

# ART IMITATES CHRIST

EXODUS 31:1-11 FEBRUARY 23, 2014

*CLOCK / Good morning / Taking a break.*

You can start finding your way over to the book of Exodus.

Leonardo da Vinci's *Mona Lisa* has been acclaimed as "the best known, the most visited, the most written about, the most sung about, the most parodied work of art in the world."<sup>1</sup> It is believed to have been painted sometime around 1503, however, there has been considerable argument over both the subject of the painting and the identity of the model who sat for it. There are at least 7 different theories, one of them being that da Vinci used himself as the model.

Here are a couple of facts you may not know about Mona Lisa: in 1956 it was twice damaged. The first time a vandal threw acid at the painting. Later that year someone else threw a rock at it, causing damage that required restoration.

After these events, bulletproof glass was installed in front of the painting, which has shielded it from a spray paint attack in 1974 and from potential damage when a terra cotta mug was thrown at it in 2009.

One more interesting piece of trivia that I didn't know - the Mona Lisa was once stolen and missing from the Louvre from 1911 till 1913. An Italian employee at the Louvre Museum felt the painting should be on display in Italy, rather than France, and so, one day, he hid in a broom closet until after hours, then carried the unsecured painting out under his coat. In Italy he was hailed for his patriotism and served a 6 month sentence for the crime.

For a piece of canvas that hangs on a wall night and day, there's a lot of history there.

Now here's where we get started. It's Ephesians 2, verse 10, let me read it to you:

**Ephesians 2.10 - For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.**

The Bible describes us as the Master-crafted workmanship of God. But the difference between our lives and the workmanship of Leonardo da Vinci is that we don't just hang on a wall to be looked at. We see there that we are created in Christ Jesus *for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.*

That's what the Lord desires for us. And as we see His plan and His methods as revealed in Scripture, we find a very peculiar arrangement that He has set up for us. We are hand crafted by God not just to be admired, but as a tool in His hands. We're meant to be *useful* works of art. And, even stranger than that, God opens up His plan and His will to include us. He gives us the option to participate and cooperate in His crafting process. It's a remarkable thing. The Bible says, "Here's what God is doing in your life to craft you into a sanctified, conformed part of the Body of Christ, into the image of His Son, and here's how *you* can be a part of that process." Like a painting that assists the artist in making itself a masterpiece. We are encouraged to cooperate in God's craftsmanship,

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<sup>1</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mona\\_Lisa](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mona_Lisa)

for example, by letting the mind of Christ be in us. We cooperate by abhorring what is evil and clinging to what is good. By magnifying Christ in our words and our actions. By taking the form of a bondservant. That's how we obey and participate in that command to *be transformed*, which is the perfect will of God.

There's a passage in Exodus that I want us to think about this morning that gives us insight into how this all happens. It's Exodus chapter 31, verses 1 through 11. As you make your way there, let me quickly set up some context.

This is in a long section of the book where Moses is up on Mount Sinai, receiving instructions from God about the Law and the system of worship that would be established in the Tabernacle. The tent of worship that would be set up for them as they travelled to the Promised Land.

Our verses show us the process of God by which He crafts your life while also using you for His purposes. So let's look at our text and see what we see.

**Exodus 31.1-11 - Then the Lord spoke to Moses, saying: "See, I have called by name Bezalel the son of Uri, the son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah. And I have filled him with the Spirit of God, in wisdom, in understanding, in knowledge, and in all *manner of workmanship*, to design artistic works, to work in gold, in silver, in bronze, in cutting jewels for setting, in carving wood, and to work in all *manner of workmanship*. "And I, indeed I, have appointed with him Aholiab the son of Ahisamach, of the tribe of Dan; and I have put wisdom in the hearts of all the gifted artisans, that they may make all that I have commanded you: the tabernacle of meeting, the ark of the Testimony and the mercy seat that *is* on it, and all the furniture of the tabernacle—the table and its utensils, the pure *gold* lampstand with all its utensils, the altar of incense, the altar of burnt offering with all its utensils, and the laver and its base - the garments of ministry, the holy garments for Aaron the priest and the garments of his sons, to minister as priests, and the anointing oil and sweet incense for the holy *place*. According to all that I have commanded you they shall do."**

This morning we've got 4 simple insights into the way God takes our lives and transforms them to use them. The first is found in verse 2, and it's that God calls you by name.

