

## SERMON NOTES

SERIES: Exodus: Set Free to Live Free

TITLE: The "Amongness" Factor

SCRIPTURE: Exodus 35-40

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We are in a series on the Book of Exodus from the Old Testament. Why study this book? Exodus is the Old Testament story of the salvation of God's people that points forward to the great salvation that comes to us by faith in Jesus. Exodus helps us better understand what it means for God to *set us free* from our broken, messy lives so we can *live free* in loving, personal relationship with God.

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**LEAD IN:** If someone were to ask you: *Why do you go to church, what would you say?* How would you answer the question—*Why bother with church?* Today, some Christians don't feel the need to be a part of an organized church. They feel they can experience God in other ways, and therefore, to them church isn't necessary. But is "church" optional? Not according to the Bible. The Bible teaches that your relationship with God is personal, but it's not individual. When you place your faith in Jesus, Jesus places you in his church—it's not optional. It's a fact. So to say "don't go to church, be the church" makes no sense. *You* (singular) are not the church—we are the church, and if you are a follower of Jesus, then you are *a part of we*. Church is a we not a you. And, this is not just a New Testament idea. It goes all the way back into the Old Testament, beginning with God's covenant to Israel, in the book of Exodus.

**PASSAGE SUMMARY:** In Exodus 35-40 we come again to the tabernacle—God's "tent of meeting" with his people. God gave the blueprints for the tabernacle in chapters 25-30 that we looked at in an earlier message. Now we come to the actual building of the tabernacle. That's 12 chapters devoted to the tabernacle in Exodus and 50 chapters total in the Torah. So while we are not going to read through these chapters, the fact that God saw fit to include so much space in Scripture to the tabernacle requires us to dig deeper into why the tabernacle was so important.

*What was God's purpose in building the tabernacle?*

- READ Exodus 25:8; 29:45-46; Leviticus 26:11-12. Put simply, God's purpose in having his people build the tabernacle was to construct a place where he would live *among his people*.
- This is a major Bible theme, what I call "The Amongness Factor." It runs all through the OT and NT and culminates in the book of Revelation.
- READ Revelation 21:1-4.
- It is clear that God wants more than a *personal* relationship you; he wants you to have a *people* relationship with him.

*So, how does the tabernacle help us think about the church today?*

- Disclaimer: To be sure, there is not a one-to-one correspondence between the tabernacle and how we think about the church today. The tabernacle certainly does not equal a church building. But the tabernacle does point forward to several things.

- First of all, the tabernacle points forward to Jesus—"God with us" (John 1:14).
- Second, our bodies are temples (tents, dwelling places) of God's Spirit today (1Corinthians 6:19; earthly tents, see 2 Corinthians 5:1ff)
- Also, (and here's our focus today), the local church is also referred to as a temple of God—a gathering of believers that God's Spirit dwells among (1Corinthians 3:16-17).
- POINT: God has never given up on his ultimate goal of living among a people who are called by his name. God's eternal, unchanging purpose is not to simply have persons relating to him as individuals, but to have a people, who together belong to him and each other.
- So, the tabernacle helps us think about the church as God's people, intentionally gathered together with full knowledge and eager expectation that God is present among them in a way unlike anything else you can experience.
- "The New Testament does not have a category for someone who is part of the universal church and not involved in a local church" (Jim Thompson, *A King and a Kingdom*).
- READ 1 Corinthians 14:24. Notice carefully how when God's people gather to hear God's Word and respond in worship, the impact on those present can be a profound impression that "God is really among you."
- God's unchanging purpose in both OT and NT is *to be present among his people*. His purpose is unchanging, his plan is unfolding—from tabernacle to temple to Jesus to an individual believer to a gathering of believers both now and in Kingdom come.

**BIG IDEA:** Why bother with church? Because when you gather with God's people to hear God's word and respond in worship you can experience "God among you" in a unique and powerful way that you cannot experience anywhere else.

**FOR DISCUSSION:**

1. How is the idea of the tabernacle different from the church? What is the common element connecting the two?
2. What was your big take-away from this teaching? What questions do you still have?
3. Have you had a personal experience with God in a worship service recently? Have you heard a story of someone experiencing God in a profound way in a worship service?
4. How should this teaching drive us to pray for what happens on Sunday mornings? Talk about how your group can begin to pray specifically for the Sunday church meeting. e.g., asking the Spirit to reveal Christ to everyone gathered, to strengthen those who lead and serve, to help the congregation sing with understanding, to make the teaching of God's word clear and understandable to all, and for God's Spirit to be at work changing lives. What else? Close your time in prayer for the church.