

Text: Exod. 39:32 – 40:38  
Title: “Finishing the Work”  
Time: 9/15/2024 am  
Place: NBBC

Introduction: On December 1, 2019, I preached to you a message titled, “Why Study Exodus?” as we began our journey through this Old Testament book together. With the help of the Apostle Paul, we learned from 1 Corinthians 10 that we should study Exodus because it is a book about our fathers, because it is a book about our examples, and because it is a book about the way out of slavery.

*Exodus* means *the way out*. It tells us of the new birth of the nation of Israel, which was redeemed from slavery through the shed blood of Passover lambs. We study Exodus because we find Christ here, our Passover Lamb, the only One whose shed blood can deliver us from our slavery to sin.

The previous month the first cases of Covid-19 had appeared in Wuhan China from the lab leak there. As winter turned to spring in 2020, we found ourselves worshipping outside, doing our best to respond to our nation’s pandemic fear. I will never forget the fond memory of teaching through the plagues of Egypt as we did our best to follow government regulations for avoiding the plague of Covid-19.

So for nearly five years now, we have studied Exodus together. We saw first Israel’s need for a deliverer and God’s provision for that need in the call of Moses (chs. 1-4). Next, we saw God’s power to use Moses to deliver His people (chs. 5-18). That deliverance was both resisted and ultimately irresistible. Though at times God’s people pined again for the delicacies of Egypt, God’s deliverance of His people proved also to be irreversible.

These slaves of Egypt were now the redeemed of the Lord. There was no going back, and the way forward meant that their lives had changed forever. The life of the redeemed is a

covenantal life (ch. 19), one that begins with a relationship with God built upon His promise of salvation. It is also a lawful life (chs. 20-24) and a worshipping life (chs. 25-40). The last 16 of the 40 chapters of Exodus were given by God to His people to teach them how to worship Him. Worship was going to be work, but it was good work that deserved to be finished.

Israel does finish the work. Exodus began with the descent of the Israelites into slavery under a Pharaoh that did not know Joseph. It ends with Israel celebrating the beginning of their second year of freedom by finishing the work of the tabernacle, God's dwelling place and the congregation's meeting place for worship (39:32, 40:33).

I have titled this final message, "Finishing the work," with the thought in mind that just like the children of Israel, we too have a worthy work that must be finished. As New Testament believers, we too must know what it takes for us to finish our assignments from the Lord the way Israel finished theirs. The example of the children of Israel in this regard tells us three important truths about what it means to finish God's work.

I. God's work is finished by obeying the Lord commands (39:32, 42-43, 40:16, 19, 21, 23, 25, 27, 29, 32).

Illustration: "Finish the job" is a mantra I heard repeatedly from my dad while growing up as a boy. Dad enjoyed gardening, and I hated it. He enjoyed it, I think, because as a systems analyst, Dad spent many beautiful days couped up in his car commuting to the office or in the office under florescent lights. He enjoyed getting out under the sun and getting his hands dirty. I could play outside most days, so working in the garden seemed more like a prison sentence than a liberation to me.

Only the Lord knows how many times my dad sent me out to weed the garden, after which I managed to extract roughly every third weed, after which dad had to remind me again to "finish the job." Starting a job is easier than finishing a job.

Application: This morning, we took the time to read Exod. 39:32 - 40:38. That was a longer passage than usual for the Scripture reading segment of our order of worship. The passage reviews in detail all that had to be done to finish the work of the tabernacle. If it felt like work for us to read about this work, imagine what it must have been like to have to do all this work. God's work of worship is truly work.

Israel completed their work on the first anniversary of the Exodus from Egypt (40:2, 17). Bible commentators believe that Israel arrived at Sinai after the third month after the Exodus, and that out of the remaining nine months in which this work might have been done, Moses's time on Sinai and other time-drains meant that Israel zealously completed this work in about six months' time.

