

Service From The Heart

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[0 : 0 0] So our church, St. Mark's, is considered to be what's called a conservative church. We're not into, you may have noticed, we're not into ecstatic, spontaneous, speaking in tongues, and people standing up and having spontaneous prophecies and things like that, like you might see at more kind of Pentecostal or charismatic churches.

We have more ordered services. We focus more on what the Bible has already said, what the Bible is saying. You know, the preacher doesn't walk around and get really passionate and tell you about all the things that are on his heart in that moment.

Rather, he focuses on what God says. We have set prayers, thought through beforehand. And there's a good reason we do things we do the way we do them.

But it does come across to many people who are maybe used to more Pentecostal and charismatic churches, that when they come to a more conservative church like this, it comes across that we're not perhaps passionate about what we're doing.

That our heart is not in it. And that we're, we often seem to just be going through the motions. I wonder if you maybe think that or feel that.

[1 : 2 3] But I was thinking about that, that perception of conservative churches, and it raises the question, well, how do we know that's not true?

How do we know that we're not just going through the motions when we come here and we do what we do? How do we know, how do you know that your heart is really in what you're doing when you come to church?

Because it's, I think it's easier in a more conservative, structured, ordered church, it's easier to just come to church and not be ready, and not, not, a heart not be in the right place, and us just go through the motions, have some coffee, and then go home.

Right? It's easier for us to do that in this kind of church. So how do we know that's, that's not the case? How do we know that our hearts are really in what we're doing? And that's really why the closing chapters of Exodus are chapters that I've found so helpful as I've read through them this last week.

Chapter 35 to 39. Because what they do, if you read them carefully, is they give us a picture of what it looks like when God's people serve Him with all their heart.

[2 : 3 8] Which is what the Israelites are doing here in the story. This moment in history when they rallied together to build the tabernacle that God had commanded.

And this, of course, is a relevant topic for us. It's a relevant topic today, especially as we welcome new members to St. Mark's who want to get stuck in. But also, I think it helps every single one of us as Christians reflect.

As we read it, as we look at what the Israelites did and how they did it, I think it's going to give us an opportunity to reflect whether our own hearts are really in what we're doing here at church.

Whether we are passionate about what God has given us to do. And if that is not the case, how we can remedy that. So that's what I hope to see this morning.

We're going to just take some time this morning from these chapters to look at what heartfelt service to God really looks like. What does it look like when your heart is in what you're doing as a Christian?

[3 : 47] And as we look through, we see that there are at least five features that I want to draw to your attention in my sermon this morning. Five features of heartfelt service.

So let's look at them. Firstly, heartfelt service is voluntary. Service from the heart is voluntary. Nobody has to force you to do it.

Look in your Bible at chapter 35, verse 5 to 6, for example. Take up an offering among you for the Lord. Let everyone whose heart is willing bring this as the Lord's offering.

Gold, silver, bronze, blue, purple, scarlet, yarn, fine linen, goat hair, etc., etc. Look at verse, go down to verse 21. One, notice what's highlighted here.

Everyone whose heart was moved and whose spirit prompted him came and brought an offering to the Lord for the work on the tent of meeting for all its services for the holy garments.

[4 : 51] Both men and women came. All who had willing hearts brought brooches, earrings, rings, necklaces, and all kind of gold jewelry. Everyone presented a presentation offering of gold to the Lord.

And then down to verse 26. And all the women whose hearts were moved spun the goat hair by virtue of their skill.

So you see what's being emphasized here? When it's describing what the people brought, what of their skills and their resources they brought, it's not just describing that they brought it, but it's describing that they did it voluntarily.

That all this giving and the service was done by people who wanted to do it. Because they realized that being involved in God's work on earth was a privilege.

They didn't want to miss out on it. That's why Moses didn't have to force anyone to do this or to give. It's because of where their heart was. They did it voluntarily.

[5 : 55] And notice also the various different ways that people could be involved. People weren't involved in the same ways. They brought different skills, different resources they had. You know, the leaders had onyx stones and stuff that the others didn't have.

