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Exodus 7 - 37

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March 1st – Exodus 7

Chapter 7 is an extremely important chapter in the book of Exodus and in the Bible in general. In these verses, we read about the beginning of the plagues that eventually freed Israel from slavery in Egypt and we also come across a crucial truth regarding our own hearts and the importance of God's presence and power in our lives.

The ten plagues recorded in Exodus are some of the most remarkable and awe-inspiring stories in the Bible. They record some of God's glorious power over His creation and they teach us that not even nature is an obstacle to Him as He works among us. In addition to this reality however, they also teach us about the importance of God's drawing power if we are going to come into relationship with Him. We see this played out in the person of Pharaoh as he deals with God.

In summary, Moses and Aaron are sent to Pharaoh in order to request that the nation of Israel be freed from bondage. God has already assured Moses that the end result will be that His people are released, but in chapter 7 we learn that God has some other plans for Pharaoh and the nation of Egypt along the way. In verse 2, Moses and Aaron are commanded to demand that Pharaoh let Israel go and then verses 3-4 tell us, "But I will harden Pharaoh's heart, and though I multiply my signs and wonders in the land of Egypt, Pharaoh will not listen to you." Isn't this amazing? God guarantees that despite all of the signs and great miracles that will take place around Pharaoh, Pharaoh will still not come to the realization that he is up against the true living God.

Let's talk a moment about the culture that Moses and Aaron are entering. In Egypt, it was believed that Pharaoh himself was a god (among many gods) and so for Israel to claim that there was only one God was already offensive and then it was doubly offensive to claim that Pharaoh wasn't Him! Also, think about what Moses is saying here, he is essentially telling Pharaoh that the God of the universe is on the side of the nation of Israel but really all signs disagree with this statement. Think about it, if God really was almighty, why would He allow His chosen people to suffer for so long? Why would He have for his people such a small tribe of nomads? Wouldn't He choose for Himself some great nation? These are all legitimate questions, but biblically we can see that God almost always does the unusual. He uses people who are not "candidates" to be used, He chooses men and women who society would consider average or even outcasts. Truly, God was telling us something important when He spoke through the prophet Isaiah saying, "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways." (Isaiah 55:8). So, despite all of the evidence to the contrary, the God of the universe was on the side of the Egyptians and He was getting ready to show Egypt all of His power.

In light of this reality, it is understandable why Pharaoh would need some convincing. No one would question a decision to wait and see one of these plagues come upon Egypt, most wouldn't even blame him for seeing two or three (after all the magicians in Egypt could reproduce some of these things), but why didn't Pharaoh eventually come to know God? The reason is very simple, because God did not move on his behalf. You see, you and I are in desperate need of God to save us. Some of you have grown up believing that you can just "make a decision" whenever you feel like it, but the truth is that "salvation is of the Lord" (Jonah 2:9). If you are like me, sometimes you read the Bible and think "why in the world would these people not come to know God after witnessing THAT?!?!" Think about all of the people who witnessed miracles and yet continued to doubt God. What else would a person need? Well, the Bible tells us what else we need, in order to come to know Christ we need God to pull us towards Him. We will not make the first step towards God; God will always have to make the first step towards us. Now, some of you will read this and think, "well I know that I searched for truth for years before I came to know God, surely I was taking a first step towards Him." The problem with that statement is that you assume that you began to search for God by your own design. The truth is that "there is no one who understands, there is no one who seeks God." (Romans 3:11). God put that desire in you to search for Him and that is why you are now a child of His. If you are a believer today, rejoice! God has sought you and revealed Himself to you. Isn't this marvelous? The God of the universe considered you worthy enough to seek you out to save you!

There is another truth that we must learn from this example. We must pray that God would move in the hearts of those who are lost! If we truly understand that God is the one who saves and that those who come to know Him must be drawn by Him then we must pray diligently that God would have mercy on their souls! Pray for the people you know who are lost, pray that God would move in their hearts. Ask him to do as He promised through Ezekiel "I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh" (Ezekiel 36:26). This is what God has done for those of us who know Him and it is what we must beg Him to do in the hearts of the lost people we know!

March 2nd – Exodus 8

Exodus 8 provides us with an important principle as we relate to God. I would dare say all of us have been in positions where our own mistakes or sins have caused us great pain. It could be that you lied to a friend of yours who found out that you were dishonest or you struggled with some “secret” sin only to be found out and punished. There are many times in life where we come to a point in which we realize we are getting ready to pay the consequences for our actions. In those moments, many of us call out to God. We beg Him to help us and to remove whatever consequence. This can be a very good thing, but it can also be misleading. You see, the fact that you call out to God does not necessarily mean that you are sorry for the sin, in the case of Pharaoh, he wasn’t sorry for the sin he committed in not believing in the God of Israel, he was upset because of the consequence he was suffering because of his sin.

Pharaoh had been unwilling to obey God’s command to allow the people of Israel freedom to worship in the wilderness. Because of this, God sent plagues on the people of Egypt. In chapter 8, God send a plague of frogs. Some of you (particularly some of the ladies) can imagine the horror of having frogs overtake your life. The Bible says that these frogs were not limited to the outside, rather they were in “your house and into your bedroom and on your bed” (v. 3). Can you imagine what that must have been like? It was absolutely horrible!

Somewhere in the midst of this plague, Pharaoh decided that he would cave into God. He calls Moses and Aaron into his presence and asks them to “Plead with the Lord to take away the frogs from me and from my people, and I will let the people go to sacrifice to the Lord” (v. 8). At first glance, it seems like Pharaoh has finally gotten the reality that God is who He claims to be. He makes a deal with God (indirectly) that if God would take away these frogs, Pharaoh will be obedient to God’s command. I wonder if you have made a similar deal before. Have you ever told God that if He would take away the consequences of your previous sin or unbelief that you would obey Him? The danger here is that we are not to make deals with God. We don’t serve God because we are afraid of the consequences if we refuse to serve Him, we serve God because He is God! We serve Him because we love Him and desire to obey Him because He first loved us. Pharaoh only chose to say he would be obedient because the he selfishly wanted the problems he faced to go away. In verse 15 we see the logical reason why this type of commitment won’t work, “But when Pharaoh saw that there was a respite, he hardened his heart and would not listen to them, as the Lord had said.” Do you see what has happened? As soon as the consequence goes away, Pharaoh begins to live life the same way he had lived before. We will not follow God to avoid potential trouble, we will only follow Him when we begin to realize who He is and what He has done for us. This realization will produce a genuine love for Him and a desire to be obedient to His commands. Anything else will only be temporary.

I wonder how many of you decided to give in to God because of the consequences you were facing. Did you tell Him you would follow because you were afraid of what would happen otherwise? Or did you see your sin and His love for you in spite of that sin and realize that you were being disobedient to the One who loved you the most? If you are just trying to avoid consequence, your commitment won’t last, if you fell in love with Christ it will last for eternity.

March 3rd – Exodus 9

An important discipline in the Christian life is found in Exodus 9, namely the discipline of preparation. The first question any person needs to ask is “Am I prepared for the return of Christ?” The Bible is very clear that Christ is returning, it is also clear that even those who pass away before He returns to Earth will be judged. Those who take Him seriously will find that when the moment of His return comes they will have nothing to fear, those who don’t take Him seriously will be in for a rude awakening and will lose everything.

In Exodus 9, God (through the words of Moses) provides warning for Pharaoh and Egypt regarding the next plague that was coming their way. God decreed that He would send hail on the nation of Egypt the next day and that they needed to heed His warning and bring in their livestock before this terrible storm. Verse 20 tells us “Then whoever feared the word of the Lord among the servants of Pharaoh hurried his slaves and his livestock into the houses, but whoever did not pay attention to the word of the Lord left his slaves and his livestock in the field.” God graciously gave these people time, some used it wisely and others did not.

Likewise, God has given all of us time and a similar word of warning. He has told us that a day of judgment is coming and that those who deny the salvation found in His son will be judged and separated from Him eternally in a place we call hell. He has warned us that judgment is sure and that the last days will bring many great tribulations and catastrophes. Romans 5:9 tells us that those who have been justified by His blood will be saved from the wrath to come. Make no mistake; there will be a day in which we have to answer for our actions. The only defense that will work is the statement that we have accepted and put our trust in the sacrifice Christ made on our behalf. All other reasons will be futile.

Getting back to our text, the Bible tells us that the hail “struck down everything that was in the field in all the land of Egypt, both man and beast” (v. 25). When you first read this, it seems absolutely ridiculous that the people of Egypt would not believe that God was speaking truth after all they had witnessed. But, humanity has proven again and again that they are largely willing to overlook the facts. How much proof did people need that Christ was the Messiah? Think about all of the miracles that were witnessed, all of the prophecies that were fulfilled in this one man, to cap it off think about the very fact that the greatest army in the world at the time was charged with watching over the body of Christ and yet somehow He disappeared and then reappeared to several. Truthfully, we are not very good at weighing the facts or thinking about our past. We may look at the Egyptians and wonder how in the world they didn’t take God seriously, but let me ask you a question, how often do you take Him seriously? Have you forgotten how accurate He has been in your past? When you ignored Him in the past and faced consequences did you learn from those mistakes or are you doomed to repeat the very same mistake as those Egyptians fell into as they chose not to take God at His Word?

