



Sermon Notes | Ability from the Lord | Exodus 31:1-11

We all have abilities. Different kinds, to different degrees. There is no question about that. But what of the deeper questions about our abilities? How do we have them? Why do we have them? Is it simply a matter of a different chromosome composition in one over the other? Is ability something passed down from one generation to the other? Do our abilities have a purpose? Do some kinds just surface in the more fortunate, and enable them merely to do some things better? Is that it? Church, you know that is not it. You know that cannot be it. Under a sovereign God, nothing is random or accidental, and everything has purpose. This week, our text in Exodus presents us with realities about abilities. I am sure we will both be challenged and encouraged. Take a moment to read Exodus 31:1-11 as you prepare for our corporate worship on Sunday.

INTRODUCTION

Moses' time on Mount Sinai is drawing to an end, a rapid close. Moses ascended the mountain at the end of chapter 24, following the confirmation of the covenant and the glory of the LORD descending on the mountain summit. Moses had been called up on the mountain and given instructions for the composition and construction of the LORD's tabernacle, and also instructions for the priesthood — the garments to be worn, their consecration, and a methodology for worship. Moses received precise prescriptions, clear directions, specific instructions from the LORD, from YAHWEH.

The exact manner of approach to each of these things was given by the LORD God. But it is one thing for Almighty God to give, but it is more difficult for His people to receive. Right in our DNA is a grave difficulty in receiving. He can be precise, and He is. He can be detailed, and He is. The issue is not clarity from God. The issue is with us, with our obedience to His instructions, how we respond to God's instructions. How often have you heard or uttered, "I don't have the ability to do that." "You know my weakness, Father." "You know my limits." "I can't do that." "My lack of ability holds me back." "I don't have the right background, experience, mix, or resources." There is no end to our protests. Our protests are limitless. Exhibit A: Moses, the man of God, who also began as a protester.

Exodus 3:10-11

"Come, I will send you to Pharaoh that you may bring my people, the children of Israel, out of Egypt. But Moses said to God, 'Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the children of Israel out of Egypt?'"

God's instruction to Moses was direct and clear: "Come, Moses." But immediately, Moses throws down his protests, his excuses for not obeying. "Who am I?" Then he protests

further, "The people won't listen to me. I am not eloquent. I am slow of speech and tongue." The LORD reassures him that all will be well, for He will be with Moses and will help him. Still Moses protests, and the LORD rebukes him.

Exodus 4:11

"Then the LORD said to him, 'Who has made man's mouth? Who makes him mute, or deaf, or seeing, or blind? Is it not I, the LORD?'"

Who has made the mouth of man? Who provides? Who gives the abilities? Focus not on the mouth itself, Moses, or on what the mouth is called to do. Focus on the one who gave the mouth. Focus on the Mouth-Maker, Moses! The attention must always be on God. This was true for Moses and for Israel (for Israel too would have similar doubts). We see God's instructions, His careful measurements, His precise instructions, but we do not see how we will carry out those instructions.

The Church today is no different. We know about protests also. We see the instructions, but we see our fleshly lack, our fleshly inability; we see that our ability is impaired. When we yield to such apprehensions, our obedience becomes impaired. We fail to obey. We protest. We submit to "I can't." But the danger in doing so is that we fail to see God. The "I can't" blinds us. We can't see beyond the "I can't" and receive God's clear instructions over our own protests. We see only our fleshly reasons for "I can't" — our lack, our doubts.

But God does not see Moses's protests. He does not say, "Good point, Moses. I, the Almighty, missed that." NO! It is God Almighty, Yahweh, who gives us the instructions, and it is God Almighty, Yahweh, who gives us the ability to carry them out. The principle is true not only in service, but in activity. In sin, we determine that we cannot do what God has asked of us. "I can't help it." "I can't stop doing that." "I can't do that." But we must be mindful that *God is faithful!* He allows no temptation that we cannot overcome. Paul reminds the Corinthians, a dysfunctional church, of this truth.

