

Exodus Chapter 40 v 17 - 38

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Preacher: Peter Robinson

[0 : 00] T gonna take you once againove him Good evening. Welcome. Good to be together.

I didn't, this morning, I didn't welcome Linda, Brenda's sister. You're the only visitor amongst us this morning and this evening, so we should have made a special point to welcome you, but lovely to have you with us, and I'm sure you've had a good time with Brenda over this past week.

As we come to worship, let's read a psalm together, Psalm 146, if you'd like to turn there. And this is something we do from time to time, read a psalm.

We'll do what we have done before. I'll read the odd verses. If you, as a congregation, can read aloud the even verses, and then we'll all read together the last verses.

There's only ten verses at how good it is, again, to set our minds upon the Lord our God. Psalm 146. And hopefully, as we read the psalm, you'll also get a waft, as it were, of the flavor of this morning's message and of the passages we looked at in Luke, because, again, we see the same theme.

[1 : 47] That's always the way. When you read the scriptures, you'll always keep bumping into similar things, because it's, of course, one author, isn't it? One God, one author. And similar themes keep a cropping up of God's salvation.

So let's, I'll read verse one, and then you together read verse two to me, and then we'll do that odds and evens and all together. Praise the Lord. Praise the Lord, my soul.

I will praise the Lord all my life. I will sing praise to my God as I live. Do not put your trust in princes, in human beings who cannot save.

When their spirit departs, they return to the ground. On that very day, their plans come to nothing.

Blessed are those whose help is the God of Jacob, whose hope is in the Lord their God.

He is the man to come to heaven and to death, with the sea and heaven in heaven. The Lord is the man to come to heaven and to death. He upholds the cause of the oppressed and gives food to the hungry.

[3 : 02] The Lord sets prisoners free. The Lord despises the blind. The Lord gives up those who are ungodly. The Lord gives up those who are ungodly.

The Lord watches over the foreigner and sustains the fatherless and the widow, but he frustrates the ways of the wicked. All together. The Lord reigns forever.

Your God, O Zion, for all generations. Praise the Lord. And we read there, How blessed are those whose help is the God of Jacob.

We are blessed, and because we are blessed, we praise God. We bless the Lord. And our first song will come on the screen. Bless the Lord, O my soul. I'm going to lead, and then if a few others, those who feel able, please lead us in prayer.

Bring our praise, our thanksgiving. Bring our blessing to God. It is a blessing to him when we worship him, and we're called to bless him. So let's pray together and bring our praises.

[4 : 17] Oh, Lord, we have more than 10,000 reasons to praise you. More than a million reasons. More than 10 million. Lord, it seems if we were to count those blessings, then indeed we just could never count them all, because you have, from the moment of our conception, up until this very time in our lives, poured out upon us good gifts, and we have so much to thank you for.

And Lord, we ask that even now, as we come to worship, to praise you this evening, may our hearts and our lives overflow with thanksgiving and praise.

May we be a blessing to you as we give you grateful thanks, and we bring all of our praise in Jesus' name. Amen. We're going to go to Exodus chapter 40, Exodus chapter 40, the last chapter in the book of Exodus, and page 100.

Page 100, if you have one of the church Bibles. We're going to pick up the reading from verse 17, and read through to the end of this book.

So Exodus chapter 40, beginning at verse 17, reading through to the end. So the tabernacle was set up on the first day of the first month in the second year.

[5 : 51] When Moses set up the tabernacle, he put the bases in place, erected the frames, inserted the crossbars, and set up the posts. Then he spread the tent over the tabernacle, and put the covering over the tent, as the Lord commanded him.

He took the tablets of the covenant law, and placed them in the ark, attached the poles to the ark, and put the atonement cover over it. Then he brought the ark into the tabernacle, and hung the shielding curtain, and shielded the ark of the covenant law, as the Lord commanded him.

Moses placed the table in the tent of meeting on the north side of the tabernacle, outside the curtain, set out the bread on it before the Lord, as the Lord commanded him.

He placed the lampstand in the tent of meeting, opposite the table, on the south side of the tabernacle, set up the lamps before the Lord, as the Lord commanded him.

Moses placed the gold altar in the tent of meeting, in front of the curtain, and burned fragrant incense on it, as the Lord commanded him. Then he put up the curtain, at the entrance to the tabernacle.