March 4th – Exodus 10

Most of you probably have a list of chores or responsibilities around your home that you must do on a weekly basis. If you're like me, some of those you don't really mind but a few of them you absolutely hate. For me, it was always cleaning the bathroom. I didn't mind mowing the grass or unloading and reloading the dishwasher, but when it came time to clean the bathroom I looked for any and every excuse not to have to do it. I would fake a sickness every now and then or wait until the last possible moment and then try to find some other engagement to be obligated to so that the bathroom would wait another week. Here is what I found, when I was faithful to do ALL of my other chores besides doing the bathroom, my mom was still unhappy. You see, she had told (commanded really) me to do everything on the list and even though I did "most" of it, I was not being obedient. This is very similar to our relationship with God. He calls us to give everything to Him. All of our desires should be His desires, all of our possessions should be in His hands to determine how to use them and our attitudes should be dictated by His commands in the Scripture. He calls us to follow Him with EVERYTHING we have and when we try to hold back even a little bit, we are being unfaithful.

We see an example of this in the person of Pharaoh in Exodus 10. Moses has already informed Pharaoh that God wants all of his people and their possession to be given the freedom to leave to worship Him (v. 9-11) and now after another horrific plague, Pharaoh calls in Moses and says this, "Go, serve the Lord, your little ones also may go with you; only let your flocks and your herds remain behind" (v. 24). Do you see what Pharaoh is trying to do here? He is trying to make a deal with God. He is saying that he is willing to cave on part of the demands but he is not willing to give all of what God has commanded.

I wonder how many times you have been guilty of making a deal with God. Have you ever told Him, for instance, "God I will share my faith and I will live for you here, but I don't want to go anywhere outside of my comfort zone" or "God I will read my Bible and go to church but I do not want to share my faith to the people you have asked me to speak with". You see, in both of those circumstances you are making the same mistake Pharaoh made thousands of years ago. God is not in the bargaining business. It is truly His way or the highway. If we are going to follow Him, we must deny ourselves totally and follow Him (Luke 9:23).

After Pharaoh made his parameters clear, Moses responded in the only way that he could saying "Our livestock also must go with us; not a hoof shall be left behind, for we must take of them to serve the Lord our God." (v. 26) Do you see what happened? God didn't take the deal. He would not settle with Pharaoh and He will not settle with us. This is not a flexible arrangement, He demands our all from us at all times. Just like my mom was not happy when I was obedient to do almost all of what she asked me to do, God won't be happy if we are only obedient to do part of what He has commanded us to do. Follow Him totally! If not, there will be tough times in your future.

March 5th – Exodus 11

Have you ever prayed that God would give you more faith? Particularly as young believers, it is easy to look around at people who are more mature and wonder if you will ever be able to live the way they live. Things that seem very difficult for you (sharing your faith, holding your tongue, loving people who are rude) seem to come so easily to them. Often as a younger believer, I wondered how I would ever get to this point in my life. I knew that I needed to pray that God would continue to grow me in my faith, but I didn't really know what that meant for me in my future. In Exodus 11, we see a leader who has grown exponentially in the person of Moses. Do you remember about a week ago when we first read about Moses' calling in Exodus 3 and 4? If you recall, Moses had so many excuses regarding why he wasn't the right person for the job of leading the nation of Israel out of Egypt. One of his primary reasons for being unqualified was that he couldn't speak very well. At the time, we read about God providing Moses with Aaron to be the mouthpiece for him as Moses spoke to Pharaoh the words of God.

In Exodus 11, we see a subtle hint that things have now changed. In this chapter, the last and worst of the plagues is getting ready to take place and Moses has been told by God to go to Pharaoh and let him know what is getting ready to unfold. The interesting thing about this text is that Moses goes by himself! God is now calling Moses to deliver the most difficult message to pass along to Pharaoh and Moses goes without any help. How would this happen? Why would Moses all of the sudden have the confidence to go alone? The answer lies in his experience over the past few days.

Think about this, when God first called Moses out of the desert he was comfortable. It probably was not the lifestyle he would have thought he would live, but he knew what to do every day, he had a family and friends and he had a stable job. He wasn't challenged spiritually at all and life was predictable if it wasn't exciting. When God calls Moses from the burning bush, Moses is immediately called to go out of his comfort zone and he responds the way most of us respond in a similar situation, he fights it. He tries to make up all of these excuses as to why he isn't the man for the job and why he isn't qualified, but in the end he goes. As he goes, he confronts all kinds of problems. He deals with Pharaoh who is hard hearted and cruel to Israel, he deals with people who begin to gripe and complain and who question whether or not he is truly called by God to deliver them, he deals with Egyptian magicians and sorcerers who are able to reproduce many of the plagues, in short he encounters situations daily that require him to rely fully on God.

In these moments Moses had a choice to make, he could run away from the challenge and return to Midian to never be heard from again or he could rely on God and see results. Moses chose to see results and you know what happened, in the end he not only saw God deliver but he grew as a believer himself. This is so important students; you don't grow in the comfortable times nearly as much as you grow in the difficult ones. If you want to see your faith expand, expect that faith to be tested. If you want to grow in maturity, expect to see situations arise in which your maturity is needed. We don't grow by sitting back and doing nothing, we grow by following God and learning to rely on Him. This is what happened to Moses and this is why Moses became a great leader and man of God. Are you willing to be tested? Are you ready to leave your comfort zone? If you are, you will see incredible growth in your life!

March 6th – Exodus 12

Exodus 12 records one of the ugliest and most severe penalties in all of Scripture. As we have read many times, Pharaoh simply would not allow God's people to leave his land. In the face of great signs of God's incredible power and with the understanding that God's request had stayed the same, Pharaoh's heart remained hard and the culmination of this disobedience is found in Exodus 12. In this chapter, God finally sends a plague that so deeply impacted Pharaoh and the entire nation of Egypt that he finally relented and allowed Israel their freedom. In the midst of this plague, God gives Israel particular instructions, one of which foreshadows an even greater display of God's love and mercy, namely the instruction to use the blood of a lamb to ensure their salvation from this terrible plague.

The entire Old Testament serves to point us toward the person of Jesus Christ. We see Him spoken about in prophecy in many books, and even the sacrificial system where the nation of Israel would kill different animals and use their blood as an offering of atonement point to a day in which the "Lamb of God" would be killed and his blood would serve as the ultimate and final offering for our sins. In this instance, the blood of the lamb is the only thing that separates those who will face death and those who will not.

You see, the blood of the lamb placed on the doorposts of each home served to remind the Israelites that life had to be sacrificed in the place of those who lived in the home. It wasn't enough that the Israelites were born into the home of one of God's chosen people. They still needed a sacrificial lamb to make sure they were safe. Likewise, it is not enough for us today to be born into a religious home or to partake in religious ceremonies or gatherings, one day when we stand before the Lord and have to give an account for our lives, the question will boil down to whether or not the blood of the lamb covers us. For those who have placed their trust in that sacrifice, they will be given life and those who have not trusted in the sacrifice of the lamb will face death.

Even in the Old Testament, long before the coming of the person of Jesus Christ, God required atonement for sin. The beauty of our situation is that the atonement (or payment) has already been made, the only question that remains is will you place your trust in it? The people of Israel did not know the long term plans of God on that evening, but they knew what God commanded of them and they were willing to do as He told them. This act of faith saved their lives. Our act of faith in trusting in Christ will do the same!

March 7th – Exodus 13

Exodus 13 gives us another example of how merciful and loving our God is as He leads us. The people in Israel had been through a rather eventful and traumatic time leading up to their release from Egypt. They had been enslaved by cruel masters, witnessed some ghastly plagues, seen the consequences of Pharaoh's disobedience to God, and had to leave the place they called home very quickly. Now, they are being led by "the pillar of cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night" (v. 22). Many of you know what it is like to have gone through something traumatic. It takes time to deal with the results of those moments. For you, it could be witnessing a very serious wreck or seeing someone have a health emergency take place before your eyes, whatever it may be, you know that in the immediate aftermath you feel rather shell-shocked and unable to function normally. This is undoubtedly how the people of Israel felt in these moments right after they obtained their freedom, and in the midst of this situation we see God sympathize with their plight and show mercy to them even though they didn't realize this was the case.