I Corinthians 10:13

"No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it."

Faithful God Almighty, He provides instruction. He then provides the way. Therefore, there is no place for "I can't." Old or New Testament, yesterday or today, "I can't" really means, "I won't." But God never commands you to do anything that He does not provide and does not supply for. He gives; He provides; He fills; He equips; He enables. Therefore, we are without excuse. We can! This reality is the heartbeat of our text today. This truth has no home in generalities or platitudes. We've got the words from God. God will provide. God will see us through. Here is the reality, the how and why of fulfillment. In the wake of responding to His instructions, God presents the principles of obedience, of service, of Christian living; it is all God Almighty! *He* commands and gives the ability. As we turn to our passage today, God gives us five characteristics of ability, as God defines it.

I. ABILITY IS EVIDENT (vv. 1-2a)

Exodus 31:1-2a

"The LORD said to Moses, 'See'..."

The LORD has commanded Moses, "See"! Take note, Moses, of this person Bezalel! See this person, distinct from the other people. Something is evident; something is obvious to the eye. This is a command to see, to take note of this particular person, for ability is evident. See it, Moses. See it, Israel. There is a man in the camp with ability. You know him.

Ability is not hidden. It is evident. It is not a guessing game. It is seeable. It is exercised. It cannot be held back. You already know this man's ability, Israel. He is already using his ability. He is a craftsman; he is crafting, doing what he does. This is not unique to life.

We are aware that David played the harp and was a skillful player. His skill was evident. His skill was desired, and he was sought out to play for Saul, to soothe Saul's torments. David's ability was evident before he was called. Ability is not instant; it is evident.

1 Samuel 16:18

"One of the young men answered, 'Behold, I have seen a son of Jesse the Bethlehemite, who is skillful in playing, a man of valor, a man of war, prudent in speech, and a man of good presence, and the LORD is with him.'"

Before Luke became part of Paul's ministry, he was known for his ability as a physician.

Colossians 4:14

"Luke the beloved physician greets you..."

And Apollos was another noted for his ability as an orator, even before he was called.

Acts 18:24-25

"Now a Jew named Apollos, a native of Alexandria, came to Ephesus. He was an eloquent man, competent in the Scriptures. He had been instructed in the way of the LORD. And being fervent in spirit, he spoke and taught accurately the things concerning Jesus, though he knew only the baptism of John."

The ability was evident. Abilities are seen and known about, and they are evident. Doubting your abilities does not remove their existence, nor does it make them untrue. How many people noticed Moses' abilities before he did? Moses doubted, protested, made excuses, but even so, Moses had abilities.

II. ABILITY IS PERSONAL (v. 2b)

Exodus 31: 2b

"I have called by name Bezalel the son of Uri, son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah..."

God speaks to Moses about a name. Observe his name, Moses. It is a specific person. His name is Bezalel. He is from the tribe of Judah. He is the son of Uri. He is the grandson of Hur. There is just one Bezalel, and he has these specifics, these personal details, which belong to and are true of only one man. And this man has evident ability. Look at him, Moses. See who I am referring to. Note that I call him by name.

There is no hiding from God. God is quite aware of the specific details about this man. Therefore, no one is shocked at Bezalel's being called. This is how God calls. He makes a personal call; He calls by name. He knows our details. He has known us before the foundation of the world.

This is how God calls us to salvation and to sanctification. He calls us by name. It is personal. Everyone called by name has ability.

We are image bearers. We are crafted by God. We are made in the image of God, and God gives all manner of ability to His Creation. We are made individuals with different lineages. He crafted us with diverse abilities. He crafted us to have skill in us. He crafted some with skill to tend to animals, some to shepherd (like Abel), some to lead (like Joshua). We all are different, and all have different lives, different accounts, and different abilities.

Everyone we know has a name and has ability that is both specific and evident. Bezalel was a craftsman; David played the harp; Apollos could speak. Ability is personal.