That is remarkable, but it is not what our text emphasizes about the quality of their work. Rather, our text emphasizes that the work was done according to God's commandments. God not only wants to be worshipped, He wants to be worshipped according to His commandments.

Hudson Taylor, the great missionary founder of the China Inland Mission, left us with this truth: "God's work, done God's way, for God's glory, shall never lack God's supply." Maureen and I have that quotation taped to our bathroom mirror. It reminds us every day how the work of Christian ministry must be done—God's way, for God's glory, with God's supply.

Today, God has not commanded us to build a tabernacle, the way He commanded this generation of Israelites. But just as they could never have finished God's work without obeying God's commands, neither can we.

In our work, God commands us to read the Scripture. We must obey. He commands us to preach the Word. We must obey. He commands us to pray, alone and together, and we must obey. He commands us to give our time and resources to make

disciples, and we must obey. He commands us to love one another, and we must obey. He commands us to gather faithfully as a local church to draw near, hold fast, and consider one another, and we must obey. He commands us to financially support the gospel ministry of our local church, and we must obey. He commands us to baptize and to remember His crucifixion on the cross at the Lord's Table, and we must obey. He commands us to sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs from the heart for His glory and the encouragement of one another, and we must obey.

All of this confronts each of us with an important question this morning. In what way am I trying to finish God's work without obeying His commandments? God's work is finished by obeying His commandments. Obedience is a simple thing; but it is indispensable for finishing God's work.

Israel would have failed had they decided to skip say, the commandment to put cherubim on the top of the mercy seat. When we pick and choose the commandments we will and will not obey in the work of God, we invite His faithful chastening upon our work rather than His empowering blessing. God's work is finished by obeying His commandments.

II. God's work is finished by sanctifying it as holy (40:9-15).

Illustration: My wife and I have different approaches to cooking. I do most of the cooking of the evening meal during the week, and the way I go about that is to open the fridge, figure out what in there is about to go bad next, pull it out, and figure out how to put something together from it that I think might taste good to me.

Maureen has a much different approach. Maureen's primary goal is to cook something that is good for our health, so she researches a healthy recipe, creates a grocery list from that recipe, and follows the recipe to a tee as she cooks supper for us. Every once in a while, I will suggest going off recipe and adding

something I think might work to Maureen's dish, but that is always disallowed. The ingredients for Maureen's cooking are set apart for this specific purpose, and they are not to come into contact with my lesser non-recipe ingredients, or supper may be ruined.

Application: In a mundane way, Maureen's cooking method is an illustration of the meaning of *holiness*. When God sanctifies or hallows something as holy, He sets it apart for a use that is not to be tampered with, changed, added to, or subtracted from. Letting what is holy come into contact with the unholy corrupts what is holy and ruins God's work. God's work is finished by its being sanctified by Him as holy, as set apart for His holy purposes and executed by His holy people.

Our passage teaches us that it is the application of the anointing oil that symbolizes this sanctifying unto holiness. We studied the recipe for this oil outlined in Exod. 30:22-33, and we found there that the oil was a recipe that smelled beautiful. Beauty, like morality and truth, are associated with God's holiness. God wants His work to be holy in a moral way, in a truthful way, and in an aesthetically beautiful way.

We also learned that the anointing oil is a symbol of the Holy Spirit. God's work is sanctified as holy when the Holy Spirit is given His proper place in that work. Each of us as believers is God's anointed holy instrument in this sense - that the Holy Spirit has convicted us, regenerated us, indwells us, is sanctifying us, and empowering us. We will finish God's work only if the Holy Spirit is not quenched or grieved by corruption with the unholy.

Our passage mentions many different building components, furniture pieces, and smaller vessels that were anointed for God's work in the tabernacle. This variety of materials came together to build a single, unified, house of the Lord. God's house still works the same way today.