In verse 17, Moses gives us insight into God's thought process as He seeks to lead Israel. The text says, "When Pharaoh let the people go, God did not lead them by way of the land of the Philistines, although that was near. For God said, 'lest the people change their minds when they see war and return to Egypt'. But God led the people around by the way of the wilderness toward the Red Sea." God in His great love and mercy looked at these people and knew that they simply could not take any more conflict at the moment. They had been through some very difficult days and they just needed a few more minutes of peace before the next obstacle.

You know, we serve a God who knows us better than we know ourselves. He is able to peer into our hearts and into our souls and see our true condition. There is no lying or deceiving God about how we feel or how equipped we are to handle a potential problem. He knows everything! This could be quite scary if we didn't also know that He knows everything and He loves us enough to protect us from things we aren't ready to deal with. This is what He does for Israel in this moment and it is what He will do for us today.

Some of you are facing a situation that you don't think you can handle. Take heart! The very same God that looked at Israel and realized they weren't ready has looked at your life and stated that you are prepared. You may not feel that way, but you must remember that your God knows you even better than you know yourself. For those of you who have placed your faith and trust in the sacrifice of Christ, God is with you even now. His character has not changed and you can rest in the fact that He knows what He is doing just like He knew what He was doing with Israel thousands of years ago!

March 8th – Exodus 14

When we truly make a commitment to follow God, you may find that you get into situations in which only a miracle can save you. This happens often in the Scriptures. David got into that situation with Goliath, Elijah got into that type of situation with the prophets of Baal, Moses was in that predicament when he appeared before Pharaoh, the apostles were in that situation when they chose to continue to believe in Christ in the face of the persecution of the Romans, and even today we can find ourselves in those situations if we follow God. These are not stress free times for sure, but God typically reserves His mightiest works for people who choose to follow Him regardless of the cost.

This is certainly shown to be true in Exodus 14 as the nation of Israel is in deep trouble. The most powerful army in the world at the time is pursuing them and they have literally nowhere to go. I sometimes try to envision this scene. On one side is the Egyptian army, these men are trained fighters equipped with the best combat gear of their time riding on chariots and focused on the nation of Israel. On the other side is the nation of Israel, this is a people who have never been trained to fight they have elderly people, women and small children along with all of their possessions and livestock. They cannot move ANYWHERE quickly and they have no weapons to speak of to help protect them. In light of what I just described, from an earthly perspective this fight is no contest. The Egyptians are clearly the favorites and quite honestly the nation of Israel doesn't even have a chance. Much like young David going up against Goliath, there is no way Israel will win this fight.

So Israel begins to look around and they understand the danger immediate danger that is in pursuit. They begin to cry out to the Lord and they start to panic. We really can't blame them for panicking, in fact if we were honest, most of us would panic as well. It is very easy for us to forget all of the great things God has done in our past when we are in a moment of crisis in the present. This is what happens to Israel, but God has a reminder for these people and it remains a powerful truth for us today. In verse 14, in the midst of all of this pandemonium, Moses says "The Lord will fight for you, and you have only to be silent." Isn't that awesome? In their moment of need, when they found themselves in a position that they could not handle, their God was their God was there and He would fight for them.

Those of you who are faithful to follow God may need to be reminded of this very fact. Your situation may look hopeless or your faith may cause you to paint yourself into a corner that you can't personally come out from but God will fight for you in those moments. You see, the nation of Israel had been faithful to follow God and God had led them to this point. You remember in Exodus 13 the account God leading these people day and night, God had placed them in this spot and He had a plan to get them out of it as well. If God leads you to it, He will get you through it! The reality is that we are in much more danger when we don't follow God than when we do choose to follow Him! Even though not following may seem more logical, we must realize that having His blessing and power on our side is so much more valuable than trusting our own logic and common sense. If you are faithful today, don't worry about the situations you may face, He will fight for you!

March 9th – Exodus 15

We left off yesterday with the idea that what God brings you to He will ultimately bring you through. There is absolutely no question that He is faithful to those of us who are obedient to follow Him. We can rest in this reality. Exodus 14 provides an example of the majestic way God often chooses to work on His people's behalf and Exodus 15 provides an example of how God's people are to respond when He protects them.

If we aren't careful, we can take for granted what God has done in our lives and never give Him praise and glory for His acts of mercy and power on our behalf. In fact, it is human nature to forget to be thankful in general. We must be very careful to be sure that we don't blow past all of the blessings God has bestowed upon us. The nation of Israel doesn't forget to praise God, and we can learn a great amount from them about what we should do when God works miracles on our behalf.

Let's look at a few things the people of Israel did in thanking God:

1. They recalled the event: Notice in verses 1-10 how the song discussed what God did to overcome the Egyptian army. They remembered, for instance, that "the Lord has triumphed gloriously" (v. 1) and "Pharaoh's chariots and his host he cast into the sea, and his chosen officers were sunk in the Red Sea." (v. 4). In moments when God does the miraculous on our behalf, we would be well served to do what Israel does here and verbally recall what happened. This serves to remind us of the great power and strength on display from God and it gives Him praise and glory for what He has done.

2. They praised God for His power and glory: In verse 11 they sang, "Who is like you, O Lord, among the gods? Who is like you, majestic in holiness, awesome in glorious deeds, doing wonders?" In light of what God had done on their behalf, they praised Him for the fact that He is unrivaled. There is no one like Him, and when He gives another example of this truth, we should praise Him again!

3. They praised God for His faithfulness: in verse 13 we read "You have led in your steadfast love the people whom you have redeemed; you have guided them by your strength to your holy abode." The nation of Israel at this moment recognized and verbalized the fact that God is the one who was responsible for this great miracle and that His leadership was the only reason why they were even able to see such an awesome display of power.

As we thank God for the mighty things He has done in our lives, let us model our thanksgiving after the song we read in Exodus 15. Let us recall the miracles God has worked in our lives, let us praise God for His power and glory and let us thank Him for His faithfulness. If we do these things, we will be constantly reminded of the greatness of the God we serve and we will give Him the praise and glory He desires and deserves!

March 10th – Exodus 16

There is a great temptation in our society to “get ahead”. We live in a fast paced culture that values doing all that you can to be successful. There is nothing wrong with being a hard worker or with trying to improve your lifestyle, but all of these efforts must be within the limits of God’s instructions. For instance, saving money is a great thing but we should always give God our tithe (10%) before we save. We are told to be hard workers and dependable employees, but we also are commanded to take a day of rest so working 7 days a week is not an option for the believer. This temptation to get ahead is shown vividly in Exodus 16 and it should serve to warn us about the dangers of being unfaithful to God’s instructions.

In chapter 16, we read that God has taken it upon Himself to provide food, a type of bread called “manna”, for Israel to eat. This food is to be gathered every morning and all that is gathered is to be eaten on that day or thrown away (v. 19). Each day, God provided the manna for that day and on the sixth day (the day before the day of rest called the “Sabbath”) God instructed each family to take enough manna for that day and the day of the Sabbath. This was very important as it reminded the nation of Israel that they were dependent upon God each and every day for their food.

This was the system that God ordained to be in place and it certainly met all of the needs of the people of Israel, but it was not totally followed. We read in verse 20, “but they did not listen to Moses. Some of them left part of it till the morning, and it bred worms and stank.” Some of the people decided that they would go ahead and get more than they needed. They undoubtedly did this because they did not trust God to do what He said He was going to do, namely provide food each day. They wanted to have some insurance in case God didn’t come through one of these days. This action, motivated by distrust, was sinful and it proved to be unwise. You see, the people could not trick God. The Lord knew who was disobedient and their plan to be disobedient blew up in their faces.

We struggle with a similar temptation today. We know that God has called us to give of our time and money, but we think that if we just spend our money or time doing what we want to do then we will prosper more than if we were obedient. At the root of this action is a desire to want to be independent. We don’t want to have to trust God, we want to be self-sufficient. This is what Israel wanted and it is still a sinful tendency in us today. May we learn from Israel’s mistake and see that working to get ahead by being disobedient does not benefit us in the long run. You might make a few more dollars or save more than you would otherwise, but God is in control of all things and He will ensure that you don’t prosper. Conversely, if you are faithful God will provide all of your needs just like He provided food for all of Israel. You won’t have to worry about whether or not you are taken care of and you can be obedient to Him in the process! Don’t fall into the trap of thinking you can do it all yourself, you can’t and you won’t, let God sustain you and resolve to be faithful to Him!

March 11th – Exodus 17

One thing we figure out rather quickly in our lives is the fact that we cannot do all we need to do alone. There will inevitably be times in each of our lives when we are confronted with the reality that we need help. For some of you (particularly the guys) this is difficult to come to grips with, but it is the way we were made. Exodus 17 shares a story of a time when Moses could not do what he needed to do by himself; thankfully he had friends there to help shoulder the burden.