III. ABILITY IS GOD-GIVEN (vv. 3-5)

The LORD, speaking to Moses about Bezalel, says:

Exodus 31:3-5

"...and I have filled him with the Spirit of God, with ability and intelligence, with knowledge and all craftsmanship, to devise artistic designs, to work in gold, silver, and bronze, in cutting stones for setting, and in carving wood; to work in every craft."

This truth is the heart and peak of the passage: ability is God-given. Ability is not an accident; it is not random. Ability and intelligence are given by God: "I have filled him with the Spirit of God" (v. 3).

The Spirit of God is the Holy Spirit, the third person of the Trinity. Therefore, Bezalel was filled by/with God Himself. Often in the Old Testament we read that the Spirit comes upon someone. Whereas in the New Testament we usually read about the filling of the Holy Spirit, in the Old Testament, it was usually an external action. For example the Holy Spirit rushed upon both Saul and David; it was an external action.

I Samuel 11:5-6

"Now, behold, Saul was coming from the field behind the oxen. Saul said, 'What is wrong with the people, that they are weeping? So they told him the news of the men of Jabesh. And the Spirit of God rushed upon Saul when he heard these words, and his anger was greatly kindled.'"

I Samuel 16:13

"Then the Spirit of God rushed upon David from that day forward..."

Later, in Acts, a different situation is happening with regard to the Holy Spirit.

Acts 2:1-4

"When the day of Pentecost arrived, they were all together in one place. And suddenly there came from heaven a sound like a mighty rushing wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. And divided tongues as of fire appeared to them and rested on each one of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance."

This was not the same thing going on with Saul and David. This is an important difference to take note of. In Acts, the Holy Spirit is filling, not coming upon. The Holy Spirit is making a permanent indwelling in Acts. This permanency was not possible before Christ's work was completed, that is, before Christ's work enabled the permanent inner filling of the Holy Spirit.

Rather, before Christ, in the Old Testament, we see, what we might call, situational indwellings of the Holy Spirit — that is, temporary indwellings that are not permanent, but are given for a specific task. Bezalel was not a convert to Christ. But the LORD provided the Holy Spirit to him temporarily to give him the knowledge and ability he needed to complete the task that God was calling him to do.

To be filled with the Holy Spirit is a matter of control, whether Old or New Testament. Bezalel did not experience losing control when he received the gift of the Spirit. He did not have an emotional outburst or experience, wild gyrations or spontaneous utterances. He did not experience anything that would impair the work of crafting. Such flamboyant displays are more Satanical than special. Such a lack of control would not serve a craftsmen very well, and being out of control is not of the Holy Spirit.

Whose control do you come under? Bad control vs. Good control. Bad control being the loss of control, as in drunkenness or debauchery. Good control as in being filled with the Holy Spirit and being able to serve the LORD because of it.

Ephesians 5:18

"And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit..."

Micah 3:8

"But as for me, I am filled with power, with the Spirit of the LORD, and with justice and might, to declare to Jacob his transgression and to Israel his sin."

The prophets were filled with the Holy Spirit; thus, they were able to accurately receive and proclaim God's message.

Luke 1:13-16

"But the angel said to him, 'Do not be afraid, Zechariah, for your prayer has been heard, and your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you shall call his name John. And you will have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth for he will be great before the LORD. And he must not drink wine or strong drink, and he will be filled with the Holy Spirit, even from his mother's womb. And he will turn many of the children of Israel to the LORD their God.'"

Luke 1:67

"And Zechariah was filled with the Holy Spirit and prophesied..."

This was pre-Pentecost. There was only the Holy Spirit coming upon, not dwelling within, someone. After Christ's finished work, after Pentecost, believers were sealed with the Holy Spirit, such that the Holy Spirit resides permanently in the believer.

Ephesians 1:13-14

"In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory."

Ephesians 4:30

"And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption."