[7 : 02] He set the altar of burnt offering, near the entrance to the tabernacle, the tent of meeting, and offered on it burnt offerings, and grain offerings, as the Lord commanded him.

He placed the basin between the tent of meeting, and the altar, and put water in it for washing. And Moses and Aaron and his sons, used it to wash their hands and feet. They washed whenever they entered the tent of meeting, or approached the altar, as the Lord commanded Moses.

Then Moses set up the courtyard, around the tabernacle and altar, put up the curtain at the entrance to the courtyard, and so Moses finished the work. Then the cloud covered the tent of meeting, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle.

Moses could not enter the tent of meeting, because the cloud had settled on it, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle. In all the travels of the Israelites, whenever the cloud lifted from above the tabernacle, they would set out.

But if the cloud did not lift, they did not set out, until the day it lifted. So the cloud of the Lord was over the tabernacle by day, and fire was in the cloud by night, in the sight of all the Israelites, during all their travels.

[8 : 25] We're going to do something slightly different at the end of this evening's sermon. And for that reason, I haven't prayed for the second time. Usually there's intercessory prayer. But the end of our sermon is going to be a prayer time before we sing our final hymn.

And again, as we did at the beginning, an opportunity either for us to bring our prayers silently or vocally. And I hope that from God's word, we will have a sense of leading as to what we pray for. So I hope that you've got Exodus chapter 40 open. We read from there just a few moments ago, and we're going to be looking at what happened here at the close of this tremendous book.

There's two ways, of course, that you can feel at the end of a journey, whether that be a physical journey, whether that be completing a task, or whether that be even finishing a book.

Either you're relieved to at last got it behind you and arrived at your destination because it's been a struggle to get there. Or you can have that sense of satisfaction and joy that the time that you've invested in that book, in that journey, in that task, has been rewarded.

[9 : 42] Well, we are at the end of this book of Exodus. I can't tell you exactly when we started it, except that this is sermon number 51 in my list of sermons on Exodus.

So it's a little while ago, and we're coming to the end. I'll leave you to decide how you feel, whether you're glad it's over or whether it's been worth the journey.

But let's have a brief recap before we come to chapter 40 for those of us who have been on the way and those of us who haven't. At the very start of Exodus, we find that the sons of Jacob, who was the son himself of Isaac, who was the son, of course, of Abraham, Jacob's sons, Joseph included, have all died in Egypt.

Their descendants are becoming numerous, so much so that the Egyptian government are worried that the Hebrews, the descendants of Joseph, might take over the country, and so before they get too numerous, they enslave them and treat them cruelly.

400 years of this cruelty, this oppression, this slavery, passes until in God's time, a deliverer is raised up, as he promised earlier.

[10:58] Moses, that little baby boy, whom God placed, as it were, behind the enemy lines, right in the center of power, Pharaoh's palace.

But it wouldn't be for another 80 years before Moses was ready to fulfill God's promise, to fulfill God's plan, to lead the people out of slavery, out of Egypt, so that they could fulfill their mission of living to the worship and the glory of God.

And now, in Exodus chapter 40, we're told it's one year later. One year from the time that the people left Egypt.

And what a year it's been. They've traveled through the desert. God's provided them manna from heaven, quail to eat, water from the rock. There's been a few setbacks, of course, along the way. People grumbling and moaning and complaining. And, of course, they worship, that idolatrous worship of the golden calf that was set up. But God has given His people His law, those commandments through Moses while he was on the mountain.

[12:16] And more than that, God has given instruction about this tabernacle and about the priests, their robes, the ark, the altars, the sacrifices, so that God and His people could be reconciled.

And that His people might worship Him. And now, everything is finished. Everything is complete within that year.

And so, what God had purposed from before now begins to take place. Now, at last, God's people can worship Him.

But before anything happens, before any worship takes place, before any blood is shed, before any sacrifice for sin, before any priest enters the most holy place, an extraordinary event takes place in verse 34.

Then the cloud covered the tent of meeting, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle. That cloud has been there from the very beginning, from Exodus in chapter 13.

[13:29] As God's people left slavery, God went with them in the form of a cloud by day, a pillar of cloud by day, which was full of fire by night. It protected them.