In Exodus 17, the people of Israel encounter their first military opposition after crossing the Red Sea. The Amalekites (a group that would be a problem for God's people for years to come) attacked Israel, prompting Moses to tell Joshua to round up some good men and return fire the next day. As Moses is giving Joshua instructions, Moses states that he will be "on top of the hill with the staff of God in my hand" (v. 9). The staff of God signifies God's presence. If you remember, the staff was the very instrument God used to confirm to Moses that he was truly God, to initiate many of the plagues, and to part the Red Sea. The staff was what God chose to channel His power through and, as we will see, He once again used it as Israel went to battle.

As Joshua and his men began to fight, Moses and his friends realized that whenever Moses held up his hands Israel would gain the advantage but whenever his hands were lowered Israel would begin to lose ground. The problem was very simple, Moses knew he needed to continue to raise his hands but he physically couldn't! If you have ever worked out before (particularly for the first time) you know well the feeling you get in your muscles when you are spent. You just can't move anymore and no matter how hard you try, your body has just given out! This is what has happened to Moses, but the stakes are much higher than just completing a workout, the success of Israel is in the balance! It is in this moment that Moses desperately needs some help and, thankfully, he has just the right group of friends surrounding him to get him through. The Bible says that Moses' friends Aaron and Hur were there to help hold up Moses' hands and the result was that Joshua and his men "overwhelmed" (v. 13) Amalek.

This story illustrates a very important principle for us, namely that we all need some good and dependable friends because there will be moments in life in which we will have to depend on them. These moments are often unpredictable and they typically come about with little warning so take the time even today to pray that God would raise up good friends in your life for those times when you need them. You know, part of the reason why God has instituted His church and commanded us to be together for worship (Hebrews 10:25) is for this very reason. When the people of God meet together and become the close-knit family of God, our need for dependable friends who love us and are ready to serve will be met. I can tell you from recent experience that you never know when you may need someone to help you "raise your hands" but I know that those who will be there for you are the ones who love Christ. Find those people and grow in relationship with them beginning today!

March 12th – Exodus 18

One thing I learned very early on in my Christian walk was that telling people my personal testimony was often more credible to them than any theological argument I could make. When people heard who I was (some of them knew from experience) and heard how God changed my life, they really couldn't argue with my experience. Conversely, many times when I read a Scripture there was an argument already devised in their minds against hearing the Word of God. In Exodus 18, a man named Jethro who was Moses' father-in-law was convinced by Moses' that the God of Israel was the one true God because of Moses' testimony about all that God had done.

The Bible says that Jethro came to Moses while the people of Israel were traveling through the desert. As Moses and Jethro talked, Moses "told his father-in-law all that the Lord had done to Pharaoh and to the Egyptians for Israel's sake, all the hardship that had come upon them in the way, and how the Lord had delivered them" (v. 8). This is so very important; Moses did not hesitate to tell what God had done for him! Do you hesitate to tell other people your story? Are you concerned that they might look down on you or be uninterested? Maybe this has been an obstacle in your past. You need to understand that God does miraculous things in our life and midst partially because He wants us to faithfully give Him the credit and the glory for His deeds as we faithfully share our story with others. This is what Moses was doing; He was praising God by giving Him credit in the company of someone who didn't quite yet believe. Every single one of us have experiences that we can share! They may not be as "grand" as seeing the Red Sea divided right in front of you or seeing God rain down bread from heaven, but they are still miraculous. You once were dead and now you are alive! What a miracle and what a blessing to have been born again!

Look at the way Jethro responds, "Blessed be the Lord, who has delivered you out of the hand of the Egyptians and out of the hand of Pharaoh and has delivered the people from under the hand of the Egyptians. NOW I KNOW that the Lord is greater than all gods." (v. 10-11 emphasis mine). You see, Jethro could have argued over whether or not his gods were greater than God Almighty if Moses had just wanted to talk "religion" with him, but when Moses began to share real stories and real experiences he had with God Himself, Jethro really couldn't argue. Jethro was convinced based on the testimony of a faithful believer in God.

I wonder how many people might be convinced of the Gospel based on your story. Share it with people, don't be ashamed to tell others about what He has meant to you and the new life and purpose He gives. You might not know a ton of Scripture (even though I hope we are all working to know more) and you might not be able to argue philosophy with others, but you can tell your story and that is a powerful method of sharing Christ with someone else!

March 13th – Exodus 19

When I was a kid, one of the great thrills of my life was when I was allowed to help my grandfather with some task. Sometimes he would let me come over and help him put together some piece of equipment or cut the grass with him. I remember those times mainly because when I was able to help him I felt like I mattered. In my mind, helping my grandfather meant that I was able to say that I had a part in whatever he was doing. It seems a bit strange now, but if you think about it there are certain tasks even today that if you were asked to help you would feel honored. What if you were asked to help record an album for your favorite artist or help an athlete you look up to practice? These are things that would be really exciting because you would have a hand in their performance. Even though you aren't technically needed, you were there and that counts.

In Exodus 19 God makes an interesting covenant with the nation of Israel. As they camp around Mount Sinai and he begins to speak to Moses, God shares that if Israel is faithful to obey His voice and keep His covenant, they will be a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. (v. 5-6) Now, when we read this today we probably don't think much of this promise or we think he must be talking about the priests of Israel (people like Aaron and his sons). But in reality we see that what God is actually saying here is much broader than that. He is promising Israel that if they are obedient then they will be His ministers.

Literally in Exodus 19 God is telling Israel that if they are faithful they can help Him do His work. He is asking them to be a part of something great. Now, to be clear God didn't need Israel to accomplish what He wanted to accomplish but He WANTED them to help. Not only did He want them to help in the Old Testament, He still wants those of us in His church to help today!

In 1 Peter 2:9 we see that Peter writes that the New Testament Church (all of us who believe in Christ) are "a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light." Peter is using the same terminology used by God to Moses in Exodus 19 to express that we still are a chosen people and a royal priesthood.

Put simply, each and every one of us are called to be God's ministers. He wants to use us to proclaim His incredible news! One day, when we look back on our lives my prayer is that we will look back on all the times we helped our Father in heaven accomplish His task. Like my grandfather, God doesn't NEED us to do what He wants to do but He wants us to help. He loves us and He desires to see us grow and to equip us to do ministry along the way. What a great calling we have! Will you be obedient today to God's commands? If so, He will use you in awesome ways.

March 14th – Exodus 20

So, you knew this day was coming... in Exodus 20 we get the command from God that many students dislike the most, “Honor your father and your mother” (v. 12). This has always been a difficult task for many students and it seems to get harder the older you get. The truth is that many of you are only a few years away from living on your own. You are becoming more and more independent and it can become increasingly difficult for you to do as Exodus 20:12 commands you. Today I would like to give you a few reasons why you should honor your parents and my prayer for you is that you would pray and ask God to give you the strength to do as He commands.

1. Your parents really do love you... I know it doesn't seem this way sometimes but I look back on my childhood and teenage years and realize that many of the reasons why my parents told me not to do something was because they wanted what was best for me. If you are disagreeing with your parents on a subject, take the time to really evaluate what they are saying and most of the time you will see that they do love you and only want what is best for you.

2. Your parents have experienced more. It is tough to admit, but your parents have seen more, done more and screwed up more than you have. Many times, they are just trying to keep you from making the same mistakes and experiencing the same pain that they dealt with in their younger years.

3. God has placed your parents as authority over you. Some of you might disagree with the first two reasons I gave, but if you believe that God is all-powerful than you have no choice but to admit that He placed your parents above you for a reason. Even if your parents aren't believers, you still should submit to them. If your parents are not believers, a great way to witness to them is to honor and respect them like the Bible commands you to do, I've seen many parents come to know God because their students took this seriously.

God gives the nation of Israel the reason why He commands them to obey their parents when He says, “that your days may be long in the land that the Lord your God is giving you” (v. 12). If you remember, God has asked the Israelites to pass down their traditions from parent to child. Our parents are who our God has ordained for us to listen to and to learn from. We would be wise to do our best to heed God's advice and listen and learn.

March 15th – Exodus 21

Exodus 21, begins a part of the Bible that some find very difficult to explain. Why are all of these rules in the Scripture and why does God make the nation of Israel do all of these things that He no longer requires of us? If you have ever made an attempt to share the Gospel with someone who is an unbeliever, you have probably encountered a situation in which they bring up an Old Testament law like the need to stone the homosexuals in the group in order to refute what you are saying. So, why did God give all these laws and why don't they apply to us today?

This is a pretty complicated answer if you get down into the minute details, but the simple answer is this: the nation of Israel was God's chosen people who were supposed to reflect God's goodness to others. This meant that they had to be different and that that they had to be holy. So, in Old Testament times, in order for them to remain pure they had to purge the evil from among themselves (Deuteronomy 19:19). They had to be different in their customs. In today's text for instance, God commands Israel to treat their slaves differently than all of the other countries treat their enslaved workers. In short, they needed to be unique and so God instituted rules that would make them stand out in contrast with the other countries.

