

Text: Exod. 31:1-11

Title: "Builders of God's buildings"

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Introduction: Before my work as a full-time pastor, and before my career with a plastic bottle company, I worked professionally as a painter. Those were some boom years in new construction during the Regan administration, and so the paint jobs I worked on were all new homes and condominiums in Connecticut. As a painter I learned to admire the skill and know-how that builders of buildings possess.

My grandfather was a builder. I have a lamp he built, and a chess set he made, which includes the Swiss game nine-buttons on the reverse side of the game. My grandfather handmade each chess piece. We are not allowed to lose any of those. I remember that, when I was a boy, my dad and grandfather built an enclosed porch on the back of our house in Waterford, WI, and in Waunakee, WI, Grandpa used to drive me by the house that he built by himself.

Our founding pastor, Walter Poole, was a builder of buildings like some who are here with us today. Pastor Poole's team included Jim Dane and his sons. Jim worked at the lumber yard and made sure our building projects got the best prices on materials. These builders constructed the house I live in with the wood from a three-story chicken coop that had become available. A brother named Mr. Hirschy, who is now 104, helped gather the wood.

The Bible tells us that our God is a builder of buildings. His specialty is the construction of a sanctuary, a holy place where His presence dwells among men. In the Old Testament, the Lord takes an active role, first in the construction

of the tabernacle of Moses, and then in the building of the temple of Solomon.

In the New Testament, the sanctuary He is building is His church. His church is an invisible universal dwelling place (Matt. 16:18) made visible by local congregations or churches all over the world (1 Cor. 3:5-10). What is unique about what God is building today, of course, is that it is a building only in a metaphorical sense. When Paul says, "Ye are God's building," he means people, a local gathering of New Testament believers organized as a local church. They may or may not have the great blessing of a literal building that is their own as we do here this morning.

God uses builders to build His buildings. It is a great privilege to be one of these builders. I am reminded that King David did not have this privilege. In our passage on the tabernacle, he uses Bezalel, Aholiab, and others to build His sanctuary, the tabernacle. In Corinth God used Paul, Apollos, and the members of the local church there to build His sanctuary, the local church. In each passage, the work is God's work, which He accomplishes through His servants.

C. H. McIntosh emphasized the divine nature of this construction work: "Whether for 'the work of the tabernacle' of old, or 'the work of the ministry' now, there should be the divine selection, the divine call, the divine qualification, the divine appointment, and all must be done according to the divine commandment. . . . Such is the plain wholesome doctrine suggested by the words, 'I have called,' 'I have filled,' 'I have given,' 'I have put,' 'I have commanded'" (*Notes on Exodus, 349-350*).

So, our passage is first about a work of God, but secondarily also a work of God through men. Many of God's mighty

works He chooses to do through weak men for His own honor and greater glory. I want us to see three truths about the builders God uses to build His buildings.

I. God personally calls His builders (vv. 1-2).

Illustration: Os Guinness is a Christian apologist who just published a book titled *The Great Quest*, in which he summarizes three choices a person can make when seeking the meaning of life. One choice is the mysticism of the East, a second choice is the secularism of the Enlightenment and Western modernity, and the third choice is the biblical Judeo-Christian answer historically found in the West.

Guinness makes an interesting observation in that book about what happens to the dignity of the individual in consequence of each of these choices. He said that in Eastern mysticism, the true meaning of life is found when the individual is eradicated as everyone becomes lost in an ethereal and universal existence. He said that in Enlightenment secularism, the uniqueness of the individual becomes lost as a mere cog in nature's machinery. Under this assumption the meaning of my life is no more than that of the rocks holding up the road by our church.

So in both the mysticism of the East and the secularism of the modern West, the dignity of the individual is lowered and ultimately lost.

And then Guinness notes that in the biblical tradition of the West, the value of the individual is not lowered but heightened, for the Bible teaches that every individual human being has been made in the image of God, His Creator. God is a personal individual, and we are personal individuals because He made us like Him to know Him personally.

Application: That God is a person who knows us personally is the truth at the foundation of what it means to be one of His builders of buildings. In our passage, the Lord calls by name Bezalel. The Lord knows Bezalel's father's name – Uri, and his grandfather's too – the much-respected Hur. God knows that these men are part of a family that belongs to the tribe of Judah. Bezalel becomes a builder of the tabernacle because God has called him by name to this work.

What it means for the God of the Bible to know and call your name is best understood from a conversation that Moses has later with the Lord (Exod. 33:17): “And the Lord said unto Moses, I will do this thing also that thou hast spoken: for thou hast found grace in my sight, and I know thee by name.” Finding grace in God's sight is related to God's knowing our name.

God knows sinners by name through the saving power of His matchless and infinite grace. When we find grace in God's sight, He then knows us by name, and He uses us to build His building. Without this saving grace, sinners will someday hear Jesus's judgment, “Depart from Me. I never knew you” (Matt. 7:23). This personal relationship that God has with His people is always His seal of ownership on the foundation of His building: “Nevertheless the foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal, The Lord knoweth them that are his. And, let every one that nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity” (2 Tim. 2:19).

Have you found grace in God's sight? Do you know your sins have been forgiven as a free gift that you could never earn or deserve, but which Jesus purchased for you with His own blood on the cross? Do you believe He arose from the grave? If so, He knows you and calls you by name to this task of building His house. If not, confess your need for

His saving grace and forgiveness of your sins in Christ.  
God personally calls the builders of His buildings.