It became a barrier between the Egyptian soldiers and God's people so that they could escape. It gave them direction in the day and warmth at night.

And now this cloud, this cloud that had descended upon the mountain as Moses had gone up there, this cloud which was the very symbol of the presence of God that had thundered and lightning so the people were terrified, from this cloud that God had spoken to Moses and revealed his will, his words and his covenant.

Now this cloud descended and covered and filled the tabernacle, the tent of meeting. And we're told that this cloud was the glory of the Lord.

So much did it fill the tabernacle, Moses, we're told, couldn't even enter. It wasn't like the fog that we've got outside again this evening and had all week because it was something glorious and tangible and real.

[14:47] The glory of the Lord filled the temple, the tabernacle. What does it mean? What's it all about? Does it have any relevance for us?

Well, of course, we believe it does. This wasn't, this was the first time that God did this particular incredible event, but it wasn't the last. As we go through the Old Testament again and again, we find the glory of God and the cloud of God's glory descending and filling his tabernacle, his temple. So you skip over 300 years or so to the time of Solomon in 1 Kings chapter 8. Over the course of several months, the first temple is built in Jerusalem, the temple that David, Solomon's father, longed to build, but was told, no, your son shall build it.

And when it was completed and finished and the prayer was offered up in 1 Kings 8, we're told, the cloud filled the temple of the Lord and the priests could not perform their service because of the cloud for the glory of the Lord filled his temple.

And then later on, hundreds of years later, we find Ezekiel, that man of crazy visions, amazing insights and pictures. We find that he too is given a vision of the glory of God filling the temple near the end of his ministry.

[16:16] I looked and saw the glory of the Lord filling the temple of the Lord. And then we go right to the end of Scripture, to the book of Revelation.

We find that John, once more, given visions of God, has a vision of heaven. And there in heaven, he sees once more God's glory filling the temple.

In Revelation 15, the temple was filled with smoke from the glory of God and from his power. So what God is doing here at the end of Exodus, at the beginning, in one sense, of the people of God being gathered together for the worship and service of the Lord, is something that's regularly repeated throughout Scripture.

It's the practice of God. It's the work of God. And that has very real significance for us today. But it has meaning. Why did the glory of God descend upon the tabernacle? What did it mean for God's people then? And what does it mean for us?

[17 : 25] Well, first of all, the glory of the Lord coming down and filling the tabernacle was a sign that the work was finished, that the tabernacle was completed, that it was as God intended it to be.

There in verse 33, Moses set up the courtyard around the tabernacle and altar and put up the curtain at the entrance to the courtyard and so Moses finished the work.

It was a mark of completion, a mark of finish. a bit like the ship that's being put out to sea and the bottle smashed against the hull. So in this sense, God's mark was upon the tabernacle.

The tabernacle was to be the very dwelling place of God amongst his people. It was not just some ordinary tent or some other building. It was a visible symbol.

It was God saying to his people, I am in your midst. I am with you. In a simplistic way, we could almost say it was God's home on earth in the very center of the camp of his people.

[18 : 37] Now we know his true home is in heaven, but the amazing God that we worship is the God who has chosen and has determined and has done everything so that he might dwell in close fellowship with us, his people.

He's done everything so that he might be with us. And so in one sense, just as when a house is completed and newly built, so the owners move in. So now this spiritual house in that sense, this tabernacle once finished, now the Lord moves in.

What an amazing comfort it was for God's people to know that God had moved in, that he was with them.

But you see the glorious picture that we have here points us to an amazing and wonderful work of God in the life of every single believer.

we, dear friends, the scripture tells us, are indwelt by the Holy Spirit of God because we, dear friends, are temples, tabernacles of the Holy Spirit.

[19 : 54] Here's Paul in 1 Corinthians 6, 19, your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you've received from God. When we become a Christian, when we come to faith in Christ, God comes and takes ownership of us.

We become his dwelling place on earth. The Holy Spirit is to us the assurance that God is with us. Yes, we do that by faith, but actually in reality it is also to be our experience that we, that God is with us and we belong to him.

Secondly, it meant that God accepted their work. The tabernacle, as you remember, when we looked at some of the articles and the work that had to be done, they were very specially gifted men and women who worked hard to make all the intricate details of the tabernacle, the various poles and the various curtains and the various implements and so on.

