

God's people equipped for God's work

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[0 : 0 0] Well, you know sometimes how you commit to doing something, right, whatever it might be, some project at home or something you've said you'll do, but then only after you start doing it do you realize that it actually turns out to be far more involved or far more work than you originally thought it was.

Have you been in that situation? I recently was when our geezer started packing up and I thought, oh, I could fix the geezer. Of course I can. And I went up there and I realized it was a far more complicated thing than I was capable of doing, far more work than I thought and it required far more expertise than I had.

But I wonder if you ever feel like that as a Christian, that being a Christian turns out that it requires far more work than you originally thought it would.

Maybe when you first became a Christian you thought, okay, well, it means going to church once a Sunday, you know, giving a monthly contribution, maybe going to a growth group during the week. I can do that.

But then once you start the Christian life you realize, oh, oh, okay. It's a little bit more involved than what I thought. And maybe you're at the point where you're thinking, am I able to give?

[1 : 2 5] Am I able to do what God is calling me to do as a Christian? Because it seems that this thing I've committed to, it requires far more than I necessarily have to give.

Is that you? Have you ever felt that as a Christian? Well, I'm sure that's how the Israelites were feeling in the wilderness here where we are in Exodus 31 after receiving 12 chapters of these intricate instructions for how to build God's home on earth.

12 chapters ago in Exodus 19, the Israelites were keen. They had just been rescued out of Egypt. Miraculously, God had called them to his service and they arrived at Mount Sinai and they were at the bottom and they declared to God after he showed them his presence on the top of the mountain.

They declared, you'll remember this from Exodus 19, we will do everything, anything you want us to do. This is so exciting. We get to be God's people on earth. We will do anything you want.

Okay. They were really keen. But then, after 12 chapters of instructions, it becomes apparent that what God wants them to do is a little beyond their capabilities.

[2 : 3 9] Right? We've got to appreciate that all these instructions that God has been giving them over the past 12 chapters, as we've been seeing them, it requires a lot of work and not just a lot of hard work, it requires a lot of skills that they don't have.

But that's also why we have this passage that we're looking at this morning, Exodus 31, where God, after giving all these instructions of what he wants the Israelites to do on earth, to build his place on earth, the tabernacle from which he's going to start achieving his plans for the world, which, you know, what the rest of the Bible is about.

But this is kind of the starting point. And after he's given all these instructions, he also, in this passage, announces a vital promise, which is that, you know, while this is a big task that he's giving his people, he's also going to give them the capabilities they need to do it, to carry it out.

And that, just that, that's the lesson of this passage this morning, that God gives his people work to do, but he also, at the same time, gives them the capabilities they need to do that work.

And that's what God does whenever he calls people to his work on earth, in every age. It's the same principle at play.

[4 : 06] That even though God's work and the life that God is calling us to might seem overwhelming, might seem beyond us to achieve what he expects of us, the truth is, throughout Scripture, God never does that without also giving his people the ability to do what he calls them to do.

And that's what we're going to see this morning. And the reason, the way he does that, the way he gives his people every time the capability to do what they need to do, is through filling people with his own spirit.

And so, as we look at this passage this morning, have your Bible open at Exodus 31, the first thing I want us to notice in this passage, which may have passed us by, in fact, I'm almost guaranteed that this didn't stand out for you the first time we read it, but the first point that I want us to see is the return of the Holy Spirit to earth.

That's actually what's going on here. The Holy Spirit is coming back. So look at what God did to prepare his people for the work that he gave them. Exodus 31, from verse 1.

The Lord spoke to Moses, Look, I have appointed by name Bezalel, son of Uri, son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah. Verse 3. I have filled him with God's Spirit, or the Spirit of God, and with wisdom, with understanding and ability in every craft, to design artistic works in gold, silver, and bronze, to cut gemstones for mounting, and to carve wood for work in every craft.

[5 : 44] And I have also selected a Choliab, son of Ahasemach, the tribe of Dan, to be with him. I put wisdom in the heart of every skilled artisan in order to make all that I have commanded you.

So there it is. God is promising, listen, I've given you a lot to do. I get that. But I've also given you everything you need to do it. And he's selected particular people.

And he's given them all the abilities they need, the practical abilities they need, to do the various jobs that are required in this stage of God's plan, building the tabernacle.

And it required a lot of work, actually. If you look back over the last few chapters, you'll start to realize all the jobs and the professions that needed to be involved in this. Carpentry, metallurgy, engraving, carving, architecture, engineering.

