

Living Up to Our Potential as God's New People

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[0 : 00] Wonder if you ever feel like your life is not quite living up to its potential. Maybe you had those report cards at school.

Johnny has so-and-so has lots of potential. You know those horrible report cards? It means you're always promising to do something more. You never quite got there. Or maybe you're too busy. You know, you're all grown up now.

And you're too busy trying to get food on the plate. The kids to school. Maybe your grandkids to sports. Or maybe you're living in retirement and struggling to make ends meet.

And find yourself sort of brooding on your past mistakes. Maybe your life is in one of those ruts. And you wonder, have I lived up to my potential? Probably feeling something like the English players are feeling this morning.

Maybe you think, well, what is it? How has my Christianity, how has that helped me? What's it doing for me? How has that changed me? How can we live up to our potentials as Christians?

[1 : 02] How can we live up to our potential as the people of God? As God's church? And so as we come to the end of our journey through Exodus, we're going to see two more things.

Or two things to live up to. That will help us to be the people of God. That God not only calls us to be, but also empowers us to be. And so to live up to our potential as the new people of God, we must learn two big lessons.

We're going to learn two big lessons from our chapter today in Exodus. And that is the need to be beautifully holy and to reflect the glorious presence of God in our lives.

So we're going to look at that first one, the need to be beautifully holy. Now those two themes, holiness and glory, have been working their way through Exodus almost the whole way through.

And our journey through Exodus has been amazing. I mean, it's a story full of drama. It reveals this amazing God with this amazing salvation.

[2 : 10] And God's people have gone from slavery under evil forces to freedom. From being oppressed and afflicted to being blessed and provided for.

From being a slave nation to belonging to the God of the universe. That visits them with fire and thunder and cloud.

And gets him to build this beautiful tabernacle. And blessed him with, they don't even have to buy food. It's there, provided for them along the way. And all this gold and silver and all the stuff they put into this tabernacle.

But the main purpose of all of this saving work by God is to restart his creation project that he began in Eden. There's a bigger picture to just what's happening in Exodus.

It's actually hinted at in our passage. So if you're in Exodus chapter 40, just have a look at verse 1 there. The Lord says to Moses, Set up the tabernacle, the tent of meeting, on the first day of the first month.

[3 : 15] And that commemorates the Passover. It occurs earlier on in Exodus chapter 12. So it's a new beginning. It's a new way of living for God's people.

That's a hint of that. The other place it's used though, those specific words, the first day of the first month, is used way back in Genesis chapter 8. where God restarts this creation project after the flood, where new life can be brought back into the world, and where God has his people become part of that transformation project.

But there's an opposite kind of reaction happening in Exodus that we've seen the entire way.

There's a problem with God's pattern of salvation in the Old Testament, and that's the problem of God's people.

Instead of enjoying their freedom, they complained. Instead of trusting God to provide for them, they blamed him when they didn't get it, when they wanted it. And to top it all off, as they meet with him on the mountain, they fall into idol worship and sexual debauchery.

They just never lived up to their potential in the Old Testament. And the first reason that's highlighted in our passage is this failure of holiness. God requires holiness, but his people never really achieve it in the Old Testament.

[4 : 33] So have a look at from verse 9 to verse 15. As they're setting up this altar, as God is telling them what to do, all the details, place the altar, do this, do that.

From verse 9, it focuses on the holy aspect, the holiness aspect, of this place where God is going to meet with them. Verse 9, take the anointing oil, the special oil, and anoint the tabernacle and everything in it.

Consecrate it, and all its furnishings, and it will be holy. Then anoint the altar of burnt offering, and all its utensils. Consecrate the altar, and it will be most holy.

Anoint the basin, and its stand, and consecrate them, and then Aaron and his, and the priests have to be consecrated. And so we see again, how our text highlights the words of consecrate, and anoint, and holiness.

They all got the same basic meaning, of being separate from normal use, and being dedicated, and devoted, to the God who saved them.

[5 : 40] The whole nation was to be a holy, and set apart people. They've got all these mechanisms to get them there, and none of them actually work.

The main reason is not the problem of the mechanisms, it's the problem of their heart. Holiness never really touches their hearts, and so they're never able to live up to their potential.

