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THE TABERNACLE, THE TEMPLE AND FCF

Exodus 35 & 36, 1 Chronicles 28 & 29

By

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May 29, 2005
Special Message on FCF's Future

The Tabernacle, the Temple, and FCF
Exodus 35 & 36; 1 Chronicles 28 & 29

I interrupt our series in James to bring you this special message of great importance. We face the most important decision in the almost 80-year history of this church, namely, whether to purchase a 9.4-acre parcel of land in Equestrian Estates for our future growth needs. You should have received a letter regarding this opportunity. This property, which is about 3.8 miles west of the church, contains a 26,000 square foot indoor arena, plus an attached 14,000 square foot indoor stable, which could be converted for ministry use. The property is just north of a future development of 4,000 new homes, and just south of another development of 2,500 homes. Several other new housing developments are nearby.

If you have not seen the property yet, come to the open house this Wednesday, June 1st, from 5-7 p.m. You'll be amazed! You can't look at this opportunity and not be impressed with its potential. It will accommodate our needs as a congregation for the foreseeable future. It's exciting to consider how we might utilize this new location to reach out to the many new families that will soon live in the area. As we grow as a congregation, our global potential through missions will be increased in proportion. Our intent is to retain our main facility here for our college ministry and other ministry uses.

The process of getting from here to there will require several phases stretching over several years. But our immediate need, by July 1st, is for \$380,000 in gifts to close escrow. So we are asking every person who is committed to the ministry of FCF to ask God what He would have you to give and to trust Him to meet this need through His people. Once we cross this first hurdle, we have time to consider how to meet the next hurdles.

As I thought about this project, I thought about two other building or property projects that are in the Bible for our instruction. One had to do with building the tabernacle in the wilderness; the other was the building of the temple. (Read Exod. 35:5, 10, 20-22, 24, 26, 29; 36:2-7; 1 Chron. 28:9-10, 20-21; 29:1, 3, 6, 9, 10-19.)

Both of these projects originated with God, not with any man. But although they came from God, they did not just float down out of heaven in completed form. In both projects, God stirred the hearts of His people to give and work. As they were obedient to the Lord, the projects were completed, God was glorified, and His people had a worship facility that served for hundreds of years. I want to point out five things that both projects shared in common:

1. Both projects could have been opposed by numerous excuses.

Nothing of significance ever gets accomplished for the Lord without strong opposition, setbacks, and difficulties. That is why David twice tells his young son, Solomon, to be strong, courageous, and act (1 Chron. 28:10, 20). Those words anticipate the many difficult obstacles that were ahead.

Think for a moment about some of the problems that could have stopped the work on the tabernacle. These people were refugees, recently displaced from Egypt. They were nomads in the hostile Judean desert with no homes, no jobs, no financial reserves, and a future that was only a promise. To secure that promise, they would have to kill many giants to take over their homeland. This just was not the time for Moses to come up with this grand scheme to build an elaborate, expensive tabernacle!

Many could have grumbled, "Let's wait at least until we're settled into the promised land. That's only prudent! Then we'll have homes and a steady source of income. We're not against this project, but this just isn't the right time! Besides, if you build it out here in the wilderness, while we're on the move, we'll have to move the thing every time we break camp. It's much more sensible to wait until we're settled in the land."

Others could have said, "Have you heard about the design of this thing? Moses is talking about covering all the wood with gold and silver. Isn't that a bit extravagant? We're all living in tents and barely scraping by, eating this manna stuff every day. He wants us to give all of our gold and silver and precious stones. That's my savings for the future. Besides, here we are in this forsaken desert and he's talking about covering the tabernacle with porpoise skins!

Where does he expect us to get porpoise skins in the desert? He needs to scale the project down!"

Others may have said, "Noah worshiped God just fine without a tabernacle. So did Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Why do we need a tabernacle? Why can't we each just worship God in our own tents, with our families? It would save all of this needless expense."

Four hundred years later, David and Solomon no doubt heard their share of excuses: "We've had the tabernacle for 400 years. None less than Moses built it and it went with God's people in the wilderness. They brought it across the Jordan, into the promised land. Think of the rich tradition represented by this tabernacle. If it was good enough for Moses, it's good enough for us! Now, David wants to junk it and build this grandiose temple! He's on an ego trip, trying to build a monument to his own glory. Besides, there are more pressing and practical needs in the kingdom right now. David is just trying to divert attention away from the problems. We should keep the tabernacle and use the money to help the poor!"

I don't mean to imply that there are no valid objections to consider and problems to face in moving ahead on our project. We would not be wise to ignore such difficulties. But we do need to be careful not to get bogged down with needless excuses. Nothing significant ever gets accomplished without overcoming major hurdles. Rather than focusing on all the giants in the land, we need to focus on our God and what He is calling us to do by faith in Him.