And now at last, as that is finished and completed, God is saying by coming down amongst and upon the tabernacle, I accept what you've done.

[21 : 23] I'm pleased with the work that you've done. I mentioned that Ezekiel had an amazing vision. A vision of the glory of the Lord filling the temple.

But actually he had a vision long before that in Ezekiel 10. A much more terrifying vision where he saw the glory of the Lord departing the temple, leaving the temple.

It was a sign of God's disapproval with his people. Disapproval of what was going on in the temple. Disapproval in the lives of those who worshipped in that place.

The glory of the Lord had left the temple. The return of the Lord's glory later on was that symbol of God's acceptance.

And that's the principle by which God operates in the world and operates in this world, in our lives. His presence is the assurance of his acceptance. His absence is the sign of his disapproval and rejection.

[22 : 34] Samson experienced this. You know the story of Samson the judge, how he was led astray, though he didn't need much help, by Delilah. And when she cut off his hair and the Philistine soldiers came in, we're told he leapt up to fight them as he'd done before, but we're told he did not know that the Lord had left him.

Because of his sin, because of his turning from God, the Lord had left him. It was only much later on as he went through terrible experiences that he ultimately calls upon God in prayer, and we're told that the Lord came and helped him and was with him.

God's Holy Spirit comes into the heart and life of a believer at conversion, it's to assure us that God has accepted us, that he's forgiven us, that the work that Jesus has done on our behalf is pleasing to him in our lives.

In Ephesians in chapter 1, verse 13, Paul reminds us, when you believed, you were marked in him, that's Christ, with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit.

That's why it's impossible for anybody to be a Christian without the Holy Spirit of God within. Now that's what makes a great, vast difference between what we might call nominal Christianity and real Christianity or evangelical Christianity or biblical Christianity.

[24 : 08] Many people in our nation, if you speak to them, will say, well I'm a Christian because I was christened as a child or because we were married in a church or because of some other reason that I put C of E or something on my details for the census.

But a person cannot be a Christian according to the Bible's version of a Christian except that God the Holy Spirit indwells us, fills us, revives us, quickens us, transforms us.

my question to you dear friends is this, what sort of Christian are you? A Christian in name but not in experience, a Christian in practice but not in power.

Have you received of the Holy Spirit? That's why Paul says you must be born again. So Jesus says you must be born again. Jesus wouldn't have got it wrong. Born again he says of the Spirit.

So when the Holy Spirit dwells within us dear friends we know that we are accepted by God. Not for what we've done though, for what Christ has done, his work on our behalf.

[25 : 21] Thirdly it meant that the worship of God could begin. From that day onward sacrifices and offerings begin to be made by the priests for the atonement of the sins of God's people.

So if you turn the page over to Leviticus, the very next book you find Moses receives instruction all about the offerings, the sacrifices, the animals that are brought to God.

Why? Because that's exactly what is the next stage. God comes upon the tabernacle and now the way is open. Everything is ready for action.

Everything is ready. See the tabernacle was not meant to be just a monument. It wasn't just meant to be like you see in some of these wonderful great national trust houses of folly that's set up on the hill.

It looks architecturally wonderful and amazing but there's nothing in it. It's a completely empty shell. That wasn't the tabernacle. It wasn't there simply for that purpose.

[26 : 25] It was a place of activity. There was bread there and lights were lit there all 24 hours a day. There were sacrifices. Every day of the week there was activity.

It was a place of hustle and of bustle. So God coming down in one sense is the sign now things really can start happening.

And when the Holy Spirit of God comes upon us dear friends at salvation he comes not only to comfort us and assure us that our sins are forgiven. He comes not only to encourage us that God is with us and will never leave us but he comes especially to activate us to service.

To transform us from being dormant to being lively. We sang that lovely hymn this morning at the end of our service.

Lord I was dumb I could not speak. Lord I was deaf I could not hear. Lord I was blind I could not see. The Spirit of God comes with power to act upon us so that we might obey the very will of God our Savior.

[27 : 32] We're not meant to be monuments either. The temples of the Holy Spirit that Paul talks about we're not meant just to be sort of standing around and looking beautiful.