The good news for us, is that where the people of God failed in the Old Testament, Jesus achieves for us, as his new people, in the New Testament.

Our Colossians passage helps us understand, how the New Testament has changed holiness, from being a chore, to being something that we should long for, and that we do long for.

What do I mean by holiness being a chore? Do you see all that preparation they had to do? The tabernacle had to be anointed, that's anointing an entire structure. The priests had to be anointed.

[6 : 39] Remember, they had to put on their special clothes, and only they get to enter. The people had to stand behind. It takes a lot of effort, a lot of work, to be holy, in the Old Testament.

Christ does all of that, for us, in the New Testament. I'm just going to read from Colossians 1, Paul writing to the church, and explaining to them how Christ has changed them.

Once, you were alienated from God, and were hostile in your minds, engaging in evil deeds, just like God's people in the Old Testament.

But now, there's this change. But now, He has reconciled you, by Christ's physical body, through death. For what purpose?

What does His death achieve? What does the cross do here? To present you holy, unblemished, and blameless, in His presence.

[7 : 37] And so here, for the first time, God's people are able, to enjoy God's presence, because of what Jesus did, on the cross. But notice, what to be holy here means.

To be without spot, or blemish. To not have anything, in your life, that spoils, your beauty. In other words, holiness makes us, beauty, beautiful.

Some of you, might remember, the last time, you went out on a date. And the last thing you want, is to have an ugly spot. Boop! And you know, they always appear, they don't appear, somewhere where no one, sees them, you know what I'm talking about, a big, fat, juicy, ugly, red, white, and purple, black, poisy.

And, on your nose, like a carbuncle, like a thing that's, feels like a rhino horn. the last thing you want, the last thing you want to have a spot, when you want to go on a date, because you want to look beautiful.

Well, that's what sin is. We think sin makes us beautiful. We think sin makes us acceptable. We like sin. We think, go back all the way to Eden, the knowledge of the tree of good and evil.

[9 : 00] We think it makes, doing sinful things, is nice, and enjoyable, when actually what it does, it makes you ugly, it spoils you.

Holiness, is like this divine, spot remover. We're washed in it, we're anointed, in our baptism.

We receive the promise of the Holy Spirit, we get washed, and we get cleaned on the inside. If you trust in what Christ has done for you, it takes away our ugliness, and lets us shine, with an inner beauty.

So my first question to us is, have you been changed, by Christ? Have you received this anointing from God?

Has he taken away the ugliness of sin in your life? And have it, has, has your, sin things in your life, been replaced with, words, and thoughts, and actions, that make you beautiful, and, attractive to others?

[10:11] The only person, the only thing that can do that in your life, is Jesus. Everything else out there is, like counterfeit beauty products. They're not going to last.

They're not going to make you clean. It's only Christ, it's only Christ, at the cross, through his blood, and as you receive, that anointing that you need, in baptism, and as you come to faith in him, you're made beautiful.

You're made holy. Is your holiness making you more and more beautiful? Is it making you more and more clean? Or is sin, in you, keeping your life ugly?

Have you had any change in your life? One of the things that gets in the way, of us being holy, or realizing that we can be holy, is we don't see ourselves, as holy at all.

We feel as if it's something, we can never be. It's a potential, that we can never reach. But when we come to Christ, there's a decisive, a decisive change that happens. Almost every New Testament letter, is addressed, to the saints, gathered in a certain location.

[11:22] That word saint, comes from the Latin word, sanctified. So that, St. Mark's, meeting here right now, is filled, with, holy-fied, beautified, spotless, unblemished, blameless, and holy, people.

It's something, that's actually happened to you. But in case you want to get carried away, and say, okay, I'm a saint, I've got it all, I've reached my full potential. Each New Testament letter, goes on to say, well guys, you've been made a saint, but you need to, you need to be made more, and more holy, in your life, as you go along.

We need to become, more and more holy, because all the letters, are written to sinners, not just to saints. So holiness, is a process, something that sin makes hard.

The key, to being beautiful, to being spotless, to being clean, is staying connected, to Christ.

Holiness is not a force, in my life, but it comes out, of a relationship, with Christ.