The women were able to spin and sew and things that other people couldn't do. They all brought different skills and materials. And everybody had a role to play in making this tabernacle.

And this is one of the beautiful things about how God designed the tabernacle. He didn't only design it to look great and beautiful, to represent His presence in this overlap of heaven and earth.

He also designed it in such a way that everybody has something to give towards it. God could have actually just made the tabernacle Himself, miraculously.

I mean, He made everything else. He made the whole world. He could have just made the tabernacle, but He didn't. He specifically decided that He wanted to do something on earth that gave every single one of His people an opportunity to be involved, a chance to be involved in His work.

[7 : 02] He wanted His people to do something involved in His work. That's why He set it up the way He did. And do you know it's the same today? The work that God does through His church on earth, He wants each of us to have an opportunity to play a role in that work.

And He set it up in such a way, He set up the church in such a way that everybody has something to offer, and that the church won't work unless everybody is bringing their unique contribution and offering and skills and resources and throwing it in together.

And everyone has something to give. God has set it up that way. God has set it up that the church only works, just like the tabernacle only worked, when everybody came to the party and every single person has something unique to give.

You have something unique to give if you are a Christian with God's Spirit in you. You have something to give to this church. Not just your resources, but also your particular manifestation of God's Spirit.

But no one is going to force you to do that. You have to decide voluntarily to be involved and to give of what you have.

[8 : 19] As we heard in 2 Corinthians 9, God loves a cheerful giver. God does not want people to feel forced to give. He loves a cheerful giver.

He loves it when people realize what a privilege it is to be involved in His work and that they have something to offer and then they voluntarily give that. Service from the heart is voluntary.

Second, service from the heart is generous. Look at chapter 36, verse 3 to 7.

Chapter 36, verse 3 to 7. This is quite striking. They took from Moses' presence all the contributions that the Israelites had brought for the task of making the sanctuary.

Meanwhile, the people continued to bring freewill offerings morning after morning. Then all the artisans who were doing all the work for the sanctuary came one by one from the work they were doing and said to Moses, The people are bringing more than is needed for the construction of the work the Lord commanded to be done.

[9 : 28] After Moses gave an order, they sent a proclamation through the camp. Let no man or woman make anything else as an offering for the sanctuary. So the people stopped. The materials were sufficient for them to do all the work.

There was more than enough. Do you see what happened here? The artisans had to come to Moses and say, They're bringing too much. Please stop them. I wish we had that problem at this church.

You see, service from the heart gives over and above what is necessary to give. No one was asking.

No one came to Moses and asked, Okay, well, what's the minimum I have to give? What can I get away with? You know, and Moses didn't have to kind of draw it out of them.

He didn't go and say, Well, you know, the minimum, it starts at 10 shekels, but there's also a 20 shekel option. And, well, if you want premium membership, well, then there's the 50 shekel option, and you get a special access to the holy place once a week.

[10 : 26] He didn't have to have any convincing ways of selling it to them, and there was no minimum sort of entry level. They gave far more than was needed.

There was no minimum requirement. On the contrary, there was a maximum. They had to stop giving. You know, come to think of it, no one has ever in my entire ministry career come to me and said, What's the maximum I can give to the church?

Or, is there a maximum amount that I can be involved? Nobody's ever asked me that. I have been asked, What is the minimum? What is the minimum that I have to do if I'm a church member?

That's what I've been asked. But if you have to ask that question, well, then it shows that your heart's really not in this. Because heartfelt service gives over and above what is needed.

It doesn't give the minimum. Thirdly, service from the heart is sacrificial. Service from the heart is sacrificial. There's a wonderful little detail in chapter 38.

[11 : 37] We didn't read it earlier because we don't have time to read through five chapters. But I want you to turn there and I want you to look at this wonderful little detail that is mentioned in the making of the tabernacle. Chapter 38, verse 8.

He made the bronze basin and its stand from the bronze mirrors of the woman who served at the entrance to the tent of meeting.

Okay, so what's going on? They needed more bronze. For this giant basin, you'll remember there was this basin in the courtyard of the tabernacle that held the water for ceremonial washing of the priests and things.

