

The Tabernacle Finished
Exodus 39:32-43
3/30/2014

It is always satisfying to see something come to completion. Also, it is frustrating to have projects that never come to completion. There are some wonderful examples in culture. Franz Schubert's 8th Symphony was never completed, and so it was called "The Unfinished Symphony." Charles Dickens never completed his last novel, which was entitled "The Mystery of Edwin Drood." As a result, we do not know for sure who committed the murder. We have to go outside the novel in order to know who did it.

In the case of the tabernacle, no such frustration existed. The tabernacle was finished. And this is all the more remarkable, given the circumstances of Israel's sin. If we recall, there had been the equivalent of a stop work order given when the Israelites worshiped the golden calf, and the Lord said that He was not going to go with the Israelites. After Moses' mediation (the Lord having tested him with the whole situation), the Lord promised to go with Israel. This meant that the work on the tabernacle would go on.

Now, although we have already looked at the description of the work both before and after the golden calf incident, it is important for us to understand why Moses repeats everything, and what the nature of that repetition teaches us.

The nature of the repetition is very simple. Before the golden calf, the description took the form of commands. The Lord was telling Moses how the tabernacle and all the furnishings would be made. After the golden calf incident, Moses tells us that everything was done according to the commandment of the Lord. It usually mentions Bezalel and Aholiab as the main architects of the tabernacle. Moses tells us in chapter 35-39 that Bezalel and Aholiab did everything according to the commandments of 25-31. So the pattern is simple: the command comes first, and the fulfillment of that command comes second. They did everything according to God's commandment. It is no accident that the phrase "as the Lord had commanded, so had they done it" occurs both at the beginning and at the end of our passage. That means that it applies to everything in the middle, too. Everything was done according to God's commandment.

But why do we need such repetition? Well, this repetition accomplishes four things. Firstly, it draws attention to the fact that Moses had faithfully transmitted all the commandments of God to God's people. He had left nothing out. He was faithful. It is vitally important for the messenger to get the message correct. Any deviation from the original message would be disastrous.

Secondly, the repetition serves to highlight the contrast between the Spirit-filled work of Bezalel and Aholiab versus the Satan-filled work of Aaron and the people with the golden calf. The golden calf was an attempt to short-circuit God's commands regarding the tabernacle, and everything that went with it. The people wanted to control God, rather than be controlled by God.

Thirdly, the repetition moves us beyond the golden calf. All is truly forgiven. The people, though experiencing some of the consequences of their sin, are still forgiven. The work will move on. God will still be with His people. The people will still be God's people.

Fourthly, the repetition shows us something very important about forgiveness: it never exists for its own sake. It always leads to something else, something bigger, something greater. That something is the dwelling of God with His people. The goal of human existence is not forgiveness, as important as that is. The goal of human existence is to glorify God and to enjoy Him forever. It means the closest possible fellowship and unity between God and His people. Forgiveness is necessary for that fellowship to happen, simply because we are estranged from God due to our sin, and forgiveness needs to happen before fellowship can again resume. But the forgiveness exists to propel us towards a much larger picture and purpose: fellowship with God Himself. This is an especially important message today, given the fact that so many preachers preach only about the forgiveness of sins, and then never speak about anything else. The Christian life is so much more than that. Forgiveness is the beginning of the road, but it's not the whole road, or even most of it. It is the door to the way of life, fellowship and unity with God.

In a very important way, this pattern of commandment, sin, forgiveness, and reiteration of the commandment corresponds very closely to the pattern of all of human history starting from the Garden of Eden. God gave Adam a commandment, which Adam promptly broke. After the breaking of that commandment, when sin entered the world, God provided a way of forgiveness, so that Adam and Eve would no longer need to hide from God. God could restore fellowship through forgiveness, which was in turn dependent on a sacrifice. For Adam and Eve, it was the animal skins that came from sacrificed animals that clothed them. For us, it is the sacrifice of Jesus Christ that provides the way of forgiveness. But the way of forgiveness for us leads to something else. It is why Jesus says, "If you love me, keep my commandments." There is life after forgiveness for us.

There is also law after forgiveness. Remember that after we have been forgiven, the law changes completely. Instead of being the harsh taskmaster that only condemns us, the law is instead our guide and friend. The moment when God pronounces us not guilty according to the law, there remains therefore no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. So this pattern of law, sin, forgiveness, and then new law which has a completely different relationship to us now, is repeated in human history as a whole, and it is repeated in Israel's experience at Mount Sinai and after, and it is repeated in our own lives. The pattern is law, sin, forgiveness, and then new law.