When I see him, for who he is, for what he can do, what he has done. I want to be more, and more like that. And so that brings us, to our next point, that to fulfill our purposes, as the new people of God, we need to reflect, the glorious presence, of Christ, in our lives.

[12:59] By the end of Exodus, Israel had reached, a final, high point, in its relationship, with God. Everything, was, ready. in Exodus, back in Exodus chapter 40, the tabernacle, was set up, exactly as God, had wanted.

If you notice, the first part, of the chapter, it's God telling them, what to do. And then from verse 16, Moses did everything, just as the Lord, had commanded him.

And then he sets up, each and every stage, of the tabernacle, just as the Lord, commanded him.

And that occurs, seven times, throughout that chapter, a significant, number.

The tabernacle, was set up, the people had gathered, and God, finally, arrives. And he does so, in any way, that God can do, in a spectacular way.

Read from verse 34, then the cloud, covered, the tent, of meeting. Actually, I should just take it, from the previous verse.

[14:12] Everything is set up, and there's a significant thing, it says, Moses, Moses, finished, Moses, finished the work. It's a significant, word used there. It's the same word, used of God, when he, finished, his work of creation.

So there's this expectancy, we said at the start, that there's this new creation, event, God is prepared, everything is prepared, for, the Eden project, for the world to be filled, with holy people, to be, to continue.

For God to, for God's people, to experience his presence, and he, he does do that, in our passage. So from verse 34, the cloud, covered the tent, of meeting, and the glory, of the Lord, filled, the tabernacle.

Can you imagine, being Israelite, and watching that? Now we've seen, God's glory, in Exodus. Moses sees it, in that, bush, the burning bush, it's pretty spectacular.

Egypt sees it, in the miracles, it's spectacular, but they don't like it. And then they see God, the Israelites, see God, come down, on Mount Sinai. It's amazing.

[15:33] But all of that is, far away from them. They've never seen God, up close and personal. And here he comes down, in the tabernacle, in this, storm, of fire, and cloud, and glory.

But the story, the story goes on, Moses, could not, enter the tent of meeting, because the cloud, had settled on it, and the glory, of the Lord, filled the tabernacle.

So I wonder, if you can see, the problem, with God's glorious presence, finally arriving, to dwell with his people. He's there, but Moses, can't enter.

Yes, God is going to go, with their people, but as the story goes on, that, presence of God, dwelling with his people, doesn't, last. Centuries later, after, after many, occurrences, of the same thing, that happened at Sinai, Ezekiel records, that the glory of the Lord, eventually left, the temple.

So there's a sense, that God is there, but not fully, as he wanted to be. It's not quite the same, as Eden. His glory is still, just too dangerous, for God's people. It's going to take, someone better, better equipped, better able, than Moses, that can handle, God's glory, and at the same time, bring God's presence, presence to his people, in a way that will, change them, and not, destroy them.

[17:10] In a word, it's going to take, Jesus. I think what I want us to get, is that having Jesus, in your life, is in a way, like having, that glorious presence of God, here in Exodus 40, but on an exponentially, more powerful level.