And this basin was made out of pure bronze. And they needed more bronze when they were building it. And so there were a bunch of women who worked in that area of the courtyard of the tabernacle.

And these women realized that they needed more bronze. Now they could have gone, okay, they need more bronze. We better go tell people. We better go fundraise.

[12 : 47] You know, let's start a GoFundMe campaign. Let's put it on Facebook. Let's get it out there that they need more bronze. But they didn't do that. Instead of going out and telling the people what was needed, they first went into their own tents and saw what they had to give.

Before asking others, they considered what they could give first. And they found these bronze mirrors.

Now, it's worth knowing that mirrors were very rare in the ancient world. You know, the privilege of being able to look at yourself wasn't a privilege that everyone had in the ancient world.

There's not a lot of shiny stuff. But the Egyptians had made a way to really buff up bronze to make mirrors that you could see your reflection. And it was a very luxury item that the upper class of Egyptian society women had.

And you can imagine, you know, these women, these Hebrew women, these Israelites were slaves to the Egyptians. For years and years and years, they would have coveted these bronze mirrors that their mistresses would have used.

[14 : 01] And now, since leaving and plundering the Egyptians, they had them in their own possession. They finally had these luxury mirrors for themselves.

But that, when they went into their tent, as the tabernacle was being built, that's what they saw. We have bronze. We can give. Yes, it would mean giving up a luxury that we've coveted for years and now we finally have.

But that's what they decided to do. Rather than clinging to their luxuries and caring about how beautiful they were, they instead wanted people to see how beautiful God is.

Isn't that touching? Instead of clinging to their luxuries and caring about how beautiful they were, they rather wanted people to see how beautiful God is.

And that's why they gave up their bronze mirrors. It reminds me actually of a verse that is this coming Friday's daily devotion. I hope you're keeping up with daily devotions. It's so wholesome.

[15 : 01] If you're not, you must. It's so good for you. It's so good for you. Daily reading in God's Word. But this daily devotion coming up this Friday in our church readings is 1 Peter 3.3.

I just want you to see what it says. To Christian women, it says this, 1 Peter 3.3. Don't let your beauty consist of outward things like elaborate hairstyles and wearing gold jewelry, but rather what is inside the heart.

That's true beauty. True beauty is a heart devoted to God that is willing to give up for Him what you could otherwise enjoy for yourself.

That is true beauty. And when you do that, when you sacrifice, now it's not just the woman I'm talking to, everyone, when you sacrifice time and things that you could use for yourself and resources, and you sacrifice money that you could otherwise enjoy for your own luxuries, for God and for other people, that is beautiful to God.

God loves that. He loves to see that it is beauty to Him. You know, it's why when, you know, remember that woman in the Gospels who poured that expensive perfume on Jesus to anoint Him for His burial before He died?

[16 : 24] And the disciples were all upset because it could have been sold and given to the poor. It could have been used. Actually, the one who was complaining was Judas, and he was thinking it could have been sold and I could have taken a cut myself.

But, you know what Jesus said about that? He said, stop complaining. She has done a beautiful thing for me. Jesus saw that as beautiful.

It's beautiful to God when His people sacrifice extravagantly to make Him beautiful. So that's the third aspect of service from the heart.

It's sacrificial. Fourth, service from the heart is excellent. Service from the heart is excellent.

Look at chapter 36 of Exodus, verse 2. 36, verse 2.

[17 : 30] So Moses summoned Bezalel, Aholiab, and every skilled person in whose heart the Lord had placed wisdom, all whose hearts moved them to come to the work and to do it.

What work were these skilled people meant to do? Well, go back to the end of chapter 35, verse 32 to 33. This was an example of the work that they were called to do.

To design artistic works in gold, silver, and bronze. To cut gemstones for mounting. To carve wood for work in every kind of artistic craft.

Verse 35, He has filled them with skill to do all the work of a gem cutter, a designer, an embroiderer in blue, purple, scarlet yarn, and fine linen, and a weaver.

