

“In the Shadow”

Exodus 35:30-36:7

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Series: The Way Home Week 4 Bezalel and the Tabernacle – Open Your Gifts

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Poor Bezalel. Always off in a corner, ignored by the rest of the kids. Unwanted, unappreciated, misunderstood. At least that’s what he thinks. You’d feel the same if you knew his story. But that’s the trouble. Nobody remembers Bezalel – probably because his name is Bezalel. It sounds like something dishonest stock traders do. “The judge sentenced him to fifty years in prison after he em-bezeleled millions.” Why didn’t his father Uri call him something easier to pronounce – Jacob, Joseph, Jehoshaphat? His name means, “In the shadow” and that’s where you’ll find him – in the shadow of better students. Bezalel feels he never fits in.

Bezalel’s grandfather, Hur, is one of Moses’ right hand men. Hur and Aaron pray alongside Moses whenever Israel faces a battle (Exodus 17:10-13). Hur’s son, Uri, hopes his son Bezalel will follow in his grandfather’s footsteps. It is a heavy burden to lay on the boy. Bezalel often feels in the shadow of his grandfather. He doubts he will ever step into the light and shine on his own. Uri cannot see any promising abilities in the boy, either. He is useless with a bow and arrow. He got detention when his arrow pinned the coach to a wall. The kids laugh when he falls off the bucking goat after five seconds. He always gets tangled up in the lasso at the big quail roundup. The only thing he is good at is making tents. Yet Bezalel takes too long to finish a job. He dreams of making grand, jewel covered canopies. They are palaces fit for a Pharaoh, not dirt-poor desert nomads.

Late one afternoon his father Uri comes home in a sour mood. “What’s for dinner?” he roars. “Manna,” replies his wife. “Manna, again?” he growls. “What did you do to it this time? Manna burgers? Manburger helper? Manna banana bread? Barbecued Baby-back Manna?” “No,” she replies, “I’m trying an Italian recipe: Manna-cotti.” Uri is about to complain about his heartburn when he spies the note from Bezalel’s teacher. It reads,

Dear Uri son of Hur, I regret to inform you that your son Bezalel is not cut out for the military life. We are therefore notifying you of his dismissal from the camp training school. We are sure, however, that his special abilities will be used by God in some other way. May the Lord bless and keep your family.

Signed, Ezra ben Yosef, Headmaster of the Sinai Military Academy.

“Special abilities?” Uri shouts, “What special abilities? Who needs a purple and scarlet tent covered with jewels in the middle of a desert battle?” Then turning to the frightened boy he says, “Why couldn’t you be good at roping quail, harvesting manna or milking a water buffalo? So help me God, I’m going to teach you a useful craft if it’s the last thing I do. Then you will finally make your grandpa Hur proud.”

At this, Bezalel bolts from the tent and keeps running. Leaving his clan and tribe behind, he is about to exit the whole Israelite camp and head into the dangerous wilderness when he trips over a stone. “Did you hurt yourself child?” asks a warm and familiar voice.

Bezalel looks up, but he can't make out the face because the sun is directly behind his head. The man's shadow offers a cool respite from the heat. "Where are you going in such a hurry?" the man inquires. Then Bezalel recognizes the voice. "Grandfather?" "Yes, child. Here, let me help you up." The two of them find a shady spot to sit. "Now," begins his grandfather, "why are you running away?" "I disgraced you and our entire family. Father says I am useless." "Nonsense," replies Hur. "Your father is a man of the eyes but he is not a man of prayer as I am." "What do you mean?" asks Bezalel. "Those who look only with their eyes, judge a person by what they can make and do. But those who live by prayer look into a person and see what the Lord places in the heart. You have strong talents and abilities, Bezalel. More importantly, the Spirit of God burns in you. One day, your skills will shine." "I should go back to Egypt," Bezalel sulks, "they would appreciate my abilities there." "The Almighty placed you here for a reason," Hur says. "If you offer yourself, it will inspire others to do the same. You might start a flood of generosity and grace. Each one of us has a special role to play in God's story. When we do, we become the way God's glory shines in the shadows. The world will be a much poorer place if you do not play your part. And one more thing – and this is the most important – whatever you do, whether great or small, do it all for the Lord and give it your all" Hur prays over Bezalel, walks him back to their tent and smooths things over with Uri.

Bezalel did have one friend: Oholiab. They both loved finding cool rocks, stones and gems. Every day, after their chores, the boys meet to find and trade gemstones. As the years go by, they discover how to cut and set the stones into jewelry. They go into partnership making and fixing jewelry. They learn to weave, embroider and dye fabrics. They create magnificent colors: purple, scarlet and azure. In addition to their jewelry store they open a chain of tent improvement shops called Tent Depot. Bezalel remembers his grandfather's advice, "Whatever you do, do it all for the Lord and give it your all." He serves each customer as though he is serving God.

Sadly, Oholiab and Bezalel are forced to close their shops. The poor Israelites have no money to spend on jewelry and fine fabrics. Bezalel was right all along: he has nothing to offer these people. They will announce the closings at the next worship service.