Look at verses 1 and 2 again.

**Exodus 31.1-2 - Then the Lord spoke to Moses, saying: "See, I have called by name Bezalel the son of Uri, the son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah.**

It was Valentine's Day not too long ago. Isn't there a powerful difference between a *real* Valentine and a forced one, or a generic one? You know, in school they make you bring a Valentine for everyone in the class and it's like when the FED pumps money into the economy. It devalues the whole thing. A forced Valentine is a worthless Valentine. But maybe this year you got a *real* Valentine. One that had your name written on it by someone who loves you. That is a special thing. Because it's not general, it's not forced, it's specific affection directed toward you by someone.

When we read the Bible we find that God has an incredible, specific love and affection for you. Yes, God loves the whole world and draws all men to Himself, but we also see that there is a great specificity in His mind concerning you. In His mind, *YOU* are the guy, *YOU* are the girl for some

particular part of His will and Kingdom. And, here's the thing, God doesn't reserve that specific thinking for a few super saints. It's not that there's a small group of starters and the rest of us are bench warmers. No, here's what God says to us *as individuals* in His word:

**John 10.3 - To him the doorkeeper opens, and the sheep hear his voice; and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out.**

God knows you by name and He *calls* you by name. He knows *exactly* who you are because He *wants* to. That's the personal nature of His love for you.

It's easy to think of God impersonally. But that's not how God describes Himself to us. He has revealed Himself as a God of specific, personal, intimate love for individuals. And we find that He has called each of us by name to become His children and citizens of His Kingdom. And, as we read in John chapter 10, He *calls* us so that He can *lead* us. That's His desire for your life. His desire is to lead you. And the way that God leads you is found in verse 3.

**Exodus 31.3-5 - And I have filled him with the Spirit of God, in wisdom, in understanding, in knowledge, and in all *manner of workmanship*, to design artistic works, to work in gold, in silver, in bronze, in cutting jewels for setting, in carving wood, and to work in all *manner of workmanship*.**

The Lord leads by calling us by name and then filling us with His Holy Spirit. And what we learn is that we're filled with the Spirit of God not just to *feel* something, but to *do* things for the Lord as His servants and representatives on the earth. To walk in the good works that God has prepared for us. In verses 4 and 11 we see a lot of *doing* involved. There's a lot of work to do! Here in the Tabernacle there was a long list that needed to be accomplished.

It's incorrect for us to think that being filled with the Spirit is mainly an experiential thing for us to feel. The Holy Spirit *does* give us personal peace and joy and comfort. There are, obviously, personal benefits to the work of the Holy Spirit, but when you look at people who the Bible describes as 'filled with the Spirit of God,' whether in the Old Testament or the New Testament, you find that that they are people who go out and *do* God's work and are used for His Kingdom in observable ways.

Zacharias and his wife Elizabeth were each filled and then they prophesied, teaching and encouraging others.

In Acts chapter 2 the people in the upper room were filled with the Spirit and began preaching the wonderful works of God to the crowds who had gathered.

Peter and the other disciples are described as being filled and immediately receive boldness to preach the Gospel.

Jesus is often described as being filled with the Spirit and as a result is led to move and to do and to speak in a variety of ways that we can read about in the Gospels.

Here's one way the filling of the Holy Spirit is described to us in the book of Ephesians:

**Ephesians 5.18-21 - ...be filled with the Spirit, speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord, giving thanks always**

**for all things to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, submitting to one another in the fear of God.**

A Christian is meant to be filled with the Holy Spirit. And we're not filled to do nothing. We're filled in order to accomplish what God sets before us to do. So, if I look at my life and realize that I am not about the Lord's business, there's something terribly disconnected in my heart. Because the Spirit of God is said to be our Helper, who will teach us and enable us to go and do what the Shepherd, our Master is telling us to do, where He is leading us to go, so that we can walk in those good works.