In each local church, God puts together different pieces that He sets apart as holy so that they will come together in a unified way to be His holy temple. Paul reminded the church of Corinth of this truth, a local church that often needed this reminder: "Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you? If any man defile the temple of God, him shall God destroy; for the temple of God is holy, which temple ye are" (1 Cor. 3:16-17). The local church is a sacred institution set apart for God's holy work by God's Holy Spirit.

As with Israel's tabernacle, so in our day, God's work is finished when it is sanctified as holy.

III. God's work is finished by a display of His glory (40:34-38).

Illustration: Once again, Hudson Taylor understood this truth: "God's work, done God's way, for God's glory shall never lack God's supply." Doing God's work for God's glory is simply recognizing that He gets the credit for all the good that is done.

In August of 1890, Taylor was invited to speak in Melbourne, Australia at a large Presbyterian church. Prior to addressing the audience, Taylor's host introduced him as "our illustrious guest." Taylor came to the podium, where he stood silent for a moment prior to explaining, "Dear Friends, I am the little servant of an illustrious Master."

Application: That is what it is like to do God's work for God's glory. In our passage, the glory of Israel's illustrious Master fills the tabernacle and directs their journeys. The work of the tabernacle finishes with this glory. We need the glory of God to fill our ministry and direct our mission as the work of God.

We do not read here about Moses receiving a medal for the completion of the work. We do not read that the enormously talented Bezaleel received special mention, or that Aaron and his sons looked tremendous in their new priestly robes. No, we

read that God's glory in the work was so very great that there was room for no one else's glory. Finishing God's work is doing God's work for His glory. Our work is not done until Jesus Christ is glorified.

Conclusion: And so, our study of the Book of Exodus comes to an end with this display of God's glory. What wonderful glory is this, that you and I have been allowed by our great God to study this book together? One simple answer to that question is that the glory of the book of Exodus is the glory of Jesus Christ and His love for sinners.

The book begins with Israel's descent into slavery, and every sinner born into this world begins as the slave of sin. Then we read of God's glorious provision of a deliverer in Moses, so very well prepared for the task, and accompanied by his brother Aaron destined to be Israel's high priest. And the author of Hebrews exhorts us, "Wherefore, holy brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling, consider the Apostle and High Priest of our profession, Christ Jesus" (Heb. 3:1).

Deliverance comes to Israel when the Passover lambs are slain, and John the Baptist preached, "Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world," as he pointed out Christ. The Apostle Paul could not be more clear when he said plainly, "for even Christ our Passover is slain for us" (1 Cor. 5:7).

With His people free at last from Egypt, God entered a covenant of love with them at Sinai, and we, "having a great High Priest over the house of God," the Lord Jesus Christ, are told to "draw near in full assurance of faith," and to "hold fast the profession of our faith, for He is faithful who promised" (Heb. 10:22-23). We too have this covenant of love as believers.

At Sinai Israel learned to obey God's law and to reverence Him in worship, and we, coming instead to Zion, must "consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works: not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of

some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as [we] see the day approaching" (Heb. 10:24-25). We must worship Christ "with reverence and godly fear; for our God is a consuming fire (Heb. 12:28-29), the same God Israel worshipped at Sinai.

Exodus begins with inglorious slaves crying out to a God who seemed very absent from their miserable condition in Egypt, and it ends with a free people enjoying the full view of the glory of their great Savior.

In between, they found that the Passover Lamb was their exodus, their way out. Is He yours?

"A man came—I think it was actually in Philadelphia—on one occasion to the great George Whitefield and asked if he might print his sermons. Whitefield gave this reply; he said, 'Well, I have no inherent objection, if you like, but you will never be able to put on the printed page the lightning and the thunder.' That is the distinction—the sermon, and the 'lightning and the thunder.' To Whitefield this was of very great importance, and it should be of very great importance to all preachers, as I hope to show. You can put the sermon into print, but not the lightning and the thunder. That comes into the act of preaching and cannot be conveyed by cold print. Indeed it almost baffles the descriptive powers of the best reporters."

—David Martin Lloyd-Jones,

*Preachers and Preaching*