II. God gives abilities to His builders (vv. 3-5).

Illustration: One of the things I learned working around new construction sites is that builders rarely have all the tools and expertise to do every part of a construction job. My grandfather built a house that way, but normally it takes a lot of different craftsmen with a lot of different abilities to build a building.

Application: The same is true when it comes to God's buildings. We would all say that Moses was a Spirit-empowered man of God who had great abilities that God greatly used in a leadership role. But clearly, the Lord gave different abilities to someone else when it came to taking the lead on the construction of the tabernacle.

What we need to understand, however, is that both of these men were given their distinct abilities by the same Giver – the Lord, for the same purpose – to serve the Lord, and through the same power – the work of the Spirit of God in and through their lives.

Building God's building works the same way in our day. Differing abilities are given by the same God, for the same purpose, empowered by the same Spirit: "For I say, through the grace given unto me, to every man that is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think; but to think soberly, according as God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith. For as we have many members in one body, and all members have not the same office: so we, being many, are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another. Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, whether

prophecy, let us prophesy according to the proportion of faith; or ministry, let us wait on our ministering: or he that teacheth, on teaching; or he that exhorteth, on exhortation: he that giveth, let him do it with simplicity; he that ruleth, with diligence; he that sheweth mercy, with cheerfulness" (Rom. 12:3-8).

So, our abilities are different abilities, but they are together gifts from a common Giver for a common purpose, and they equally require the power of the Spirit of God to build God's buildings.

This understanding puts our abilities, whatever they may be, in an important light that should humble us as we serve the Lord: "And these things, brethren, I have in a figure transferred to myself and to Apollos for your sakes; that ye might learn in us not to think of men above that which is written, that no one of you be puffed up for one against another. For who maketh thee to differ from another? and what hast thou that thou didst not receive? now if thou didst receive it, why dost thou glory, as if thou hadst not received it?" (1 Cor. 4:6-7). Do you and I view our God-given abilities in this light? Have they been useful in building God's sanctuary?

III. God gives assignments to His builders (vv. 6-11).

Application: It is very clear here that God gives two categories of assignments to the builders of His sanctuary. First, the Lord assigns a team for them (v. 6), and second, He specifically assigns their tasks (vv. 7-11).

Illustration: Coaching kids basketball has been fun for me. One thing that I have learned as a coach is that you sometimes have to assign players to a team in order for a certain

drill or scrimmage to work correctly. Invariably, whenever I try to assign teams that I think will work, some kids will protest that they would rather be on a different team.

Application: Clearly, one of the needs related to the construction of the tabernacle was for many hands to make the work lighter. But these are not just any hands found at random. This is a team God has designed and assigned for His builders. There is structure to the team. Its leadership is specified, and the nature of its work is God-designed too. What we do not have here is every man doing what is right in his own eyes. The tabernacle could never have been constructed in the days of the Judges. Is it any wonder that true New Testament local churches struggle in our day?

In our day, local churches are the God designed teams for the building of God's sanctuary, His dwelling place. The Lord has specified local church leadership, and He has detailed the churches' assignments (Heb. 10:21-25). We must draw near together in worship; we must hold fast together our confession of faith; we must provoke one another to love and good works; and we must make disciples of the nations together (Matt. 28:19-20).

God designs a team to build His buildings, and if we are going to be one of those builders today, we need to be part of a good local church that is specifically focused on the assignments He has given us. Without that focus, God's Spirit can be grieved and quenched, and His building ruined.

Conclusion: Fellow servant of Christ, do you and I understand and feel the privilege that is ours to be builders of God's buildings the way Bezalel must have felt honored to be so called and commissioned by the Lord? I want to close by asking that question in the better words of C. H. McIn-

tosh: "Reader, let me ask you just to pause and put this solemn question to your conscience, --Whether am I devoting whatever of skill or energy I possess to the interests of the Church which is God's dwelling place, or to beautify an ungodly, Christless world? Say not in thine heart, I am not divinely called or divinely qualified for the work of the ministry. Remember that though all Israel were not Bezaleels or Aholiabs, yet all could serve the interests of the sanctuary. There was an open door for all to communicate. Thus it is now. Each one has a place to occupy, a ministry to fulfill, a responsibility to discharge; and you and I are at this moment either promoting the interests of the house of God -- the body of Christ -- the Church, or helping on the godless schemes of a world yet stained with the blood of Christ and the blood of all His martyred saints. Oh, let us deeply ponder this, as in the presence of the great Searcher of hearts, whom none can deceive -- to whom all are known" (*Notes on Exodus, 350-351*).

"A man came -- I think it was actually in Philadelphia -- on one occasion to the great George Whitefield and asked if he might print his sermons. Whitefield gave this reply; he said, 'Well, I have no inherent objection, if you like, but you will never be able to put on the printed page the lightning and the thunder.' That is the distinction -- the sermon, and the 'lightning and the thunder.' To Whitefield this was of very great importance, and it should be of very great importance to all preachers, as I hope to show. You can put the sermon into print, but not the lightning and the thunder. That comes into the act of preaching and cannot be conveyed by cold print. Indeed it almost baffles the descriptive powers of the best reporters."

—David Martin Lloyd-Jones,

*Preachers and Preaching*