So, why do we not have to abide by the same rules today? The short answer to this is that Christ came to make us pure. We no longer only have the nation of Israel to look at to see God's blessing, now we look at Jesus Christ. Because of that, our way of life is not separated by our "do's" and "don't's" but rather by the faith we have in our God. Instead of God being lifted up by our laws, now God lives in our hearts and leads us individually to do what He has called us to pursue.

From now on, when we read the Old Testament law, I want you to think about how each rule would separate the nation of Israel from those who are surrounding them. Why would God command this regulation be upheld? Then, I want you to thank Jesus that we no longer have to live like the nation of Israel because of His sacrifice!

March 16th – Exodus 22

Every single one of us know what it feels like to be the odd man out in a situation. If you have ever hung out with a group who has spent years together you know the feeling. You don't get any of the inside jokes, they constantly talk about people you have never met, there are subjects that are off limits that you know nothing about, and typically people don't make an effort to include you as they interact. Even worse, many times you can become the target for their insults and jokes. Particularly if you have nothing in common with the group and you are just there because you have to be. These types of experiences can be really hurtful and leave us feeling as if we are helpless.

When I was in college, I was placed in the music dorm my freshman year. Our music schools had a separate campus about 15 minutes away from main campus and so all of the other people in my dorm were specifically there for the purpose of music. I, on the other hand, was just there because my original dorm assignment didn't work out. I knew no one (besides my roommates) and I had NOTHING in common with the majority of the people there. To begin the year, we had a mandatory dorm social event at a fair ground. I remember getting off the bus having not spoken to a single person, waiting in line to do things by myself and the only conversations I had that day were when people who didn't know my story asked me what instrument I played. When I told them I didn't play an instrument, every single conversation ended. It was quite the lonely day, but it taught me a valuable lesson. If we aren't careful, our churches can be places where others don't feel welcomed. They can become clubs instead of ministries. Our discussions can gravitate to subjects that an outsider knows nothing about and we can exclude them and make them feel like I did my first week in college. Truthfully, every person knows what it feels like to be excluded, it's not fun and it hurts.

God's heart, as shown in Exodus 22, is to make sure that others don't feel this way when they are in our midst. In verse 21, God commands Israel to "not wrong a sojourner or oppress him, for you were sojourners in the land of Egypt." So, God makes it very clear to Israel that people who are sojourners (a big word meaning from a foreign land) should not be wronged or oppressed. In short, they should be treated with dignity and respect. God desires that EVERY person be treated with respect. After all, He made each and every one of us and Christ died for all of mankind as well. There is no person who is worthless in God's eyes. For this reason the church should move to treat every person as if they have worth as well.

In verse 21, God doesn't stop with just commanding Israel to treat sojourners fairly, He reminds them that they too once were sojourners. You see, in Egypt the nation of Israel experienced the sting of being oppressed and mistreated. They knew what it was like to be treated as second-class citizens. All of us know what it is like to be treated this way as well. The problem is that many of us don't bother to think about how it feels to be wronged when we are in the position to wrong someone else. The nation of Israel had to be reminded of their own past and we should be reminded of ours as well.

The next time you see a new face at church or you notice that someone is being marginalized at school, do something about it! Remember what God commanded the nation of Israel and realize that God still values absolutely every person. My desire for our youth group individually and our church as a whole is that we will be the type of place where people can come and see that we do value them. We obviously won't always agree with their beliefs and there may be times that we offend them because of what the Word of God teaches, but if someone walks away from our ministry because they were "turned off" don't let it be because we treated them poorly. We can embody God's love to others. We can be the real church, not a social club, but a place for those who are hurting and desperately in need of God's forgiveness and love. Commit today to doing your part to make sure that all of the sojourners in your life are treated the way God commanded the nation of Israel to treat sojourners years ago.

March 17th – Exodus 23

Exodus 23 begins with a command that is very important for us to remember and be obedient to even today. In verse 1, God tells Israel “You shall not spread a false report. You shall not join hands with a wicked man to be a malicious witness.” If you have hung around people for any time at all, you know that false reports get spread about others constantly. Most of us know what it is like to have a false report spread about our own lives. Typically, this report starts with one person and then mushrooms to include people who don’t even know us. It is always frustrating when people who either don’t know you or barely know you make judgments about your character as if they have a close relationship with you. This type of thing happens over and over again and it teaches us about human nature, namely that people are prone to gossip and spread lies.

When you read that last sentence most of you agreed I’m sure, but many of you are less likely to put yourself in the category of being likely to gossip. The truth is that all of us have spread false reports and lies about others. In fact, we may even have done it sometime today! So, how do we avoid spreading false reports?

1. Only speak on what you know. Do not take another person’s word for what happened. The truth is always somewhere in the middle of two sides. Even if a person is your best friend, they are typically going to share only the details that benefit their side of the issue.
2. Only speak when you are trying to help the situation. If your desire is to tear someone down, then you can rest assured that what you are doing is sinful. Many times the most responsible thing we can do is simply allow the gossip to stop with us.
3. Encourage the person who is sharing gossip or false reports about someone to you to go and have a conversation with the one who is being talked about. The quickest way to stop gossip is to make the gossiper go to the source.
4. Don’t allow your emotions to control your response. If you are hurt by what someone says, take some time before you respond.
5. Understand that if someone is so willing to share gossip with you about another person, that same individual is likely to share things about you to someone else. The second part of the verse says don’t join hands with a wicked man. Many of you believe that some of your friends who mistreat others won’t mistreat you. The character of the person is on display, please take into consideration what you hear and understand that you are no exception. If they are not loyal to another friend whom they act as if they like until that friend leaves and then speak badly about them, they are not loyal to you either.
6. Measure your words carefully. Words, once spoken, are permanent. They cannot be taken back.

If we were to be totally honest, the six steps listed above don’t come naturally to us as people. We want to be a part of the conversation and we tend to spread rumors easily and often. If God is going to use us however, we must begin to do as He commands. It is so important that people trust us and know that we are true followers of Christ. One way they will come to trust us is when they realize that we desire to build up others instead of tearing them down. Commit to stopping gossip in your own life today!

March 18th – Exodus 24

Have you ever violated a rule you didn't know about? When I was a high school student, a new friend of mine invited me over to their home. He let me in and we hung out for a while before his parents got home. When his parents got home I got up to meet them and the moment I came around the corner towards them his mom's expression changed. I remember her looking down at my shoes and then saying in a rather angry voice "we take off our shoes inside." I felt awful, and I never went back either! The point is that we need to know all of the rules and expectations if we are going to follow them.

In Exodus 24 we read that Moses "told the people all the words of the Lord and all the rules" (v. 3) in order for the people to either agree or disagree to follow them. You see, it is important for you to know all of the requirements before you commit to something. This is why in Luke 14, Christ emphasized the need for disciples to "count the cost" of following Him before they committed. They needed to know what would be required of them before they told Christ they would be a follower of His. In the same way, you need to know what God requires of you before you can reasonably say that you will follow Him.

So, how do we know what is expected of us? The first way we know what is expected of us is by reading God's Word. We need to look in the Bible for places where God instructs us through the Bible about what is required. We need to read the Word with a desire to see how the Christian life should look and then be faithful to implement those principles in our lives. So for instance, we should learn that part of being a follower of God is to "pray without ceasing" (1 Thessalonians 5:17). If we are truly going to be a disciple of Christ we should work to implement this idea into our lives. If we don't, then we really can't claim to submit to His will totally.

Moses was careful to give the people all of the words of the Lord and your parents, church leaders, and pastors should do the same. Once you have the words of God, however, you must then commit to following Him. The nation of Israel did this and they were blessed, will you learn about God's instructions to us and commit to follow as well?

March 19th – Exodus 25

For the next few devotions, we are going to look at how some of these items in the tabernacle point us to Christ. A really interesting thing about Scripture is that the Old Testament fits in so well with the New Testament. God's plan to send Christ and have Him fulfill the obligations of the law was in place well before God gave the instructions to build the temple to Moses. The tabernacle was a place built for worship and to host the very presence of God and in it we find hints about how God was going to send His presence in human form in the person of Jesus Christ.

Today, I want us to take a look at the Table for Bread in Exodus 25:23-30. In these verses, we see that God commands that the bread of the Presence should be placed before Him regularly (v. 30). What is the significance of this bread? Bread was significant because it sustained life. If you remember, God provided manna (a type of bread) from heaven for the nation of Israel to eat in order for them to survive in the desert. This bread was necessary for their survival. When Jesus came, He used this metaphor to describe our need for Him if we are going to have life. For instance, in John 6:51 Jesus said "I am the living bread which came down from heaven; if any man eats of this bread he shall live forever."