So, God calls us by name, He fills us with the Holy Spirit, and then we see in verse 6:

**Exodus 31.6-11a - "And I, indeed I, have appointed with him Aholiab the son of Ahisamach, of the tribe of Dan; and I have put wisdom in the hearts of all the gifted artisans, that they may make all that I have commanded you: the tabernacle of meeting, the ark of the Testimony and the mercy seat that *is* on it, and all the furniture of the tabernacle— the table and its utensils, the pure *gold* lampstand with all its utensils, the altar of incense, the altar of burnt offering with all its utensils, and the laver and its base—the garments of ministry, the holy garments for Aaron the priest and the garments of his sons, to minister as priests, and the anointing oil and sweet incense for the holy *place*.**

The key insight I want us to think about here is that the Lord *appointed* Bezalel, Aholiab and many other gifted artisans to get this work done.

That term 'appointed' is an interesting term. I'm not a language scholar. And we don't think you have to delve into original languages to understand what God is *really* saying, but as we evaluate some of these words and see where else they're used we can discover some interesting things.

When someone is appointed, something is given to them. The word means 'to give,' or 'to hand down,' or 'to turn into.' We're familiar with this especially at the Federal level of our government, where the President *appoints* a cabinet member or an ambassador. He *gives* them a commission and turns them into an ambassador or officer to not only fulfill a role, but to represent with authority.

God was appointing these artisans for this work and it was the same word He used when giving the Garden of Eden to Adam and Eve to tend back in Genesis 1, where He said He was *giving* them every herb and every tree for food and explaining to them how their lives were going to work.

Now, in our text, notice the specificity. *You* are the guys who are going to do this specific work. I want Bezalel and Aholiab and these other artisans for these specific assignments.

As we live the Christian life it is easy for us to think God wants us to be religious in the general ways. And there *is* a pattern of life that we're called to, but beyond that the Lord wants us to fulfill a custom-made service that He has handed down for us specifically. The Bible explains to us that you, as a Christian, are not a faceless, nameless drone or cog in God's machine, but much to the contrary, you are a hand-picked ambassador that He has appointed to represent Himself in a specific time and place for His good pleasure.

Think about ambassadors for a minute. They're chosen for a reason. We may not always like the reasons, but the President doesn't just pull a name out of a hat, he picks someone specific for that

position. And the Lord chooses you for good works specifically. Why? Because there's work to be done. There's a lot to do and to say on behalf of the King.

As we set out on that work, notice from our text how God has appointed us not only for specific assignments, but He's appointed us to be a part of a community of people who are all serving Him and serving one another. There are no free agents in God's economy. We are expected to be a part of a local church where we can serve one another and be supported. It's essential for us.

Here we see that these guys are called *gifted artisans*, which sounds fancy, but all it really means is that these guys were hands on builders. That's what an artisan is - a hands on worker. And the Lord said that He had gathered these guys up to do all sorts of stuff. They'd be working with gold and silver and bronze. They'd be bringing jewels from rough to ready. They'd be building the Lord's house and setting up the Ark of Testimony and getting the lamp stand shining and making the utensils and the furniture and the clothing.

What we learn devotionally speaking is that, as God's people, there's a *lot* of work to do. There's all kinds of work. More than enough to go around. And the Lord desires that we be a part of it, not just generally, but specifically. Some shovel, some jewel, some forge has your name on it. We see this happening in the book of Acts a bunch of times.

Paul was specifically appointed to be an Apostle to the Gentiles.

Peter was specifically appointed to go and talk to Cornelius one afternoon.

Philip was specifically appointed to run into an Ethiopian eunuch on the desert road.

