dimension are a vastly scaled up version of the Tabernacle. There is no Temple in it, because the LORD lives with his people. It is Eden restored and surpassed. There we will see the glory of God undimmed.

But in the meantime we are the place where God's glory dwells, and Jesus sends his Holy Spirit to give us gifts we need to build up his Temple. The highest gifts are no longer carving, designing, embroidery, but the Spiritual gifts that Paul describes in our second reading:

"<sup>7</sup> To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. <sup>8</sup> For to one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom, and to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit, <sup>9</sup> to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, <sup>10</sup> to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another the ability to distinguish between spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues. <sup>11</sup> All these are

empowered by one and the same Spirit, who apportions to each one individually as he wills.”

Elsewhere Paul tells us eagerly to desire the spiritual gifts, so that the body may be built up, and outsiders may experience God’s Spirit at work, be convicted as the secrets of his heart are disclosed, and so, falling on his face, he will worship God and declare that God is really among you.” (1 Cor 14.25).

Today we are issuing a leaflet asking each of you to review the way that you give and serve in the local church. We can serve God in many ways and places, in loving our families, in working honestly, and in our witness and service in the community- in local politics, sports, art. But in order to function as a church family we need everyone to do what they can, to discover and use their spiritual gifts, and not let the burden fall on a few. If you are a regular worshipper at PPT, please prayerfully consider how you could serve in some way, at the front or the back, and how much you give.

### **CONCLUSION**

**God graciously wants to come and live among his people: so we must serve him gladly and give generously for his Glory to be known in all the world.**

Moses commanded the people to give and serve, and all who were willing did so gladly, and the Tabernacle was completed according to the Lord’s command, and God’s glory graciously came and dwelt among them.

Now by the grace of God we are the people of God through faith in Jesus, and we have been given the Holy Spirit. So let us gladly use God’s gifts - our time, skills and money to enable his church to be built up and bring glory to God.

Icebreaker: Have you been involved in the completion of a big project?

As we reach the end of our series in Exodus, let’s review the story.

Where were the Israelites at the beginning of the story? (1.1-2.23)

What was God’s purpose for them? (3.8, 17, 19.4-6)

What obstacles had to be overcome to bring them to this point? (3.19,11.11, 14.4, 16.12, 17.8, 32.19)

Has the LORD forgiven the Israelites for the sin of the golden calf? (34.29-35)

Read Ex 35.4-end.

Bezalel is the first person in the bible to be described as “filled with the Spirit” (35.31). What ‘spiritual gifts’ does Bezalel possess? (31-35)

How do the people respond to Moses’ appeal for resources (35.4-29). From where did they get them? (including acacia wood, sea cow hides v23!) cf Ex 3.21-22, 12.35-36. Did everyone have something to contribute?

Did all the people contribute? What has happened to the ‘stiff-necked’ people?

read Exodus 40: we have skipped almost a quarter of the book of Exodus, which comprises very detailed instructions for the Tabernacle (25-31) and description of its construction. (36-39). Why does it matter that Moses erected it exactly “as the Lord commanded him” (40.16, 19, 21, 23, 25, 27, 29, 32)

What is the purpose of the Tabernacle? (25.8, 33.7,38.21, 40.2) cf Heb 8.5

Who may enter it? 40.35 cf Heb 9.6-12)

Has God’s purpose for his people been fulfilled? What obstacles still lie ahead?

What is the Tabernacle, or Temple for Christians? cf John 2.19-21, 1 Cor 3.9-17

What spiritual gifts have we been given to build up God’s people? (1 Cor 12.4-13)

How could we build one another up more effectively as a church community at PPT and in Bovey? What is our ultimate project or goal?

Pray for all who serve as volunteers, full or part-time staff, for God to be glorified!