They can do every kind of craft and design artistic designs. So that is the kind of skill level that was put towards God's work.

[18 : 28] This is university level, career level stuff. God's people don't only study to get good at things to make money. They get studied to get good at things to serve God.

And these people, now God gave them skill, but they also developed the skill that God had given them. And there were actual skills that needed practice and training in years and years and years of ability.

Now at the end of this whole thing, so we read, I mean if you page forward in your Bibles, you can read about them making all this stuff. And it's very, very similar to the plans in the chapters before that we read.

So we're not going to go into all of that. But I want you to see what happened at the end. And Moses did some quality control. And he checked it out.

He inspected it. And you read about this inspection at the end of chapter 39. From verse 32. Just have a look in your Bibles. 39 verse 32.

[19 : 28] Onwards. That whole last section of chapter 39 is the inspection. They're all lining up. They're presenting Moses with all the stuff they did. And they're just going, I hope he likes it.

Okay, so, 39 from verse 32. So all the work for the tabernacle, the tent of the meeting was finished. The Israelites did everything just that the Lord has commanded Moses.

They brought the tabernacle to Moses. The tent with all its finishings. The clasps. The supports. The crossbars. The pillars and the bases. You see, even the little things. They're bringing to Moses and saying, check Moses.

Look at this clasp I made. What do you think? Because they put so much effort and energy into every little detail. And so it goes on. The covering.

The ramskins. The embroidered things. The curtains for the screen. The ark of the testimony. Etc. Etc. Etc. Look at the end from verse 42 to 43. The Israelites had done all the work according to everything the Lord had commanded Moses.

[20 : 28] Moses inspected all the work they had accomplished. They had done just as the Lord commanded. Then Moses blessed them. It passed master.

He was happy. It was good quality. Every single detail. Every little clasp. Every little curtain. Every little sewn hem. Everything was done excellently.

And Moses saw this. And he saw that it was good. In fact, verse 42 in the Hebrew is the same wording used of God in Genesis 1 when he saw creation.

And he saw that it was good. And he blessed it. This making of the tabernacle is deliberately being compared with God.

God's creation of the world. And it was done to the same standard. And God didn't do a half job at creation, did he?

[21 : 33] He didn't cut corners. God didn't cut corners when he made the world and when he made us. I mean, imagine he did. Imagine for a second. He cut corners when designing, say, your ear.

The ear, by the way, is amazingly designed. Do you know how amazingly designed your ear is? Let me tell you. God designed the shape of the outer ear specifically.

Have you ever wondered why the ear is the shape it is? Well, he designed that specifically. Scientists have shown to be able to pick up and enhance the frequencies that are common in human speech. Around the 2,000 kilohertz frequency.

Which is the most common frequency in human speech. Your ear is designed specifically to hear those sounds more than other frequencies. So that you can hear other people.

It's designed specifically to pick up particular frequencies. The shape of the ear. It's amazing. And then inside, inside your ear, it's an intricate machine. God made little transmitters with tiny bones and tiny muscles.

[22 : 43] One of them is called the tensor tympani. Tympani, just like the instrument. Which together transform sound waves into fluid waves to concentrate them and amplify them to enable you to hear the smallest sounds.

You have an intricately designed amplifier in your ear. And then you've also got another muscle in your ears that contracts specifically when excessively loud volumes are heard to protect your inner ear.

Which contains very sensitive machinery. So you've got this, we call it in the sound business, a compressor. You've got a little amplifier, compressor. You've got an EQ system in your ear.

And then your ear contains these very sensitive hair-like receivers that each transmit specific frequencies to the brain. All so that you can hear and enjoy the full spectrum of sounds made by the crashing of a wave or the playing of an orchestra.

But imagine God cut corners. And instead of all that, when He was making us, He said, oh, they need to be able to hear, well, let's just put some holes in the head.

[23 : 55] No, He didn't do that. Just as well that God did His work excellently. We enjoy what we enjoy because God put excellence into every detail of His work.

And so it's not unreasonable to expect that God's people put as much attention into their work for Him as He put into His work for you. I mean, think of whatever you do for God.