Let's have a look at, turn with me to Colossians, to Colossians 1, read from verse 27, it says, God has chosen, to make known, among the Gentiles, the glorious riches, of this mystery, it's a mystery, that he's just been, speaking about, but now it tells us, what it is, it's a mystery, that's been kept hidden, in verse 26, that no one really knew, what was going on, but now it's been revealed, what is this mystery, that God has done now, what is this glorious mystery, well it's Christ in you, the hope, of glory, and we could be tempted, to think, that having Jesus, is not, quite the same, as having a fiery, cloudy pillar with us, I mean, we're all Christians here, we're all saints, be cool to whip out, a fiery, cloudy pillar, when we need to, but look, how do Jesus, actually is, back to our start, of our reading, from verse 15, who is it, who is this Jesus, that you've got, with you, that the church, has as their, special possession, it's way better, than a fiery, cloudy pillar, from verse 15, chapter 1, the sun, is the image, of the invisible God, the first born, over all creation, for in him, all things, were created, things in heaven, and on earth, visible, and invisible, whether thrones, or powers, or rulers, or authorities, all things, have been created, through Jesus, and for him, he is before, all things, and in him, all things, hold together, and he's the head, of the body, that's us, the church, he is the beginning, and the first born, from among the dead, so that in everything, he might have, the supremacy, for God, was pleased, to have his fullness, dwell in him, and through him, to reconcile, to himself, all things, whether things, on earth, or things, in heaven, by having, some nasty, nails, knocked, through his, wrists, and to bleed out, on a piece of wood, in a dusty, piece of land, where they're busy, fighting for it, at the moment, but what an incredible, description of Jesus, isn't it glorious, and isn't that, way better, than having a fiery, cloudy, pitter, somewhere down over there, because we've got that, person, in us, that's why Paul says, you've got, this is, he wants to let the Gentiles, know what they've got, he talks about it, as the glorious, riches, in verse 27, the incredible thing, is by having Jesus, in our lives, we have, the living presence, of, or the presence, of the living God, himself, at work in us, here's a question, of us to wrestle with, do you know, this Jesus, Jesus, do you, value, that, size Jesus, in your life, or do you, belittle him, or count him, as of no real value, do you think, of other things, in your life, as having more value, but how could, anything in your life, compared to having, this person, at the center, of what you value, well, we do a pretty good job, of that sometimes, we take this, glorious truth, of Christ, and, Romans 1, Paul says, we exchange it, for wood, and stone, and metal, and the shiny, little bauble things, that we think, are precious, in our lives, relationships, money, job security, can you, imagine, trying to, explain yourself, on judgment day, that you valued, this thing, that I'm standing behind, as more valuable, than the Christ, of the universe, or anything, in your life, anything made of, carbon based, reality, anything, other than Christ, and,

I mean, people are just, going to look at you, like, what were you thinking, it's like, you get, gifted, oh, a Lamborghini, or some cool car, you know what I'm saying, and you, and you've got your old, skidonk, you're like, well, I don't want the Lamborghini, I want my old, skidonk, everyone's like, whoa, whoa, whoa, whoa, what's going on here, you're crazy, but of course, saving Christ, is priceless, now, but just notice, that, there's no words, ready to describe, how, powerful, and big,

and amazing, Jesus is here, I mean, Paul does, the job for us, but, you know, that's the Holy Spirit in him, lifting that up, but this level of, amazing, this power, you want to call it, you've got that in your life, that's going to change you, and I want to try, and bring Jesus holiness, or holiness as a concept, and his glory, and how they work together, in our lives, and I think the thing, that they do, is that they're both radiant, and shiny, and beautiful, aspects of God, that we can, that we would want to, hold on to, and that we would want, reflected in us, and through us, the thing is, we love shiny things, holiness, it's nice to be shiny, and to radiate positive energy, holiness is to be special, to be unholy, is to be ordinary, and of no real value, glory is scintillating, it's to shine like the brightness, of a thousand suns, and to not have glory, is to be dull, and lifeless, and listless, normal, now we don't often, get dressed up anymore, in our daily lives, well we do, every now and then, those who served, in the military, you'll remember, what it's like, to go on to parade, and you have to be shiny, okay, the one thing, about being in the military, you've got to have, a lot of bling, and you've got to, shine up your shoes, you've got to shine up, your buttons, you look smart, and you do look smart, your buckles, everything, everything, trimmed, and neat, and crisp, and when you come, on to parade, you do, look pretty cool, you look glorious, and you're rotating, this power, and strength, and ability, just from some, shiny little buttons, another glimpse, of glorious ladies, when you get dressed up, to go on a fancy date, ooh, you know that girls hair, can shine, you know when they comb it, what they do, well, who knows what they do with it, they do their secret things, hey, it comes out shiny, and they put the makeup on, and they're shimmering, it's amazing, their skin is glowing, they're bedecked with jewels, they're shiny, they're transformed, into this vision of beauty, and that's what it feels like, when you have this, well, it's nice to feel like that, isn't it, to feel like you're radiating, with beauty, and strength, and confidence, now, shiny buttons, can do that to you, and combing your hair, can do that to you, think how, infinitely, more glorious, and shiny, and scintillating, you're going to be, if you've got the Christ, of the universe, taking up residence, in your life, and changing how you live, it doesn't, even compare, and you've got that, you're sitting here, you've got that,