As usual, the whole nation gathers to offer sacrifices. But this day is different. Moses has returned from a long visit with the Lord. His face still reflects the blinding radiance of God's glory. "This is what the Lord commands you to do," he declares. "Bring Bezalel son of Uri and Oholiab son of Ahisamach to me." The two friends are stunned and scared to hear their names. The nation parts like the Sea of Reeds and suddenly they are in the brilliant presence of Moses. They don't know what this is about but now is a good time to announce their going out of business sale. "Sir, we regret to tell you we must close our shops..." "Good!" Moses declares, cutting them off. "Good?" the two ask, "Why is it good?" "Because the Lord has another calling for you. He has chosen you to direct the construction of His Tabernacle. His Tent will sit in the center of all our tents. The Lord chose you and filled you with the Spirit of God, with skill, ability and knowledge in all kinds of crafts (and) the ability to teach others (Exodus 35:30-31, 34)." "But how?" they stammer. "You will direct all the skilled craftspeople," Moses continues, "the weavers, the embroiders, the dyers, the gold and silversmiths, the jewelers, the carvers of wood and

tanners of hide. Every tribe and clan will send their best people to learn from you.” “But where will all the materials come from?” Oholiab asks. “From them,” Moses replies sweeping his arm out to the nation. Bezalel is shocked. “But they’re poor. They don’t have enough fabrics and gems to build this.” “If you offer yourself, it will inspire everyone to do the same,” Moses says, “You will start a flood of generosity and grace. He will build this Tabernacle through your abilities and their gifts.”

And Moses’ words come to pass. Every tribe sends skilled workers to study under Bezalel and Oholiab. Amazingly, a flood of offerings pours in from every corner of the camp: gold, silver and bronze; blue, purple and scarlet yarn and fine linen; goat hair; ram skins dyed red, acacia wood, olive oil, spices, incense, onyx stones and other gems. They brought many of these valuables from Egypt. Fear caused them to hoard and hide the treasures. Bezalel’s sacrifice inspires them to offer these gifts to the Lord. The people bring so many offerings morning after morning that Moses tells them to stop! The entire camp buzzes with activity. Bezalel and Oholiab train the workers to do everything for the Lord. But Bezalel is given the honor of making the holy Ark of the Covenant.

Finally the day comes when Aaron and the priests carry the Ark of the Covenant into the Tabernacle. The Pillar of Cloud, the symbol of God’s presence, descends upon it. Now God’s presence is not just up in the sky or high on Mount Sinai. The glory of God comes near and lives in the middle of His people thanks to the work of Bezalel and Oholiab.

On the day the Tabernacle is dedicated, Uri approaches Bezalel. “Son, can you forgive me for doubting your abilities?” “Of course father. I doubted myself for a long time. But I still have one question.” “What’s that son?” “Why did you name me Bezalel? That name is like a curse – it made me feel I was in the shadow my whole life.” “No son, you misunderstand. It’s a blessing. Bezalel means ‘In the Shadow of God’s Protection.’ And that’s the best place to be.

Let’s learn some lessons from Bezalel, this boy with the funny name. You are valuable to God no matter what others think. You have a special role to play in God’s story. God has given you more abilities and resources than you realize. Let Bezalel’s example inspire you to give yourself, to give sacrificially, to unleash a flood of generosity. When you do, God’s glory comes near. God’s Light shines in the shadows of those in need. Your gifts feed the hungry, shelter the homeless, free the addicted, quench the thirsty, raise up homes, start Growth Groups, share the Gospel with children, youth, adults, send out missionaries.

You may say, “I can’t do much. I can’t give much or I can’t tithe.” Let me tell you about someone who, like Bezalel, lived a little in the shadows and thought she could not do much. The first time I saw her she sat in the shadows of the sanctuary in the back pew. She always slipped out before the service was over. When I finally met her, she told me she had to leave early to go to work. She was a widow who lived in a small place on a small salary. She was trying to come back to God and her childhood faith.

Well she did in the biggest way. Her name is Peggy Wilson. Over the years she joined nearly every group we have: Dinner Ministry, Women of Woodside, Greeters, many Growth Groups, the Women's Retreat, REACH, Run for God, Recovery Services, Grief Share, the list goes on and on. She touched many, many lives and brought God's Light to many who lived in the shadows. And when she became seriously ill and could not physically come to this building as much, she continued to worship online and to bless more than 50 people every morning with her devotional messages.

As I looked in the Vine at the list of all she did at Woodside, the thing she did most was give. Again and again and again Peggy gave so generously even though she never earned very much. One time, she let me interview her about her perspective on giving. Peggy tithed – giving 10% of her income to God – a practice she learned from her Mom.

Since the time I was a little girl, my mother has always taught us to tithe. When we were young we were given a dollar for allowance. We had to give 10% of that which was ten cents. And as our allowance increased, so did our tithing and my mother made sure that we learned that that was what we owed God. Anything more than that was a gift to God because He gives us everything. And I've always tried to do that all my life. And this past winter I had a very rough winter and I was out of work. And I couldn't help but keep tithing no matter what. And there were some times when my finances were down to nil.

So I figure I don't know how I'm going to be able to give a pledge. And from the beginning that I knew we were going to have to, I've been praying about it and talking to God. And not too long ago, God told me that I have a lot of stuff that is not necessary. And I had bought some jewels after my husband passed away. They were more than I really needed. So I've been in touch with the jeweler that I bought it from. This month I'm going to go back and sell it back to the jeweler. Because I don't need it and God needs a new church here. We certainly do.

Like Bezalel and the Israelites in the desert, Peggy offered herself and then offered her jewels to God. That video was shown here at Woodside on October 8, 2006. Twenty years later, on that very day Peggy Wilson went home to be with the Lord. She left a letter of instruction which states:

There is not much in the way of money, I always felt that God wanted me to use it to care for others and so I have. Whatever is left after final expenses, please use it for the mission trips of Woodside. That way I can continue God's work a bit longer.

Let's give like Bezalel and Peggy.