2. Both projects were accomplished through the people's willing response to God.

Both texts repeatedly emphasize that the people's hearts were moved to give to these significant projects. Note Exodus 35:5: "Take from among you a contribution to the Lord; whoever is of a willing heart, let him bring it as the Lord's contribution: gold, silver, and bronze." (See also the repetition of, "everyone whose heart stirred him," or similar phrases, in Exodus 35:21-22, 26, 29. In 1 Chron. 29:5, 6, 17, the repeated word is, "willingly.") Also, in both cases they recognized that they were not giving *their* money, but rather they were giving God back *His* money (Exod. 35:21, "the Lord's contribution"; 1 Chron. 29:14, "For all things come from You, and from Your hand we have given You.")

Also, both projects were more than adequately funded. In the case of the tabernacle, Moses had to issue what is no doubt the strangest and rarest command in the Bible: "Please, stop giving!" (Exod. 36:6). They had to restrain the people from giving! Such a problem!

But this teaches us something important: *Giving to the Lord is not a burden; it's a blessing. It's not an obligation; it's an opportunity.* It's like a chance to invest in a stock that is guaranteed to go up, but you've got to invest now or the opportunity is lost. It's an opportunity to invest treasures in heaven, which is a sure thing.

Yet having said this, giving as God calls us to give is always a faith-stretcher. Those people in the wilderness weren't in a good financial situation to give at that time. They easily could have said, "Wait until we're settled in the land, with steady income. Then we'll give to this tabernacle project." But God usually doesn't wait until it's convenient for us to give. If you only give what you're *comfortable* giving, it's really *not* faith giving. Faith giving always is a bit risky. You give to the Lord and have to trust Him to provide for you the things that you were going to use that money for.

Years ago, we had a family in our church in California where the husband, in his late thirties, was dying of cancer. He wanted to finish building a house for his family that would be debt-free before he died. Marla and I were saving for a bigger house of our own, since ours was pretty cramped. But, I felt led of God to give toward this family's need. We talked about it and decided to give \$100 (which was a lot more then than it is now).

I mailed the check. A day or two later, I received a check from some people who only attended the church when they were at their vacation cabin there. A note said that they wanted us to have the money for our housing needs. It was for \$1,000. Why didn't it come first? God wanted us to trust Him by giving first. Then He returned our gift tenfold. I'm quick to add, it doesn't always work that way! Often, you give and you're out the total amount and have to trust God to get by without. But the point is, we should give with willing hearts toward God, who has supplied us with the funds in the first place.

3. Both projects required the involvement of everyone giving and working together.

Look at Exodus 35, starting at verse 20: “all” (35:20); “everyone, ... everyone” (35:21); “all ... both men and women ... every man” (35:22); “Every man” (35:23); “Everyone ... every man” (35:24); “All the skilled women ... all the women” (35:25, 26); “the rulers” (35:27); “all the men and women” (35:29). Also, in 1 Chronicles 28:21, David tells Solomon, “... and every willing man of any skill will be with you in all the work for all kinds of service. The officials also and all the people will be entirely at your command.” In 29:6-8, it mentions the rulers of households, the princes, “the commanders of thousands and hundreds, with the overseers over the king’s work, offered willingly.” In other words, these projects required that *all* of the people got involved in some way. David set the example by giving large amounts of gold and silver (29:3-5), but the people also had to give and to work to make it happen. We saw the same thing in our study of Nehemiah. To get the walls of Jerusalem rebuilt, every family had to work on the project.

In our situation, college students may not have much to give, but you can give something. Some of you may have to get creative, but if you ask the Lord to give you funds to give, He can do it. Some may only be able to give on a monthly basis. Others can do that, plus give larger gifts. But we can only do it together. I might add that projects like this have the potential to create conflicts among members who have different ideas of what should happen and how it should happen. But—please pray and work toward this end—this project can bring us together in a display of unity that brings glory to our Lord.

4. Both projects benefited God’s people for centuries to come.

A bunch of refugees in the wilderness built a tabernacle that served God’s people for about 400 years, until the time of Solomon. I doubt if they even thought about that far into the future, but if they had, it surely would have motivated them to give sacrificially to make it happen. In the case of Solomon’s Temple, it served as the center for Jewish national worship until Nebuchadnezzar’s army destroyed it 400 years later. Note David’s words (1 Chron. 29:14-15, 18):

“But who am I and who are my people that we should be able to offer as generously as this? For all things come from You, and from Your hand we have given You. For we are sojourners before You, and tenants, as all our fathers were; our days on the earth are like a shadow, and there is no hope.... O Lord, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Israel, our fathers, preserve this forever in the intentions of the heart of Your people, and direct their heart to You.”