By way of the New Covenant, God's people in the Church Age are permanently indwelt by the Holy Spirit. We are commanded to be filled with the Holy Spirit, and no one can take the Holy Spirit away from us. What does this mean? It is a right question to ask. There are a number of teachings that provide the answer. Fundamentally, being permanently filled with the Holy Spirit is active submission to Him, yielding ourselves to Him for the purpose of His control.

Ephesians 5:18-20

"And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit, addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart, giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ..."

This is how filling looks: addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, giving thanks for everything, submitting to one another — wife submitting to husband, husband loving wife, children obeying parents, workers submitting to employers. To be filled with the Holy Spirit is to be enabled, not to do wild or spectacular things, or to do your own thing, but to do things God's way.

Ephesians 5:22,25

"Wives, submit to your own husbands as to the LORD... Husband, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her..."

Ephesians 6:1,5-7

"Children, obey your parents in the LORD for this is right... Bondservants, obey your earthly masters with fear and trembling, with a sincere heart, as you would Christ, not by the way of eye-service, as people-pleasers, but as bondservants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart, rendering service with a good will as to the LORD and not to man."

Douglas Stewart defines being filled with the Holy Spirit like this: "... to have from God the ability to do or say exactly what God wants done or said." Old or New Testament, it is

the ability to do what God intends; it is a specific and controlled ability to do as you ought to do, as God commands. Submit your ability to the Holy Spirit. Bezalel had ability, but with the Holy Spirit's filling, his ability became focused for God's purposes. His intelligence, skill, ability, knowledge, and craftsmanship were now all submitted to working for and with God's ways. As Christians, we already have such God-infused ability.

I Corinthians 12:7

"To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good."

To all is given, by God, ability without distinction, for the common good. This is a broader principle that goes beyond the scope of spiritual gifts. We have no ability that God has not given to us.

IV. ABILITY IS COMMUNAL (v. 6a)

Exodus 31:6a

"And behold, I have appointed with him Oholiab, the son of Abisamach, of the tribe of Dan."

Bezalel is not alone. He is not working solo. It is not only his work. He has personal ability, but his ability is not exclusive. Oholiab has a name, a father, a tribe. He too is part of the community, and has been appointed by God to do this specific work. He too has been given ability.

Exodus 31:6b

"And I have given to all able men ability, that they may make all that I have commanded you."

All of the able men, all part of the community, have been supplied with ability. This is what the Spirit of God gives, many parts, many abilities.

I Corinthians 12:14-20

"For the body does not consist of one member but of many. If the foot should say, 'Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body,' that would not make it any less a part of the body. And if the ear should say, 'Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body,' that would not make it any less a part of the body. If the whole body were an eye, where would be the sense of hearing? If the whole body were an ear, where would be the sense of smell? But as it is, 'God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose.' If all were a single member, where would the body be? As it is, there are many parts, yet one body."

Many parts and many abilities, but there is only one body. Therefore, we cannot say, "Because I am not like you, I don't belong." In God's community, you are enabled as He has chosen. He enables each person to do specific works for His purposes. Brothers and sisters, what an encouraging truth!

V. ABILITY IS PURPOSED (vv. 6b-11)

Exodus 31:6b-11

"And I have given to all able men ability, that they may make all that I have commanded you: the tent of meeting, and the ark of the testimony, and the mercy seat that is on it, and all the furnishings of the tent, the table and its utensils, and the pure lampstand with all its utensils, and the altar of incense, and the altar of burnt offering with all its utensils, and the basin and its stand, and the finely worked garments, the holy garments for Aaron the priest and the garments of his sons, for their service as priests, and the anointing oil and the fragrant incense for the Holy Place. According to all that I have commanded you, they shall do."