And so he lists and he says, listen, all those things, I'm going to give them to you. I'm going to enable you to be able to do them. But as we read this and we read it slowly, there's clues, especially in the words that are used when God describes how he's going to empower his people.

[6 : 55] There's clues that there's something more going on here than just God giving them abilities. And the main clue is in verse 3 when he says, I have filled Bezalel with the Spirit of God.

That phrase, the Spirit of God, is a very important phrase. It's Hebrews, Ruach Elohim. And the last time we saw that phrase used in the Bible was in Genesis.

It hasn't been used in Exodus up until now. The last time it was used is in Genesis, that phrase, the Spirit of God. And it actually takes us all the way back to the first page of the Bible.

To Genesis chapter 1, the first two verses is where we first see this phrase. Right at the beginning, it's how the Bible starts. I'm just going to read that again, Genesis 1, 1 to 2.

In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. Now the earth was formless and empty. Darkness covered the surface of the watery depths. And the Spirit of God, the Ruach Elohim, was hovering over the surface of the waters.

[8 : 06] That was right at the beginning. So you might remember a few years ago, we did a series of teaching on the Holy Spirit. There's a lot of confusion around who the Holy Spirit is, what the Holy Spirit is.

And so we did a series a few years ago. And if you were here for that, you'll remember that we learned. If you weren't, by the way, you can find that series with all our previous series on our sermon library, on Connect app, or on our website.

So if you've ever been confused about the Holy Spirit and you don't know what the Bible says, great place to start. Listen to that series. But you'll remember that the first thing we learn about creation, the creation of everything we know, is that right at the beginning, the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of God, was there hovering.

Hovering. It's an interesting word to describe. The Spirit of God. The Spirit of God. The Spirit of God. The Spirit of God. Before creation started, was already there hovering over the darkness and the chaos of this pre-creation raw material that God used.

And the Spirit was hovering there, ready, at a moment's notice, to carry out God's creative will. And to bring order into the chaos and light into the darkness and beauty into the disorders.

[9 : 29] That was the Holy Spirit's role in creation. All that is ordered and beautiful and good and life-giving in our world is here because the Holy Spirit was that agent of creation who injected it into the chaos and the darkness that was here before.

That's what the Holy Spirit was doing right at creation. But now we're in Exodus 31 and that same Spirit is now here again in Exodus and God has put His Spirit, the Spirit of God, into this guy Bezalel to do the same thing as he was doing in creation.

To carry out God's creative will and to bring order and beauty out of these raw materials God has given him. That's what the Spirit is here, ready to do once more.

So for the first time since Eden, the Holy Spirit is back. And it's meant to be exciting when we read that phrase. And then as we continue the story in the Old Testament, we see this happen again and again.

God fills certain people with His Holy Spirit. Whenever God has something special to be done on earth that His people can't do by themselves, He Himself, in the form of His Spirit, indwells them.

[11 : 01] And through their hands and their minds, God does what He wants to do on earth. That's what it means when God indwells certain people with His Holy Spirit.

He comes in and He influences their thinking and their abilities. And through them, God actually does His, He continues His creative work on earth.

In ways that they wouldn't be able to do by themselves. So to illustrate, every now and again, my mom needs help with her computer.

And so she calls me. Because what's the point of having children if they can't be your 24-7 IT support? Right? And I'm glad to help. Because, I mean, having been born later than her, I've picked up more.

As my children know more about computers than I do already. I mean, Alex is often teaching me cool tricks in Chrome that I didn't know. Anyway, so my mom calls me. She's got a problem with her computer.

[12 : 08] She can't fix it. So I use this app called TeamViewer. I don't know if you've ever heard it. Where I can take over her screen. On my computer. I can be sitting at home or on my phone. And I can control her computer in Fishwick.

And I can see what's wrong. And I can sort of take over the mouse and click and see and fix what needs to be fixed. And I'm able to do things that she wasn't able to do.

And it's a very cool way of helping her. But, in a way, that's how God works on earth. Through people. When he indwells people in his spirit, he doesn't make them robots.

You know, when I take over my mom's computer. It's still my mom's computer. It's still got her software and everything on it. But it's got a new controller. It's got a new person inspiring what it does.

And commanding it. And it's the same way with God indwelling people with his spirit. They're still themselves. But they have a new mind and a new person commanding them.

[13 : 13] And enabling them to do things they couldn't do before. That's what it is when God indwells someone with his spirit. And that's what's happening here in Exodus.

But, of course, in the Old Testament, that didn't happen very often. So, there were only a few selected people who were indwelled with God's spirit. The prophets and a few kings.