we should all have, we should be so shiny, we are actually shiny, God sees us as shiny, we should have, you know, our future is so bright, we've got to wear shades, our Christians are so bright, we've got to wear, we've got to wear shades, infinitely more glorious, and beautiful, because of what the blood, of Christ does for us, we are dressed up, in his holiness, and righteousness, we're cleaned, by the best sacrifice, we're clothed, in the most glorious, of holiness, and he fills us, with his essence, and his spirit, so that we're bursting, with radiant, glory, to see what that looks like, in practice, sounds amazing, okay fine, I don't feel glorious, I don't feel particularly shiny, sitting right here, right now, well we've actually got, a few examples of that, in our church, people, who've lived a long life, with Christ, and made a practice, of having more of Jesus, in their lives, we've got shiny sense,

[27 : 34] I'm not going to embarrass them, and tell you who they are, but we've got people, who've lived a long life, with Christ, and they're beautiful, to us, and beautiful, to others, what makes them stand out, their kind words, their wise counsel, their good works, not complaining, when they can, trying their best, to do Christian things, sure, they've got their issues, they're not glorious, all over, they'll say, that they, don't feel like saints, they're just doing, what God wants them to do, we've all got areas, of our life, that's not bright, and shiny, but my goodness, there's a power, and a strength, and a glory, that comes from being holy, and having this glory, in your life, a foundation, of being holy, and having boundaries, and doing the right things, and when you know, there's someone, who does the right thing, that's to your glory, people appreciate you, you become more useful, and more wanted, what about Monday,

I've got to go to work, on Monday, how do I take this, shiny glory, with me on Monday, kind of looks, a little bit ordinary, but it's not, because it's powered, by this, nuclear reactor, of a human being, Christ, I've got a friend, he's known, for doing the right thing, at work, he doesn't cut corners, doesn't do any dodgy deals, he's solid, he's dependable, he's reliable, he's truthful, he works hard, but he's truthful, in a non-judgmental way, he's truthful, in a helpful way, he's honest, and because of that, because of this, holiness thing, that's happening, inside of him, he's a Christian, he's honored, for that, in his workplace, by those who work, under him, they appreciate him, being their boss, and his bosses, appreciate him, appreciate the work, that he does, because he does, things well, similar to what, we saw last week, his work, is weighty, the stuff he does, is good, it has meaning, it gives value, and people find it, valuable, and so, to fulfill our potential, as God's people, we've got to be,

beautifully holy, we are beautifully holy, just, we need to work on that beauty, to think of sin, as things that make you ugly, and Christ, as something, that makes you, beautiful, acceptable, fit for purpose, we've got to radiate, his glory, and his goodness, not in a way, that rejects, or chases away, but in a way, that people see, as, as, glinty, as shiny, as desirable, who've attracted, to how we live, people who are clean, and clear, and wholesome, and healthy, then you'll be like a, shine bright like a diamond, to quote a popular singer, and you'll draw people to Christ, draw them to a better way of life, just by how you live, and if you do that, it doesn't mean, that life is going to go, and that life is going to go, easily, without any issues, just means, it's going to put those issues, in perspective,

Paul himself, says in verse 24, in our passage, that he can rejoice, in what was suffered, he rejoices in suffering, he rejoices in suffering, because it doesn't derail him, yeah, it stings, but it doesn't derail him, and he knows, by doing what Christ, has given him to do, there's glory, at the end of what he does, I do it for the sake of the church, so that people can know, about this mystery, that they can know, about this Jesus, and become attracted to him, and when you live like that, beautifully holy, radiating God's glory, you'll be honored, tenfold, nine times out of ten, in this life, with a little bit of, suffering along the way, that's not really worth counting, compared to the glory, that's coming, and you'll be, infinitely glorified, at the resurrection, when our holiness, when our beauty, will be complete, and our glory, will just shine out, and never stop, well, let's pray, Lord Jesus, you are so glorious, you are so amazing, you've made the entire universe, and you hold it in the palm of your hand, like it's nothing, and we are so unworthy, to be called your people, we do feel like failures, but, your word tells us, that we're not, that you've made us holy, that we can be more holy, and that we can, we've got you, as our glorious king, as our presence, as our guide, through life, help us Lord, to want these things, and to live up to them, Amen.

... Thank you.