This is how God works. These are the kinds of things God wants to do in your life as He fashions you into His beautiful, useful workmanship. It's what He wants. And of course, we want what God wants.

So what does it take on our part? What can we do to cooperate with the Lord?

Let's finish out verse 11.

### **Exodus 31.11b - According to all that I have commanded you they shall do.**

What the Lord wants is for us to walk obediently, filled with the Spirit in the direction that He leads us. If we do *that*, He will shoulder the rest of the work.

Look here at how He accomplished this in Exodus 31. He gave them the model and the blueprint for how to do the work. He gave them the wisdom and understanding and knowledge they would need. He would provide the resources necessary by stirring the hearts of the people to give. He gave these guys co-builders to help one other. In verse 6 we see that He *gifted* them to do what they were meant to do. He had called them by name and filled them with His Spirit and appointed them for the work and that's all they needed to do what they had been set apart to do. The anointing of God was their equipping.

Now, what we see is that God would accomplish the work through obedient vessels, but there was a *lot* to do. A huge amount of work to be done. All doable because of the power of God, but this was a large-scale plan the Lord had laid out. What does that mean for us?

Well, it's a reminder that the Lord didn't just save us in order to give us access into heaven. That's part of it, the main part, but if that's all the Lord wanted to do through the cross then as soon as we got saved He would take us home.

Instead, He says that He wants to make something of us. Something beautiful and something useful. Individuals who are called by name and filled and appointed to serve in the Kingdom of God and make eternal differences in the lives of others, starting now as we accomplish the good works that He has prepared beforehand that we should walk in.

The question is will we be obedient to what God wants? Will we walk worthy and circumspectly as our Shepherd leads us forward?

To do that, we simply need to be filled with the Holy Spirit. So how am I filled with the Holy Spirit?

It's not magic. We're told in the Bible simply to 'be filled.' Meaning it's something we all can do. Practically we're filled with the Holy Spirit when we're filled with the Word. The Spirit inspired the word and He has given it to us so that we can write it on our hearts and be transformed by it.

We are filled with the Holy Spirit by gathering together and meeting with the Lord. He says that when we do He will meet with us in a unique and special way. He says, "I'd like to have a meeting with you." And it's up to us whether we want to show up to those meetings. And we're filled with the Holy Spirit when we submit to His still, small voice.

We understand God's intentions and we even understand His process. He shows us in His word how He crafts us as His workmanship. And we see that He involves us in the process. He says, "craft with Me. Let's cooperate in this wonderful work of art."

So, the question is: What are we working on? Whatever canvas we're painting on today, through our words and our efforts and our plans, are they according to the plan and will of God? Or are we working on something else?

You know, in the Tabernacle, we see all this stuff being built, almost everything was anointed with a special, perfumed oil that was only allowed to be used there in God's house. Everything had a very specific smell and it was a smell reserved for the things of God.

What does your life stink of? Does it stink of God, or does it stink of something else? If I think I'm living the Christian life but I'm not meeting with the Lord being filled with the Spirit to do His work or if I'm not submitting to God's word, then I'm no longer working on the plan God has in mind. I'm painting my life in some other way. I may even be painting something that will be as impressive as the Mona Lisa. But in the end, it's just going to be a human work hanging on a human wall. Something that can be stolen or destroyed or damaged or eaten by moths. It may be something people like to look at, it may be shocking, it may even be admirable to critics, but is it really what God intends for my life? That's the question. I can't answer it for you, you can't answer it for me. But if we expose our hearts to God this morning, the Lord will show us whether or not we're walking according to what He's said. And that's what we are commanded to do.

He's called us by name, He's given us His Spirit as our Helper, to fill us and gift us and send us out to do His work and He's appointed us for a specific part of His Kingdom. Say yes to God today. Be His hands-on worker. Walk in those good things that the Lord prepared beforehand for us, His

special workmanship. That's how you not only become a Masterful workmanship in the hands of God, but that is how we actually make something eternal of our days and actions.