And it was a privilege. When you read that, and you read that God is indwelling someone with his spirit. Then you get excited.

You know something interesting is about to happen. You know God is going to do something through this person. And you see through the prophets and the kings that he indwells by his spirit. Just what he achieves through them.

But there weren't many. But that's also what makes the New Testament so mind-blowing. When we get here to the New Testament and we realize that God's spirit is released like never before.

[14 : 19] Because after the resurrection and the ascension of Jesus to glory, what he does is he, and you read about this whole thing in Acts chapter 2, at Pentecost.

He sends down his spirit. In a way like never before, the spirit of God, the Ruach Elohim, comes down. But not on one or two special selected people.

But on every single one of Jesus' disciples on that day. And they're inspired. They stand up and are able to do things they could never do before.

Before that moment, they were timid. They were scared. They were hiding away. After that moment, with the spirit of God indwells them, they stand up as new men. Bold to do God's work and able to do things they weren't before.

And then Peter gives this amazing sermon. The first major recorded gospel sermon that starts the whole church in Acts chapter 2.

[15 : 21] And I want you to hear how he ends. And the promise that he gives to all who are listening to him. In Acts chapter 2 verse 38.

The climax of his sermon, he says, Repent and be baptized, each of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

That's the great promise that comes at the end of the first gospel sermon to the church. That starts the church. This promise that if you repent and are baptized, you will receive that same spirit that Bezalel received.

To enable him to do God's work on earth. You. That's amazing. If you trace just what it means to receive God's spirit throughout the Bible.

And then you get here to act and realize that all who repent and are baptized can now receive that spirit. You know what that means? It means we can all be Bezalels. We can all be used by God to do his work on earth in a way that we couldn't do before.

[16 : 39] And that is a promise to you. If you repent and are baptized. Whoever you are. No matter what abilities you may or may not have right now.

The promise to you is if you repent, you turn around and follow Jesus and trust in his death on the cross for you. And are baptized into his name. Then you will receive the same spirit of God.

With the privilege and the capabilities to do things for God on earth. That's what it means when you receive God's spirit. And all who are truly saved. Have received God's spirit.

Because that means you are now infused with capabilities you didn't have before. Able to do things for God on earth just like Bezalel was in Exodus 31.

And so if you have not yet received God's spirit. And you'll know if you haven't, by the way. Because you won't be doing anything for God.

[17 : 42] And he won't be doing anything in your life. Okay. If you haven't received God's spirit. Then you need to. You need to. To be saved from the power of sin in the first place.

You need God's spirit. Because the Holy Spirit does in lives today. The same thing he was doing at creation. He overcomes the chaos and the darkness. In individual lives today.

And the chaos and the darkness that comes from sin. And he infuses that with light and life and new creation power. That's what he's doing right now in the lives of people who have received his spirit.

But more than that, he makes them to be the people that God created them to be. And he makes them able to do things for God on earth. That's what happens when you receive God's spirit.

If you haven't yet, you must do what the apostle said at this first sermon. And repent and be baptized. Every one of you. For the forgiveness of your sins.

[18 : 40] And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. And if you have done that. Well then you need to appreciate what's inside you. If you're a Christian.

If you're a believer. If the Holy Spirit has enlightened you to the truth of the gospel. And you've become a true follower of Christ. And you're committed to him. Then you need to actually stop.

And appreciate what you've received inside you. The very force of creation power. That once brought life and beauty.

Into this world of darkness and chaos. And the same spirit that empowered Bezalel. To do far more than he could in his own strength. Is in you now.

Hovering and ready. To. Enable God's creative work through you to the world outside.

[19 : 40] And who can enable you if you let him. To do things that you could not imagine doing before. And that's the second thing I want us to notice this morning from this passage.

Is the spirit's work. In the gifts of God's people. God gives his people gifts. And that is the way he manifests his spirit. In the church today.

But also. Like he did back then. So back to Exodus 31. When Bezalel was filled. With God's.

Holy Spirit. The surprise. Is that. That manifested. Not in some super spiritual gifts.

Bezalel didn't start. Walking around speaking in tongues. Or performing miracles. Like we might expect. The first time. God's spirit is returning. To earth.

[20 : 37] In this man. Bezalel. You would expect. Whoa. There's going to be some crazy spiritual things going on. No. He starts like carving things. Designing things. So the spirit manifests.

In. Very seemingly ordinary ways. In this man. Very practical abilities. Have a look. Verse four to five. To design artistic works.