Some of us are better at that than others it must be said. No we're meant to be active moving serving functioning. We're functioning buildings for his praise and glory to be revealed in this world. Here's what Peter writes in his first letter chapter 2. You also like living stones are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus

Christ.

Hebrews talks about the sacrifices of service and praise and worship. Thank God yes he saved us for heaven but he saved us for earth as well.

Thank God we've got a hope and a future in heaven but thank God we've got a hope and a future in this life today and now we've got a job to do.

[28 : 39] We've got a purpose to fulfill. We're on a mission dear friends in the service and for the glory of God. That's why your spirit lives within you.

That's why we must have his Holy Spirit within us. We just can't do it by ourselves. We can't do it in our own strength. We're inadequate. We're helpless. We know that.

We feel that at times. His spirit fills us for service. Then as well we see that as part of that the coming down of the Holy...

Sorry. The coming down of the cloud and the glory of the Lord upon the tabernacle was the sign that the people of God were to move forward to the promised land.

It talks about the travels of the Israelites. Israelites. Verse 36. In all the travels of the Israelites, whenever the cloud lifted from the tabernacle, they would set out. The cloud did not lift, they would not set out.

[29 : 41] And so they were moving. They were moving towards the fulfillment of the promises. They left Egypt but God hadn't saved them that they might just simply stay in the desert.

He'd saved them that they might inherit and enjoy the promised land that he'd promised to Abraham as part of his covenant. And although God did wonderful things for them in the desert, as we saw before and thought before, he fed them and he gave them water and he blessed them and he gave them his law, they hadn't reached their destination.

They couldn't just sort of say, well that's it. The tabernacle's built. We're in the desert. That's it. We're here now. That's the end of the journey. That's the end of the work.

No. God had commanded them not to build a tabernacle, sorry, not to build a temple but a tent, hadn't he? A tent is something that's portable.

You wrap it up and you take it with you which is exactly what they did with the tabernacle for the next 40 years. They shouldn't have had to do it for 40 years but that's another story. So when we get to the end of Exodus, we get to the not the end but the beginning.

[30 : 55] The beginning of the journey, the beginning of the adventure, the beginning of the travels to the promised land. And dear friends, being a Christian is this, that we are filled with the Holy Spirit.

Why? So that we might settle down and enjoy this life and see this world as all that it is for us. No, so that we might set our eyes heavenward and seek and follow and go and look for that which is yet to come.

The perpetual hope of every believer through every generation has been the same. Heaven. This world we are passing through. We're called pilgrims and sojourners.

We're travelers. We aren't to be setting down all our roots in this world. This world is passing and it's temporary like the tabernacle. We have a home in heaven.

It's wonderful when you read the New Testament, you understand what's going on when Paul and Peter begin to speak about our bodies as tents. 2 Corinthians 5, we know that if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, an eternal house in heaven.

[32 : 08] Wasn't that the promise of Jesus in John 14? I'm going to my father's house where there's many rooms. If I'm going there, I'm going to prepare a place for you that I might come back and take you to where I am.

How many of us, dear friends, live for today? Live for this world? Live for its comforts or its pleasures? How many of us have lost sight of the fact that we are traveling heavenward, homeward?

Are our plans about that? Are we working for the treasure that is in heaven as Jesus tells us to? We are citizens of heaven.

Doesn't matter what Brexit happens or whether we're Europeans or British or English or Scottish or Welsh, we are citizens of heaven and we're journeying to that promised land where we shall dwell with the Lord forever.

It's a lovely passage in Revelation chapter 20 where we're told, now the dwelling place of God is with men. Yes, he dwells within us by his Holy Spirit now, but that's just a foretaste.

[33 : 17] That's just a deposit. That's just a guarantee. That's just a down payment. For when we shall be in heaven, then we shall see him as he truly is. Then we shall dwell with him in perfect, unspoilt harmony.

Dear friends, does the Holy Spirit of God dwell in your life?

Has he come and failed you? There's one final thought and this is particularly what I want us to dwell upon and then to respond to in prayer.

The New Testament speaks not only of the individual as being a temple of the Holy Spirit, but it speaks of the church being the temple or the tabernacle of God.