In Christ, the believer finds the source of life. Christ taught that this was true, but there is an even further meaning behind the place and purpose of the Table for Bread. Not only is bread necessary for sustaining life, bread also satisfies our hunger. All of us know what it is like to enjoy a nice meal after we have been hungry for several hours. At a certain point, we begin to long for food and it even can dominate our thoughts the hungrier we get. Likewise, there are many people who long for something that sustains their hunger and that something is God. Christ came so that we could have relationship with God and so that there would be a way for God to sustain our hunger. We were created to have a relationship with God and each person longs for that communion whether they realize it or not. In this way, our hunger will only be satisfied by finding the bread of life, and if we find that bread, we will live forever.

So, the bread was to be set by the priests in the presence of God regularly to remind the people of Israel that the sustaining power they needed was always to be found in the presence of God. Christ came with the message that the "living bread" sent from God was given so that men could live forever. Also, we are to go to God to sustain our hunger. Just like you would go to the pantry to find a snack to eat if you were hungry, God reminded Israel that if they truly wanted to find something that would satisfy their hunger for purpose, meaning, and relationship, they would need to pursue the presence of God. In Him we find our sustaining power.

March 20th – Exodus 26

We began yesterday by looking at the Table of the Bread in the tabernacle, today in Exodus 27 we will concentrate on the veil. As we discussed yesterday, everything in the tabernacle foreshadows the need for the coming of Christ. Today, in the veil we see the reason for the coming of Christ, namely that humanity had to live separate from God prior to His arrival. God was able to communicate and direct the nation of Israel, but He did not personally involve Himself with them. In fact, we see in Exodus multiple times in which Moses is commanded by God not to allow the Israelites to come near Him. This is because the people of Israel were unclean and therefore could not enter His presence.

First, it is important for us to understand what the veil separated. In the tabernacle, there were different levels of rooms. The outer courtyard was a place where everyone could come and spend time; the inner rooms became more and more sacred until the “Most Holy Place” was a place that people could not enter. Only one person, the High Priest could enter once a year in order to offer a sacrifice to God and even then he could not enter unless he had the sacrificial blood with him (Hebrews 9:7). This room was where the very presence of God was found and it was totally cut off from the people. God’s presence was literally unreachable for the nation of Israel and therefore they dwelt apart.

God being totally holy and righteous cannot allow sin in His presence. It simply will not work to bring a sinful being into the presence of holy God. The veil in the tabernacle separated the people from the presence of God and served as a visual reminder that there still existed a chasm between humanity and God. Unlike today, God could not send His Spirit to live in the people and unlike today the people had no way of having a direct and personal relationship with Him.

The good news for us is that this problem was solved when Christ died on our behalf. In fact, in Matthew 27:51 we read that the veil was torn in two immediately after Christ died. Now, this was a miraculous event by itself, but what this tear represented is even more incredible. When that veil tore, God was telling His people that there was no longer anything that needed to separate Him from them. They now could have access to God. The presence of God that once threatened the lives of God’s people could not be felt and experienced by all.

I try to imagine what it must have felt like to walk into the tabernacle and see this giant veil. I wonder what went through the minds of the High Priests who went past that veil once each year. There was undoubtedly great fear and anxiety, there was great preparation and I’m sure there was very little happiness or joy. Today, we don’t have to worry about going behind a veil or wondering what God might do to us if we aren’t totally clean, instead we can come gladly into His presence and know that He accepts us because of the blood of His Son!

March 21st – Exodus 27

God actually gives Moses instructions on how to build the temple from the inside out starting with the most holy places and leading to the outside. In Exodus 27, we come across the bronze altar. The bronze altar was the place where the everyday Israelites would come to make sacrifices to atone for their sins. In Leviticus 1 we see explicit instructions from God on how the people were to make these sacrifices so we won't go into that now but this altar symbolizes an important principle that we must understand about the greatness of what Christ has done for each of us.

You see, in order for the people of Israel to remain in contact with God they had to participate in and offer these sacrifices. There was no other way for them to remain in His good graces. The people were cleansed (momentarily) by the blood of the offering they brought. This is what Hebrews 9:22 teaches us when the author writes "the law requires that nearly everything be cleansed with blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins." It is really that simple, by God's standards without blood being shed for your sins and my sins we cannot be cleansed.

The bronze altar was the place where the nation of Israel came to shed blood of animals for their sins, but Christ came to shed blood for all of our sins. Unfortunately, the blood of animals was not sufficient to cleanse us totally. There had to be a sacrifice that was much more meaningful and significant than that to pay our debt. It's as if the sacrifice of animals was only paying the interest on our loan and the debt remained. The good news is that one person, Jesus Christ, was able to pay a debt we couldn't pay. We couldn't pay for ourselves because we were already unrighteous but Christ could pay for us because He was totally righteous. He didn't have to die but He chose to die in our place and because He paid our debt, we can be free and clear in front of God!

This is why those of you who so desperately desire forgiveness need Christ because He is the one who made forgiveness possible! The Bible promises us that if we confess our sins God will forgive us and purify us of all unrighteousness (1 John 1:9). The only one who can forgive us is the one who has paid for our mistakes. He is able to truly say that your troubles have been paid for and therefore you can be free.

As the people of Israel walked up to the tabernacle, they were immediately reminded by the altar that they had sins that needed to be paid. Every time they made a trip to the tabernacle they confronted this reality. Today, because of Christ we can approach God's throne with confidence and with nothing to offer besides our faith in Jesus because Christ came and died once and for all! What a marvelous Savior and Lord we serve!

March 22nd – Exodus 28

Talent can be a great thing but it can also be quite dangerous. If we aren't careful, we can begin to believe that the reason why we are so good or successful at something is only because of our hard work and achievement. In Exodus 28, God reminds Moses (and hopefully us today) that He is the one who provides people with skills. In verse 3, God tells Moses "you shall speak to all the skillful, whom I have filled with a spirit of skill, that they make Aaron's garments to consecrate him for my priesthood." Did you catch what God said about the people's skill? It was God who gave them their skill and it is God who gives us skills and talents today.

Today, I want to remind you of three realities regarding your skill and talent based on the knowledge that God is the provider of our gifts. First, just because you are more skilled or talented than someone else does not make you better. God in His sovereignty has decided to give each person specific skill sets. It is undeniable that He gives some people more talents than others, but He is the source of all that every person has. Just because He has given you more than someone else does not mean that you are more loved, it simply means that His plan for your life involves the talents He gives you. If God is calling you to be a musician then He will equip you with those talents, if He has called you to teach then He will give you the gift of teaching. Regardless of what He has called you to do, you can rest assured that He has given you what you need to follow His call.

Second, we should do all that we can to work hard to develop our talents. If God has given you a talent for His purposes, He expects you to use it for His purpose. If you are gifted in writing then you should work hard to develop as a writer and use those skills to honor Him. If you are a gifted athlete then you should do the very best you can to develop that athletic skill and use it for His glory. There is absolutely no excuse to not work hard at becoming better at what you do because your talents are given to you for God's glory, the better you are at something the more glory you give to Him.

Third, we should look for opportunities to use our skills and talents as often as possible. I once knew a guy who was a gifted singer but refused to lead worship for years because he was nervous. As soon as he began to lead, he realized that he was quite good at it and began to lead often. It is great that he began to be faithful, but think about all of the opportunities he could have had to be a blessing to others and to be used by God that he denied because he was afraid. Students, God did not give you talents to hide, He gave them to you to use! Look for ways to use your gifts. Look for places in the church you can serve, look for opportunities at school to plug-in. What you will find is often your talents will help develop relationships with others who need to hear about Christ. It could be that your athletic talent was given to you because the advanced athletes in this area need to hear about Christ.

It is so important that you understand that you were given your gifts to use for God's glory and not to exalt yourself. Don't compare your gifts with others, God gave to each one as He desired, but instead look for ways to use what you have. If you are faithful to do this, I believe you will see God move in awesome ways!

March 23rd – Exodus 29

We can work really hard, follow all the rules, and make sure that everything is in place to please God, but it is His presence that is necessary if things are going to be successful. This is the lesson we can take away from Exodus 29.

Exodus 29 is almost entirely instructions for how to consecrate Aaron and his sons as priests. The term consecrate is a big word that means “to declare something holy”. In this case, in order for Aaron to be the priest for Israel he had to go through a process to be declared holy by God. As you have read, that process was quite involved to say the least. There are instructions about what should be worn by Aaron and his sons, instructions about the steps to take to offer sacrifices and even what they can and cannot eat during these times. All of these steps must be followed exactly, but even if the people of Israel did just as they were told, we see in verse 43 and following that God’s presence and power were still needed to make things complete.

In verse 43, God promises that He will “meet with the people of Israel, and it shall be sanctified by my glory.” In verse 44, God states that He will “consecrate the tent of meeting and the altar. Aaron also and his sons I will consecrate to serve me as priests.” So, what we learn from this is that all of these preparations **MUST** be done, but even after the entire process is followed and everyone has done all that God has asked, God must still show up and move if the consecration will be successful.