If you're a Christian, think of what He has called you to. How are you involved in His work? How are you involved in His church? It might be a little clasp. It might be just a little detail.

But think of how you can do that excellently. Whatever it is. Think of how you can do it to the same level that God worked when He made you.

Service from the heart is excellent. And fifth and finally, what we see in these chapters about service from the heart is that it is obedient. Service from the heart is obedient.

[24 : 59] So, as I said before, we're covering in this sermon the whole section from chapter 35 to 39. And if you took time to read through those chapters, what you would realize is about 90% of everything in those chapters is verbatim repeat of what was said in chapter 25 to 31, which was the design for the tabernacle, which you'll remember if you've been with us.

We went into each of those designs. But now, in these chapters, it's repeating all of that. And many readers of the Bible have gone, well, why? Why is there such verbatim repeating of all the stuff that had so intricately been commanded and designed?

Now, we read about it being made with exactly the same words. I mean, couldn't it have just been, and the Israelites made everything according to how God told them to? I mean, He does that elsewhere in Scripture.

Why didn't He do it here? Well, there's a reason. There's a reason that all of this was repeated verbatim. It's to show how precisely the Israelites obeyed every one of God's instructions, even the little ones that seemed insignificant.

We read those repeated. They did exactly to the letter what God had commanded. And that tells us something else about service that is from the heart. It tells us that service from the heart delights to obey exactly what God wants.

[26 : 34] It's not reluctant. It delights. It wants to be excellent and it wants to be specific and do exactly what God wants because we know what God wants is better than what we want.

And that is very different to worldly obedience, isn't it? And obedience in the world is, in the world at work, you know, the traffic cops tell you to do something, whatever authority you're under, teachers at school.

Typically, in the world, people obey because they have to. Typically, in the world, people obey for fear of consequences if they don't.

That's what worldly obedience looks like. That's why the word obedience is something we don't naturally like. Because it's, oh, do I have to do it? Well, I have to obey, I suppose. But the obedience of God's people is very different.

God's people obey because they want to. Not because they have to. But because they know obeying God is the best thing they can do with their time and their efforts and their resources. Just like the psalmist in Psalm 119 delights in God's instructions.

[27 : 48] He doesn't just follow God's instructions. He delights in doing exactly what God has commanded. Let me ask you, is obeying God for you, you know, coming to church, sitting under His word, coming to where He wants you to be every Sunday morning rather than being somewhere else, listening to what He wants you to do and going out and doing it, is obeying God something you have to do?

Or is it something you want to do? Do you delight to come and hear what God wants you to do and delight to go out and do it? And you can't wait to come to church to do what God wants.

Which is it for you? Because that will show where your heart is. That will show whether your heart is really in this or not. Because this is what it looks like when God's people serve with their hearts.

It's voluntary. Nobody has to force you to do it. It's generous. Service from the heart gives over and above what is necessary. It is sacrificial. Willing to give up for God what we could otherwise enjoy ourselves.

And it is excellent. We don't cut corners. And it is obedient. We delight in God's instructions. And it's people who are serving like that who God uses to do His work in the world.

[29 : 24] Those are the people God will invest in. Those are the people that God will fill with His Spirit to do amazing things. People whose heart is in it. Are you one of them?

Maybe as I've gone through this list, you're sitting there and you realize, well, that's not where your heart is.

Or maybe it once was. Maybe you think back and you go, once I was like this. But if you're honest with yourself, you've kind of lost that passion. Maybe your heart's not in it anymore.

Well, if you know that, God knows that too about your heart. You can't hide it from Him. You can hide it from the people around you.

You can go through the motions. You can look convincing. But God knows where your heart is. 1 Thessalonians 2 verse 4, God who examines our hearts knows whether your heart is in this or not.

[30 : 22] Even if I don't. And so how do we remedy that? If we realize that our heart is not in this, how do we remedy that?

How do you make sure that you're serving God with your whole heart? If you're one of His people? Well, the answer, the answer's in Exodus.