In gold. Silver. And bronze. To cut gemstones. For mounting. And to carve wood. For work. In every craft. That was the manifestation. Of the spirit. In Bezalel. It was very practical.

Very ordinary looking. But not. Actually. Because he was able to do these things. In a whole new way. And it's not that. That Bezalel wasn't. Already able.

To do these things. We don't actually know. What. What his abilities were. Before this point. But we're not told. That he was. Given abilities. That he didn't have before.

[21 : 38] He may have been. But rather. We're told. That he was filled. With God's spirit. And with. Abilities. In a way. That he wasn't before.

So. God. Whatever abilities. He already possessed. God now. Took those abilities. And he. Infused them. With new power. And new.

Purpose. That's what it means. Often when God. Fills people with his spirit. And gives them spiritual gift. They might not look that different. To what they. What. What this person's abilities.

Were before. But they are infused. With new power. And new purpose. Like. Like when a musician. For example. Is already able to. Play music. And they might play it.

For a career. Or whatever. Clubs. Or. You know. Gigs. Or whatever. But when they're filled. With God's spirit. That. Gift. Then becomes. Enlivened. In a new way. And they're able to then.

[22 : 37] Use. Music. In a new way. For a new purpose. Or. Admin. Gifts. Or financial.

Gifts. Or whatever they might be. They might look very practical. But when they're infused. With God's spirit. They're redirected. To something. Much greater. And they're. Filled. And enabled.

In a way. That they weren't before. To do something. For a new purpose. And that purpose. By the way. When God. Gives people. His spirit.

Today. For a purpose. That purpose. Is the same purpose. For us. As it was. For Bezalel. In the Old Testament. The purpose. That God gives. His spirit. Is always the same.

It's to create. A place on earth. Where God dwells. And to make it. Beautiful. To the outside world. Now. Of course. That won't. In the new covenant.

[23 : 31] Require. Gem cutting. And carving. And working. With gold. But it. It requires. Other kinds of gifts. Because. That place on earth.

Where God dwells. And people approach him. And can know him. Today. Is not the tabernacle. Or the temple. It's the church. That proclaims the gospel. That's the place on earth.

Where God dwells. His people. And when I say the church. I don't mean the building. Much as it's a good idea. To make the building look good. As we're doing. It's the people. That are the church.

That is where God. Dwells. Today. The people. The church. That together. Brings their gifts. All together. And when that happens. That church. Powerfully proclaims.

The gospel of Christ. In the world. But for us. To be that. For the church. To be that. What God has done. Is he's gifted. Every member. Every true member.

[24 : 25] Of his church. He's gifted. With something to do. Look again at. First Corinthians. Chapter. Twelve.

Verse seven. You've heard this verse before. And you will continue to hear it. Again and again. Until everybody is obeying it. One Corinthians.

Twelve. Verse seven. A manifestation. Of the spirit. Is given. To each. Person.

For the common. Good. That's talking about. Not every person in the world. It's talking about. Every true believer. In the church. Everybody.

Who has repented. And been baptized. Has now been given. A manifestation. At least one. Manifestation. Of the spirit. And they're different. For different people. But each person.

[25 : 20] Has a manifestation. Of the spirit. And it's for the common good. It's something they must use. For God's place on earth. The church. Now sometimes.

That's. Getting new abilities. That they didn't have before. Being able to. To preach. Be. You know. Being able to. To.

Speak God's word. Into people's lives. Being able to do practical things. That they couldn't before. Being able to. Speak foreign languages. Which is often called.

The gift of tongues. In the. The New Testament. Often. That's just referring to the. Ability to. Speak foreign languages. And cross boundaries. And do cross cultural ministry. Things like that.

So sometimes. People are given. New abilities. They didn't have before. That's their manifestation. Of the spirit. But sometimes. It's a. It's just a repurposing. Of existing abilities. For a new purpose.

[26 : 17] And with a new. Power. But. Everyone has something. That's what the bible teaches. Every. True Christian. Has some way. Of.

Contributing. Some. Manifestation. Of the spirit. If you are a Christian. If you are truly a Christian. The bible teaches. Clearly. God has given you. His holy spirit.

And he's got something. For you to do. In his church. And I don't say that as a. Oh you better make sure. You're doing this. More.

I'm saying this as a. Wow. You get to do this. It's a privilege. Not a. Burden. It's not. You have to do this. It's you get to do this. You get.

To manifest. God's spirit on earth. Do you think. Bezalel. When he received. God's spirit. Went. I don't have time. Do I really have to. No. He was probably like.