This principle is still true today. We can work hard, practice hard, put extra time into making sure our singing is excellent quality and the preaching is informed but if God doesn’t show up, our services and worship will not accomplish anything. We need Him to be a part of what we do as the body of Christ. This is why it is so important to do what we can to be obedient to Him and to beg Him to move when we meet.

Really, we should do much more in the way of asking God to speak and to change the hearts of those who don’t know Him. We should remind ourselves constantly that we are not in control of the results and that we are desperate for His presence.

So, today I want to leave you with a question. Does your life reflect the fact that we need God’s power more than we need anything else? Do you spend more time in prayer, begging God to move in the hearts of your friends who don’t know Him than you do trying to convince them with some argument that they should become a believer? Do you spend more time practicing what you are going to say instead of asking God to give you words to speak when the opportunity arises to share your faith? Do you spend more time planning ways to change people instead of asking God to use His power to transform situations? If the answer to any of those questions is yes I would like to challenge you to change that this week. Spend time confessing to God that you need Him and asking Him to move, after all we need Him if anything we do is going to be a success.

March 24th – Exodus 30

The Bronze Basin we read about in Exodus 30 is another example of God's desire that His people be totally clean before they enter His presence. We talked earlier about the importance of the sacrifices the people of Israel made and how the blood of those animals served to temporarily cleanse them from their unrighteous deeds in the presence of God. In Exodus 30, we run across a basin that communicates a similar message.

The basin was put there for the priests (Aaron and his sons) to wash their hands and feet before they neared the altar where sacrifices were to take place. This basin served to be the place where they cleansed themselves of all the dirt and filth that was on their body before they began to serve before the Lord. Now, some of you read this section today and celebrated that God desires for us to wash our hands. Many of you have parents that are constantly harping on the importance of washing your hands and good hygiene, and although it is good practice to do these things the basin was not placed in the tabernacle for the purpose of making sure Aaron and his sons didn't get sick because they were unclean. The basin was placed there to communicate a message, that those who go before the Lord must be totally clean.

It was not physical cleanliness that God was so concerned with (although it is good practice) instead the point of the basin was to communicate to the nation of Israel that they must be clean in order to be in the presence of God. The New Testament has several passages that discuss how Christ has washed our sins away and made us clean (Hebrews 10:22, Titus 3:5, Acts 22:16). These passages show us that the basin that was necessary in the tabernacle is no longer important for those who believe in Christ today.

Some of you, if we were to be honest, feel very dirty. You look at your life (especially the parts that only you know about) and you know that your misdeeds have harmed you and made you filthy. You know that if others saw the real you they would be repulsed and probably would not desire a relationship with you at all. The good news for you is that while Christ knew the kind of sinner you were, He decided to die anyway so that you could be washed. If you have faith in His sacrifice and confess your sins to Him, you can be washed from all of the filth that holds you back today.

Don't allow your dirt and grime to prevent you from entering into the presence of God. Just like the basin was the way Aaron and his sons washed themselves before coming before God, the blood of Christ and the forgiveness it offers is there today to cleanse you from all unrighteousness (1 John 1:9, Psalm 51:2). Will you accept it today? If so, you will never have to worry again about whether or not you are fit to stand before God.

March 25th – Exodus 31

There are many things that God commands His followers to do that don't make sense to the lost world. In Exodus 31 we see an example of one of these commands in God's instruction to the nation of Israel to keep the Sabbath. The Sabbath is a day that is set aside each week as a day of rest. In verse 15 God says "Six days shall work be done, but the seventh day is a Sabbath of solemn rest, holy to the Lord. Whoever does any work on the Sabbath day shall be put to death." The people of Israel were commanded to emulate God who created everything in six days and on the seventh day rested from all of His work.

Now, from a purely logical standpoint this command could have really hurt the nation of Israel. After all, they didn't have many of the conveniences we enjoy today and so work was hard and often much slower. They would eventually have fields to work and homes to maintain. They had livestock to take care of and all of the other responsibilities that go along with working to provide for families. In short, there were many things that had to be done and now God was taking away a valuable work day from them each week. It certainly seems as if God is setting the people of Israel up to fail in relation to others, but there is an element to this equation that cannot be explained by mere human intellect and that element is the very power of God.

You see, when we follow God we can trust and rely fully on His power. God knew what needed to get done and He surely would bless Israel with enough time and resources to take care of whatever responsibilities that had. He understood that work was necessary but He also knew that He could bless Israel in ways that they could not fathom. They only needed to be obedient and He would take care of the rest.

I'm reminded of a modern day story of a major company whose leader chose to honor the Lord with a Sabbath. Many of you eat their chicken and some of you might even work for them, their name is Chickfila. Chickfila's owner Truett Cathy made a decision to close all of his restaurants on Sundays each week. For a restaurant owner, this is really a bold decision. After all one of the busiest days for the food industry is Sunday. There are people leaving church and others off work and out on the town looking to stop in somewhere to eat. Many of Truett's friends discouraged him from taking such a stand, but Mr. Cathy believed that he and his workers should take a day to honor God in worship at a local church and by being obedient to His command to take a Sabbath. Years later, Chickfila is one of the most successful restaurant chains in the world and they still hold fast to the conviction that Sunday is to be a day of worship and rest.

God blesses those who are faithful. Sometimes He calls us to do things that look unwise to the rest of the world, but if we will put our trust in Him and honor His commands we will find that He will bless us in ways that we cannot fathom. Do as He tells you to do, you will not be disappointed with the results!

March 26th – Exodus 32

What do you do when God doesn't answer immediately? Have you ever had to wait on a response from the Lord? In those moments often we are tempted to go our own way, trying to fix the problem ourselves. The problem is that we need God and when we try to do things our own way we will find that we dishonor Him and cause ourselves grief and anguish in the process.

In Exodus 32, Israel is waiting for Moses to come down from the mountain after meeting with God and they get impatient. People are naturally impatient. We are impatient when we are waiting for food, when we are hoping someone will call us back or waiting for a response from an email we sent. We are impatient when we are waiting to see a doctor or when we want someone to see our point of view. Frustration is a part of life and we will have to wait longer than we would like for God to answer some of our prayers, the question is will we remain faithful to Him or will we try to fix the situation on our own?

There is something in all of us that immediately moves to doubt God when we face a situation. This is what the people of Israel did, they began to doubt that they would hear from Moses (God's messenger) and so they decided to take matters into their own hands. What they did is insight for all of us regarding our sinful tendencies. Notice that their immediate reaction was to make something tangible, something they could see and touch. You see, one of the major issues we can have with following God is that we have to follow by faith. Many times we can't see Him and we can't see His movement. We don't know what He is up to and that makes us nervous. The people of Israel were not content to wait on a God they could not mentally grasp so instead they made a god that they could control. They still wanted to worship something (we all do) but they did not want to be limited by God's plan or direction. Instead, they wanted a god they could dictate and move as they pleased.

In short, they wanted the benefits of having a god (something they could worship, sing to, and believe in) without the challenges of growing in their relationship with God (learning patience, having faith to step into difficult circumstances, obeying His authority). This is the motivation behind having an idol and it can be our motivation in seeking other things to worship besides God. Don't allow a time of waiting to influence your faith. God is faithful; in fact if you look back on your life you will see that He has been faithful already many times. All Israel needed to do was to recall the plagues or the parting of the Red Sea to be reminded that their God was faithful and powerful. Instead, they allowed their impatience to cause them to sin.

Finally, notice that God forgives Israel but "Nevertheless, in the day when I visit, I will visit their sin upon them" (v. 34). Even though Israel was forgiven for their idol worship, they paid a steep price for their sin. This is true in our lives today as well, you will be forgiven (if you sincerely repent and ask for forgiveness) but you will have to serve the temporal consequences. Don't be fooled, God will not be mocked and if we decide to try to do things our way we will suffer. Decide to follow God today, decide that waiting on Him is worth it and trust that He will be faithful to you.

March 27th – Exodus 33

What is it that makes us different from the rest of the world? This is a very important question. The question is answered differently by different people unfortunately. Some would say what sets apart a Christian is their morality, others would say it's their beliefs or theology. How do you answer this question? Do you think you are different because you are a "good person" or because you come to church regularly? The truth is that these things are not bad but they are also not the defining difference between a nonbeliever and a believer. The primary difference between a believer and a nonbeliever is the very presence of God in the life and heart of the believer. God's presence and His power are what make Christians different than everyone else.

The same principle was true in the Old Testament, and Moses shows by his conversation with God that he knew it. At this point in Exodus, the people of Israel have angered God by creating a calf to worship. God promised to forgive Israel, but as is usually the case, forgiveness does not equal freedom from the consequences. The consequence for Israel's disobedience in this case is that God intends for Israel to move forward but they will be led by an angel instead of the presence of God Himself.