David was near the end of his life and he was feeling how transitory life is. And yet, he realizes that building this temple for God was a way to leave a legacy for generations to come. Moses felt the same sense of the shortness of life. In Psalm 90, he compares our lives to the grass of the field that withers in a day. He says that if we live 70 or 80 years, “soon it is gone and we fly away” (90:10). This leads him to pray (90:12), “So teach us to number our days, that we may present to You a heart of wisdom.” He ends the psalm (90:17) with the prayer, repeated as if to make sure that God hears, “And confirm for us the work of our hands; yes, confirm the work of our hands.”

I realize that a church building is neither the tabernacle nor the temple. Those were special buildings where God met with His people. Now *we* are the temple of God, who dwells in human hearts, not in the buildings where we gather to worship Him (2 Cor. 6:16). While we could meet in homes if we had to, as the church in China does, I believe that such an arrangement would hinder the sound preaching that can take place in a larger facility.

An adequate facility is a useful tool to facilitate the Lord's work. We are not shifting our focus from the ministry to the building. It will be an adequate, but simple structure that will result in more ministry to more people. That is our goal. And, should the Lord tarry for a hundred years, who can calculate the legacy that we will leave for future generations here in Flagstaff? Any sacrifices that we make will benefit generations yet to be born. Finally,

5. Both projects brought glory to God because they were from Him and for Him.

Note Exodus 35:4, where Moses simply relayed to the people what God had commanded him. This is repeated for emphasis in

35:29 & 36:5. After the entire project was completed, we read (Exod. 39:42, 43), "So the sons of Israel did all the work according to all that the Lord had commanded Moses. And Moses examined all the work and behold, they had done it; just as the Lord had commanded, this they had done." At the very end of Exodus, after the tabernacle was set up, "the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle" (Exod. 40:34). The tabernacle came about because of God's command and it was for His glory.

You see the same thing with the temple. David desired to build a temple for the Lord, but the Lord revealed to him that he would not be the one to build it, but rather his son, Solomon (1 Chron. 17:1-15). The text of 1 Chronicles 28 and 29 repeatedly emphasizes God's choice of David and Solomon to show that they were not the originators of this project; they only did what they did because God had chosen them (28:4, 5, 10; 29:1). In his prayer, David acknowledges (29:14b), "For all things come from You, and from Your hand we have given You." He repeats (29:16), "O Lord our God, all this abundance that we have provided to build You a house for Your holy name, it is from Your hand, and all is Yours." The result was that the people blessed God (29:20) and He got all the glory. So the bottom line is...

Conclusion

We need to work together through generous, sacrificial giving to bring glory to God now and for generations to come.

Let me repeat, even though God chose Solomon to build the temple, and even though David provided a large part of the necessary materials, David twice exhorted his son to *be courageous and act* (1 Chron. 28:10, 20). David knew that there would be *opposition* precisely *because* God had chosen these men and provided what was needed for the project. The enemy is never idle when we set out to do the Lord's work. That's why we have to be strong and courageous and work together through the many obstacles.

In our project, there are many obstacles between now and the time when we may be able to meet there as a church. The first hurdle is seeing \$380,000 come in by July 1st. Then, we need enough to pay off the balance (about \$500,000). We need to raise about \$1 million to refurbish the structures to use them as a church. We

need approval from the city authorities at every step of the way. We need to win over some neighbors who don't want a church there. All of these hurdles will require much prayer and sacrifice on the part of each person at FCF. I cannot guarantee on this end of things that everything will work. Equestrian Estates is *not* the Promised Land! We don't have any ironclad promises to claim for that property!

So, why move ahead? It seems like a lot of risk, a lot of money, and a lot of hassles! Yes, it does! I can give you three words for why we need to move ahead on this: The Great Commission! Our Lord commanded us to make disciples of the nations, and that job is not done yet. There are people in Flagstaff and people who will be moving to Flagstaff that need to hear the gospel, come to faith in Christ, and grow in their faith. As they become faithful and we continue to be faithful, God will continue to send out some to go to those who have never heard with that life-giving message.

Until that task is complete, we can't have the complacent attitude of thinking, "Well, I'm in the lifeboat and I'm warm and dry. Let someone else go to the hassle of rescuing those who are still perishing!" We must inconvenience ourselves. We must sacrifice our time and money, when souls are without Christ. As John Piper has pointedly said (*Mission Frontiers* [Jan.-Feb., 1998], p. 8), "There are only three possibilities in life; to be a goer, a sender, or disobedient!" We don't want to be disobedient, and so we must do all that we can do to spread the good news of Christ and His glory both here and around the globe. I ask you all prayerfully to join us in this great cause.