[27 : 11] Wow. This is a. Look what I can do. I want to do this all the time. That's how it should be. For anyone who receives. God's spirit. And if you're a Christian.

You have. God has something for you to do. In his church. Now you might think. I can't. I just. I just can't.

That is kind of. Nine times out of ten. What I hear. When I. Approach people. To get involved in. Aspects of ministry. In particular ways.

They go. Oh. I can't. I'm not able. I don't have the time. Or I don't have. The energy. I'm. I've got so many other responsibilities. Or. Or. Actually.

Often it's. I don't think I'm able to. I don't have the. Gifts. Or the abilities. How do you know. By the way. If you come to me. And say. I don't have the gifts. To do that.

[28 : 05] I'm like. But you've never done it. How do you know. You don't have to try it. Try it. But actually. If you. If you say. I don't have what it takes. I can't do it. You're actually right.

You don't. God is calling you. To service. In his kingdom. Of course you can't. Of course you don't have what it takes.

That's the point. That's why God has given you. His Holy Spirit. To do it. Through you. So it's not a reason. Not to do it. And so get involved.

Just start. Even if you don't know. What you should be doing. The way you find out. What you should be doing. In God's church. Is just to get stuck in.

To get involved. To do something. Then to do something else. And then. Until. And I promise you. I've experienced it. That's how you find. Where you belong. By getting involved.

[29 : 05] Do something. And yes. You might. Feel like you don't have the time. Of course. You feel like you don't have the time. Or the energies. Or the abilities.

Just like the Israelites. Must have been feeling. After they're given this huge task. God gives them to do in the wilderness. And they're like. How are we going to. How are we going to do this? That's.

Of course. How are you going to feel? When you hear. From this pulpit. And other places. And you read the Bible. And you hear what God is calling you to. The first reaction is. I can't. I don't know how.

I don't know what to do. Maybe that's you. Or maybe. Maybe. You are already serving. But you're feeling overwhelmed. With the work you're already doing in church.

And it's not a joy to you anymore. And you're on the verge of burnout. Is that you? And you think. Maybe you need to stop. But have you considered.

[30 : 02] Maybe. You feel that way. Because you're trying to do it. In your own strength. And not in the awesome power. Of the Holy Spirit. That is available to you. Because. The truth of this passage.

That we've seen this morning. Is when God calls people. To do his work on earth. He also. Always. Gives them. Everything they need. To do the work. He calls them to do.

But only. If. Like Bezalel. Only if they are filled. With the Holy Spirit. And here's a little. Important.

Truth. That we need to. Well. We should have already. Picked it up. A few weeks ago. When we read it. For our daily devotions. In Ephesians 5. Verse 18. But the truth is.

You still need to be filled. With the Holy Spirit. That's what the Bible says. In multiple occasions. To Christians. You might have. Been given the Holy Spirit. But you still need to be.

[30 : 57] Filled with the Holy Spirit. On a regular basis. That's why. Ephesians 5. Host 6. carbons correct. In material markets. After Jesus. Is a command.

It's a command. Being filled with the Holy Spirit. decision to put on while we put off the old life. Part of putting on the new life is being filled with the Holy Spirit. It's something we need to do on a regular basis, constantly. And incidentally, it's by being involved with the people of God, by being at church, by getting stuck in, that God fills you with His Spirit. He uses the gifts of the other people around you when you're here doing stuff and involved in the work. He uses the other people and their manifestations of the Spirit to fill you with the Spirit so that you can manifest the Spirit to others. That's how it works. And that's what we need to be doing if we are going to be the church God wants us to be in, be the people God wants us to be in the world out there. Because when we start getting that right, and we start obeying this, and we use the gifts we've been given for the common good, and we are filled with the Spirit, well then, it's then that our church and your life becomes the beautiful place God wants it to be, where He dwells, and from where He is going to achieve His purposes on earth. Let's pray.

Oh Lord, your Holy Spirit is here amongst us, hovering, ready to do your work. And Lord, we pray that you would help us to realize what a great privilege it is to be the place that you dwell by your Spirit, the lives that you indwell to do your work on earth. And we do admit that we feel that we're not up to the task. And so we pray, Lord, that you would use the truth that we've learned this morning to encourage us to know that we, while we can't do it in our own strength, you have given us your Spirit to do your mighty work through us. And so we pray that you would help us to be filled with your Spirit, to be involved in your work, and that you would use us powerfully for your glory and your purposes in Jesus' name. Amen.