Most people would look at this situation without much concern. After all, an angel is a powerful being and God is not threatening to work against Israel so everything really should turn out the well. The problem is that Moses understands that the presence of God is what distinguishes the people of God. So in Exodus 33 Moses takes the opportunity to speak with God and tells Him "If your presence will not go with me, do not bring us up from here. For how shall it be known that I have found favor in your sight, I and your people? Is it not in your going with us, so that we are distinct, I and your people, from every other people on the face of the earth?" (v. 15-16). Moses knows that the success and failure of the Israelites is not what sets them apart, what makes them unique is the very presence of God.

Many people in your life are going to be "successful". They may be successful businessmen, musicians, students, or athletes but this is not unique. There are many people who have success by the world's standards. What makes Christians different is the very presence of God in their lives. The fact that when we are successful we know who to give praise to and when we encounter trials and troubles we don't have to be shaken because we know God lives within us is what makes us unique and special. For this reason, we should value the God that moves and breathes inside of us, and like Moses, we should continually remind ourselves and tell Him that His presence is what makes us different and special.

March 18th – Exodus 34

I can remember very vividly the first time I realized that I was standing in the Lord's presence. For me, it was the night I got saved in Gatlinburg, TN. To that point, I had been in many worship services and had seen people changed but I had never experienced any change or any feeling that God was moving. On that evening, however, I knew that God was there and it impacted me deeply. Of course, the impact is still evident today but immediately after that night there was a joy and happiness that I cannot describe. It was as if everything in my life was in proper perspective and my entire countenance was different. People began to notice that my disposition was much happier and they began to enquire about what had taken place. Although I didn't have the words to describe exactly what transpired I could tell them that I had been with God and it changed me.

In Exodus 34 we read about Moses coming down from the mountain after having been with God. Like the rest of us, Moses was deeply affected by this time, so much so that "his face shone because he had been talking with God" (v. 29). Moses was so impacted by his discussion with God that he couldn't even hide it on his face. He glowed and everyone around him realized it. This is what happens when we truly encounter God. We might not physically glow like Moses did but our lives give off a light that is foreign to most people. We come near someone and they immediately sense that we have something that they don't have. People can look at us for just a moment and sense that we have been with Christ.

My desire for each of you is that this type of experience happens in your life. I'm not suggesting that every day of the Christian life looks this way (we see in the life of Moses that he had many challenging days and times when he was not glowing because of God's presence), but I am saying that there can certainly be times when God makes His presence so real to you that you come away deeply affected and glowing. I pray that these times in your life will serve to affirm the goodness of God and that He will use them to teach you about how good and great He is to us.

There is one other observation I would like to make from this story however and that is observing how the other people reacted to Moses once he came down from the mountaintop. Verse 30 tells us that "Aaron and all the people of Israel saw Moses, and behold, the skin of his face shone, and they were afraid to come near him." You see, when we have an experience with God and we are visibly changed, others will notice and many times they will be afraid or uneasy about what they see. We cannot expect others to totally understand what God is doing in our lives. For that reason, we cannot let them be the ones who dictate our relationship with God. It is true that many people will try to tear you down or be uneasy about a personal relationship with Christ and the influence that may have on your life but don't allow them to steal your joy or your commitment.

May you encounter God in a fresh way this week, may He speak to you so clearly that you have no doubts that He is near and may your life be changed because of that encounter. This is my prayer for each of you this week!

March 29th – Exodus 35

Together, the people of God can do incredible things. This is an important truth we find in Exodus 35. In this chapter, Moses requests that the people of Israel combine to collect the materials needed to build the tabernacle. If you think back on the chapters that were devoted to instructions on how to build the tabernacle you will recall that there were many different supplies needed. There was a need for gold and bronze, linens, yarns, wood, oil, and many other items. The task for one person would be almost impossible, but with everyone pitching in the tabernacle was able to be built because the people of God worked together to accomplish the will of God.

Today, the church is comprised of the people of God and like the people of Israel who were tasked with a huge responsibility, we have been given a great command from God. We after all are the body that Christ has established to share the Gospel with the world. We are the ones who are to minister in His name and reflect the love of Christ to those we have contact with. By ourselves, this task is impossible, but with the rest of our body and, most importantly, with God all things are possible.

If we look at the text, we will see that what the people of Israel did was bring to the tabernacle what they possessed. God had blessed some with livestock so they brought goats' hair; God had blessed others with jewelry so they brought the necessary gold. Each person brought what they had and collectively it equaled what was needed for the job. In the church today, God is calling each member to bring what they have. Some of you have a gift that can be used to lead worship, others are gifted in service, and others are gifted teachers or administrators. Whatever your gift might be, that is what God is calling you to give to your church to accomplish the will of God.

As we look at our world today, we realize that the challenge to make disciples of all nations is monumentally massive. We must be careful not to get discouraged and think only of what we as individuals can do to make disciples, rather we should do our part. Serve in areas that you can contribute and collectively we will see God do great things in our midst.

I try to visualize what it must have been like to see the tabernacle once it was complete. I am sure it was an awesome sight. As the nation of Israel looked at that tabernacle, they knew that individually they had contributed just a small portion to the structure. As we look back on our lives, may we be able to say that we contributed a small portion to the overall mission of the church. If we all do what we are called to do, we will see God accomplish some incredible things in our midst.

March 30th – Exodus 36

How generous are you? Are you one of those people who do the bare minimum to get by or do you give as much as you possibly can? You know, God's people should be known by their generosity. After all, God has blessed us with all that we have (none of us earn our belongings) and He has called us to be stewards of what we own, which means we should use our possessions wisely and for His glory. There are few things in life that communicate more to people than someone who is willing to give of their money or possessions to help another person. This desire to help others is not common among man and it truly reflects the selfless nature of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

In Exodus 36 we see an example of the selflessness that should characterize God's people. As you read yesterday, Moses had asked the nation of Israel to donate their belongings for the cause of building the tabernacle. Today, we see that the craftsmen who were tasked with building the tabernacle tell Moses "the people bring much more than enough for doing the work that the Lord has commanded us to do." (v. 5). God's people did not do the minimum, they continued to give and give and give.

Do you possess this trait? When someone asks you for a ride are you willing to go above and beyond to get them where they are going? If a person asks to borrow a possession of yours, do you ask if they could also use something else? When God calls you to give of your time are you only willing to give what is necessary to barely complete the job or do you give what it takes to do your calling well?

If you are a generous person, you reflect the generosity of God but if you are not generous you may want to examine your heart to see if you are being obedient to God's leadership in your life. Truthfully, we will not leave this planet with any of our possessions. Wouldn't it be much better to see God use what you have to further His kingdom than to sit by and hoard all of what you have only to lose it all when you pass away?

I want to challenge you today to have a "kingdom" mindset with your stuff. By kingdom mindset I mean that I want you to begin to think about how your possessions and time might be used to build God's kingdom rather than used to make you more comfortable. Could you use your car to help those who need a ride or your nice and large house to host a Bible study? Maybe that money you are saving for the new Playstation could be given to a ministry opportunity where people are given basic supplies they need for life. Whatever it is, I pray that your life is marked by generosity like the people of Israel displayed as they gave for the tabernacle.

March 31st – Exodus 37

In Exodus 37 we begin to read about the process Bezalel went through to construct different items in the tabernacle. The steps he took and the task he had to construct such an incredible facility is monstrous to say the least. He devoted great time and energy to serving the Lord and in his example we see a pattern we should follow as Christians.

In order to serve God fully, we must be dedicated to giving our best effort to Him. God doesn't want our half-hearted attempts at ministry, He wants our full devotion. Just like Bezalel devoted countless hours to the task of building the tabernacle, we are to dedicate great time to serving God. Some of you believe that serving is something you do when you have time, but we see that Bezalel took this call from God as his full time obligation. He made building the tabernacle his focus and took great pains to make sure he did the work with precision and quality.

In your life do you serve the Lord with your first efforts and give him first priority or do you give him leftovers? Does He come after school and sports practice or before your other commitments? He should be the One that we love the most and dedicate the most time to but too often He gets our leftovers.

We should not be shocked when God calls us to a task that will take great time, we should feel honored not burdened. If we truly believe that the Gospel of Christ is the most important message anyone will hear and that our primary responsibility as followers of God is to be obedient to His call, then we should expect to give God a great commitment as we serve Him. He will not be pleased if we put other things before Him.

Ask God to show you areas in your life that you could eliminate in order to give Him more time. Start evaluating different activities in light of the Gospel and do away with those things that don't please Him or that take away from time you could be using to serve in the area that He has called you. If you don't know where He is calling you, ask Him to make it clear what He would have you do and commit to giving Him your very best effort and the majority of your time.