God. And if we're looking here at something which is the beginning of God's practice throughout the ages, ultimately finding its conclusion in heaven, should we not expect that the glory of God should fill his church as well today in our day and generation?

[34 : 39] Should we not expect to see the cloud of God's glory in this local church? We aren't expected to see a cloud.

We shouldn't see things become misty. If you see a cloud or smoke in this building, it means we're on fire. Let me just give you that warning. But we should expect to see and experience the glory of God coming down upon us collectively as his church.

In what way? Well, remember that when we've been looking at this cloud coming down upon the tabernacle, it was a sign of God's acceptance of the work that people had done.

It was his seal of approval upon their ministry, their service. And therefore, I believe that, dear friends, we should be looking and praying for God's seal of approval upon the ministry and the service of this local church.

Particularly, I believe, his seal of approval and blessing upon the conversion of sinners, upon the saving of the lost, the fruit of our labors, of our seed sowing, of our preparing, of our praying, of lives that live for his glory.

[36 : 10] I believe that's what happens in one sense in the day of Pentecost, when we're told the Holy Spirit of God came down upon the church of that time, those 120 disciples who were gathered in the upper room.

And from that coming down of the Holy Spirit upon the church, we have the whole book of Acts, with men and women converted, not only in their ones and twos, but in their tens, their hundreds, even their thousands.

God was setting his seal upon their faithfulness to his commandment, the commandment of the Lord Jesus Christ given in the Great Commission, which is to preach the good news.

And as they preached the good news, wherever they went, the Spirit of God came upon the church and people were powerfully convicted and mightily saved.

And so my plea to you, dear friends, in this day and age is this, should we not be asking God, Lord, come and own the work of our hands. Come and set your seal of approval upon the things that we do in obedience to your word.

[37 : 22] Come and show yourself to be our God. Come and reveal your glory. Come and save sinners. Right back in Psalm 90, there's a wonderful prayer at the end of that psalm, which says, may the favor of the Lord our God rest on us.

Establish the work of our hands for us. Yes, establish the work of our hands. Because we know it's not in our strength or power or might or wisdom that anybody can ever be converted.

It's not by what we do, but it's through what we do that God reveals his glory. And I would ask you to join with me in praying that the Lord would descend upon us.

He would descend upon the work. That he would descend upon his church. That he would come with glory. So that we, a bit like Moses, would just have to stand back and see him at work.

And so I'm going to ask that we spend just a few moments now in prayer. Don't just let this be the only time we pray in this way. But let this be the prayer of our hearts.

[38 : 45] Let us take this example of God's dealing with his people in the past and ask that he might do it again in our day. To fill his church. And to glorify his name.

I'm going to pray. Anyone else who feels able to pray verbally, please join and pray. Otherwise, we'll just spend time in quiet prayer before we sing our final hymn.

You, O Lord, are the God who comes down. You, O Lord, are the God who descends. You, O Lord, are the God who indwells. You, O Lord, are the God who acts.

You, O Lord, are the God who intercedes and intervenes. And, O Lord, as we've thought for a moment about you coming upon the tabernacle in Exodus.

O Lord, O Lord, are the God who is coming down with power and glory upon your church. Not only in Acts, but, O Lord, as we think through church history, how again and again your spirit has descended and your glory has been revealed.

[39 : 58] So we pray for ourselves in this day and age. We pray for ourselves, O Lord, particularly in this week. We ask, O Lord, that as we seek to be faithful to obeying your commandment, to take the good news, so that you, O Lord, would set your seal of approval upon that work by convicting sinful hearts, by giving sight to the blind, by giving life to the dead, by raising men and women of faith.

And so we pray for the food bank tomorrow and Friday. We pray for the children's work on Tuesday. We pray for the mums and toddlers on Thursday.

We pray for the openings we have in the old folks' home through the week. We pray for our own personal witness in the shops and in the streets and with our friends and relatives and colleagues. We pray, O Lord, that wherever your people are obedient to your word, just as the Lord commanded him, we pray, O Lord, that you would descend and that you would work and that we would stand back and give you glory.

O Lord, hear us as we bring our prayers to you in this way. Amen. O Lord, that you would rend the heavens and come down, that the mountains would tremble before you.

[41 : 40] Hear us as we bring our prayers. Amen. Amen.