What is important for us to realize is that this is the only way we can delight in the law of the Lord. Remember what the essence of the law is? Love! Love the Lord your God and love your neighbor as yourself. That is the very essence of the law. It is always our sin nature that wants to hate law while loving love. You cannot love God, unless you love the most perfect description of God's character, which is in fact the

law! Law equals love. We should love what God loves. If you love the law of God, it is proof that you are one of God's children. Only God's children can love God's law. Everyone else hates it.

We have seen how the pattern fits in with all of history, and with Israel's history, and with our history. But we are yet done with the echoes that this passage has in the rest of Scripture. There is one last echo at the end of the chapter. Verses 42-43 say this: "According to all that the Lord had commanded Moses, so the children of Israel did all the work. Then Moses looked over all the work, and indeed they had done it; as the Lord had commanded, just so they had done it. And Moses blessed them." Where else have we heard about work being examined, and then pronounced good? Creation, of course. Here, the people of God, represented by Bezalel and Aholiab, but certainly involving many of the people of Israel, were the imitators of their God, in creating these things of beauty, many of which we saw were themselves echoes of creation. Remember once again that art and creativity is one of the most direct imitations of God that we can do.

Here are some applications of these truths for our lives. Firstly, we need to do things just as the Lord has commanded us. We can't just take part of the Bible and say that we'll do that part, and then ignore other parts of the Bible. Everything that God has commanded us, we are to do. We need to avoid the "loophole" mentality. W.C. Fields was on his deathbed, and was found to be reading a Bible. When someone asked him what he was doing, he replied, "I'm looking for loopholes." There aren't any loopholes. Of course, it will be a constant warfare for us to combat our sin nature, which wants loopholes, and wants to make excuses for us as to why we will not obey the Lord our God. But here is the beauty of the text: the Lord blesses obedience. The text says that Moses blessed them, but he was merely conveying to them the blessing of the Lord. I'm sure that we all know the horrible weight of guilty feelings when we do not obey the Lord God. It weighs us down. Obedience never will, even though we might be fooled by Satan into thinking that God's way is the heavy way. It's not. Satan's way is the heavy way! The burden of sin is an intolerably heavy burden! That is why the Lord Jesus says, "Take my yoke upon you and learn from me. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light." Do not be fooled into thinking that sin is the easy and light thing. Ultimately, it is far heavier than obedience. Also remember that sin may be "fun" for a moment, but the guilt and the burden that come upon us afterwards are anything but fun. We need to pray to the Lord that He will help us remember how heavy that burden is before we are tempted to sin, so that we can be turned away from that path of rebellion.

Secondly, and this is closely tied with the first point: when God commands us to do something, we should see that as a great encouragement that forgiveness has indeed happened. Remember that unbelievers cannot obey God, cannot please God, and cannot move towards God. It is only the Christian, saved by grace, forgiven by grace alone, who can please God, obey God, and move towards God. So if God commands us to come to Him, and to do His will, that very command is an encouragement to us, because it means that God has enabled us to do those things

by the Holy Spirit, and it also means that forgiveness has happened, and that we are restored to fellowship with God.

The flip side of this picture is also true. The struggle with sin is itself an encouragement, because the sinner has no such struggle. He gives right in to every temptation that comes along without any fight whatsoever. The Christian may sin, but he fights it. Be encouraged by the very presence of the fight. Read Romans 7, and you will see Paul himself talking about this struggle, and the encouragement we can get from it.

Thirdly, and lastly, while it is always appropriate to remember God's forgiveness of our sins, it is equally important to remember in our lives that forgiveness leads to something greater. Forgiveness is, of course, the message of the gospel. So let us never make the gospel of forgiveness unimportant. That we are forgiven has implications for all of life. But let us equally remember where forgiveness leads, and seek that goal: the glory and enjoyment of God. This has implications for evangelism, which, as John Piper is fond of saying, exists because worship doesn't. Evangelism exists to create worshipers of God, enjoyers of God, fellowshippers with God. Forgiveness exists to erase that distance between God and us that was created by our own sin. This is in large part the message of Exodus, and even of the whole Bible. Put your faith in Jesus Christ, for He is the lamb of God, who takes away your sin, so that you can have the closest possible fellowship with God.