But it's when we zoom out and we realize where we are in the whole story and where we've come in the whole book. And when we realize what caused the Israelites to do what they do here in Exodus.

What caused them to do this with all their hearts? Because they weren't always like this. Why now? Well, it's because of what just happened in the last few chapters.

Because if you look at the structure of Exodus, you've got the plans for the tabernacle. You've got the completion of the tabernacle. But in between, and explaining why God's people put all their hearts into this, is this terrible sin that they committed.

[31 : 35] The golden calf in chapter 32. But also what happened after that? When they experienced the grace of God in forgiving them and in restoring them.

This deep fall, terrible fall into idolatry, but then an experience of God's deeper, even deeper grace to restore them and to give them a future despite their sin.

And we saw that last week when God revealed His character to them. And they realized for the first time that even though they're sinners, even though they're lost, God wants to forgive them. God wants to restore them. And He wants to work through them to fulfill His purposes.

And He has amazing plans for them and amazing future for them despite their sin. And that is now where we are in the story. And that is why they put all their heart into serving Him.

Because when a sinful human truly experiences the grace of their Creator in restoring them into a relationship with Him, they will respond in heartfelt service to their God.

[32 : 44] Luke's account of the woman who poured perfume on Jesus mentions that she was a sinner.

And she knew that. But she had an experience of the grace of Jesus Christ. And that is why she did what she did. And I want you to listen to what Jesus said about that after she did it.

Listen to this. Luke 7, 47. Therefore I tell you, her many sins have been forgiven. That's why she loved much.

But the one who is forgiven little loves little. Have you been forgiven much?

In other words, have you truly trusted in Christ? Have you found God's amazing grace on the cross where Jesus died for sinners and sacrificed to pay for all you've done wrong and to take your burden on Himself and to restore you back into relationship with God and to give you a future in God's restored creation?

[34 : 02] Have you experienced that grace? Have you trusted in Him and have you submitted to Him and truly experienced His love for you despite your sin?

Because it's when you do that, then you will love much. But if you don't realize what He's done for you, if it's not central to your life, if you don't realize how deeply He has loved you and saved you and from what and to what, if you don't grasp that, then you will love little and you will just go through the motions.

Maybe you once grasped that, maybe you once loved much, but that has grown cold. That can happen. It happened for the Israelites. They weren't always like this and they didn't last. This eagerness, this passion they had to serve God with all their hearts, it lasted like two seconds.

And then back, okay, no, maybe, you know, Leviticus, but then it quickly went downhill and they grew cold again. And that's why, you know, later the prophets say, no, the only solution to this is a transformation of the heart because their hearts didn't stay.

That can happen. You can be eager one day for God, but then grow cold the next. And that's why God's grace for you must not be just a once-off experience.

[35 : 29] It has to be a daily reality. God's grace needs to be something that you reconnect with every day. And you do that through taking hold of the means of grace that God has given.

That's why they're called the means of grace. Daily devotions, meeting with other Christians in growth groups, coming to Sunday services, engaging in worship, sitting under the Word, engaging in the sacraments.

These are God's means of grace. These are the things, the ways God continues every day and every week to give you experiences of Him and His grace to inspire you to love much so that you will continue to serve Him from your heart every day so that you can always respond in heartfelt service of your God and your Redeemer.

And when you and I do that, when we take hold of the means of grace God has given us, we use those, we regularly reconnect with God's grace and we love much, well then we will be a church about which those looking on won't say their heart is not in it, but rather, because of our voluntary, generous, sacrificial, excellent obedience to our Lord and Redeemer, we will be known as people who are passionate about the God we serve.

Let's pray that that will be a reality for us. O Lord, you have done so much not only in making us and giving us everything we have and putting so much effort and energy and detail into making us so that we can enjoy things even despite the fallenness of this world.

[37 : 17] But Lord, we thank you for sending Jesus to redeem us, to take those sins on himself. We thank you for your grace that we can experience through the cross, through the gospel, that we can be restored, that we can have hope and a future.

Lord, help us to be people who experience your grace every day so that we will love much and that our heart will be in everything we do for you.

In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.