God has given them precise work to do. Ability is given, purposed by God, to do God's work. This is not God showing off. There is no flippancy about God. He has a purpose for what He does; there is purpose behind His giving of abilities. The abilities are not to be used for just anything; they are to be used to do as He commands, to fulfill His precise instructions. Our abilities are linked to our obedience to His instructions, to our following Him. Ability has been given to Bezalel in order for him to follow God's commands, His every instruction. Bezalel has been equipped and enabled, filled with the Spirit of God for a purpose, that he might build all the various parts of the tabernacle, not just in any way, but precisely according to God's instruction: "the tent of meeting, and the ark of the testimony, the mercy seat, all the furnishings of the tent" (v. 7), and "the altar of burnt offering, all its utensils, the basin and its stand (v. 9)."

Ability is given to the flock in similar manner. There is a right way to do things for God, and there is a wrong way. When God calls us to do something, we must do it His way. Cain and Abel both brought offerings to the LORD. One was accepted by God, the other rejected. For one was brought with the proper heart attitude, and the other was not.

Genesis 4:3-7

"In the course of time Cain brought to the LORD an offering of the fruit of the ground, and Abel also brought of the firstborn of his flock and of their fat portions. And the LORD had regard for Abel and his offering, but for Cain and his offering he had no regard. So Cain was very angry, and his face fell. The LORD said to Cain, why are you angry, and why has your face fallen? If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin is crouching at the door. Its desire is contrary to you, but you must rule over it."

Joshua is called by God for a purpose: to lead the people in the conquest of the land and to take possession of the land that God has called them to. And God is with him. Yet, while Joshua is given the commission and the ability to complete this mission, he must do so in the way that God prescribes. God clearly instructs Joshua in how he will accomplish this.

Deuteronomy 31:7-8,23

"Then Moses summoned Joshua and said to him in the sight of all Israel, 'Be strong and courageous, for you shall go with this people into the land that the LORD has sworn to their fathers to give them, and you shall put them in possession of it. It is the LORD who goes before you. He will be with you; he will not leave you or forsake you. Do not fear or be dismayed.'" "And the LORD commissioned

Joshua the son of Nun and said, 'Be strong and courageous, for you shall bring the people of Israel into the land that I swore to give them, I will be with you.'"

Joshua 1:7-9

"Only be strong and very courageous, being careful to do according to all the law that Moses my servant commanded you. Do not turn from it to the right hand or to the left, that you may have good success wherever you go. This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success. Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be frightened, and do not be dismayed, for the LORD your God is with you wherever you go."

And we read of Apollos, who was given the ability to speak about the Scriptures.

Acts 18:23-24

"Now a Jew named Apollos, a native of Alexandria, came to Ephesus. He was an eloquent man, competent in the Scriptures. He had been instructed in the way of the LORD. And being fervent in spirit, he spoke and taught accurately the things concerning Jesus, though he knew only the baptism of John."

As Christians, our abilities are God-given and are for the said purposes of God, which are to build each other up, and most importantly, to glorify God.

I Corinthians 12:7,11

"To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good... All these are empowered by one and the same Spirit, who apportions to each one individually as he wills."

I Corinthians 14:26

"What then, brothers? When you come together, each one has a hymn, a lesson, a revelation, a tongue, or an interpretation. Let all things be done for building up."

I Corinthians 10:31

"So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God."

In all that we do then, may it be consecrated unto the LORD. The question is provoked, *"What of your ability?"* Is your ability evident to others? What unique ability is yours? Whom do you attribute this ability to? To talented ancestry, to DNA, to yourself? How do you use your ability? How do you see and talk about this ability? Do you use your ability for your own pleasure or selfish ambition, or do you use it to glorify God?

Within our own church, we see that many abilities are evident, unique, and purposeful, that they are faithfully being used for God's glory — from cooks, to handymen, to music ability, to choir and harmony, to hospitality skills, to technical abilities, to memorization skills, to the ability of the elderly to tackle life. And so, we are reminded of our "I can't" protests and of our sinful tendencies to resist the LORD's calling. But the LORD, through His Word, has made the answer very clear: We can, because He enables.