

2022.04.17 Evening Sermon

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Exodus 18:13–27

¹³And so it was, on the next day, that Moses sat to judge the people; and the people stood before Moses from morning until evening. ¹⁴So when Moses' father-in-law saw all that he did for the people, he said, "What is this thing that you are doing for the people? Why do you alone sit, and all the people stand before you from morning until evening?"

¹⁵And Moses said to his father-in-law, "Because the people come to me to inquire of God. ¹⁶When they have a difficulty, they come to me, and I judge between one and another; and I make known the statutes of God and His laws."

¹⁷So Moses' father-in-law said to him, "The thing that you do is not good. ¹⁸Both you and these people who are with you will surely wear yourselves out. For this thing is too much for you; you are not able to perform it by yourself. ¹⁹Listen now to my voice; I will give you counsel, and God will be with you: Stand before God for the people, so that you may bring the difficulties to God. ²⁰And you shall teach them the statutes and the laws, and show them the way in which they must walk and the work they must do. ²¹Moreover you shall select from all the people able men, such as fear God, men of truth, hating covetousness; and place such over them to be rulers of thousands, rulers of hundreds, rulers of fifties, and rulers of tens. ²²And let them judge the people at all times. Then it will be that every great matter they shall bring to you, but every small matter they themselves shall judge. So it will be easier for you, for they will bear the burden with you. ²³If you do this thing, and God so commands you, then you will be able to endure, and all this people will also go to their place in peace."

²⁴So Moses heeded the voice of his father-in-law and did all that he had said. ²⁵And Moses chose able men out of all Israel, and made them heads over the people: rulers of thousands, rulers of hundreds, rulers of fifties, and rulers of tens. ²⁶So they judged the people at all times; the hard cases they brought to Moses, but they judged every small case themselves.

²⁷Then Moses let his father-in-law depart, and he went his way to his own land.

God's Solution for the Church's Wickedness and Weakness

Main idea: God's Word corrects man's wickedness, God's ways resolve man's weakness, and God's wisdom enables us to trust that even when men are doing wrongly, God is always doing rightly.

Introduction: Many, big problems

1. God's Word to solve our wickedness
 - a. v16, His Word answers disputes
 - b. v21, His Word corrects character
 - c. v23, His Word rules our work
2. God's Ways to solve our weakness
 - a. v15, you alone?!
 - b. v17, it is not good for a man to be alone!
 - c. God's way, from God's Word, in the specific instance of facilitating the peace and life of the church:
 - i) Properly qualified: able men, such as fear God, men of truth, hating covetousness
 - ii) Properly organized: expanding church courts... 1000s, 100s, 50s, 10s
 - iii) Implication: right and process of appeal... but what if you run out of appeals?
3. God's Wisdom
 - a. Men will still be wicked and weak, but we are not trusting that they will get everything right
 - b. v19, when we humble ourselves to use His means, it is He Himself that is with us!

Conclusion: Do we want God's wisdom to overrule our wickedness and our weakness? Then let us follow His Word, making use of His ways!

(The following is a machine-generated transcription. Please be aware of—and patient with—transcribing errors. If there is something confusing or obviously erroneous, you are invited to listen to the audio recording referenced above)

Exodus 18, our portion. This afternoon is verses 13 through 27. It's us. God for his help and endless pray.

Our Father in heaven as we have just sung, we are very weak and needy and deed. We're also very wicked and the more of us you gather together the greater the impact of our wickedness. And the more

debilitating are weakness and yet you O God are among your people and you correct or wickedness by your word and you accommodate for our weakness in the ways that you have given us by which to walk.

Because in them not only are things more wisely suited to us but you o. God yourself are with us. And so we come to you in this portion of your word. We ask for your spirits help. We thank you that your spirit is the one who carried Moses along even as he wrote so that every word that was inscribed.

Originally on the pages from which these have been translated and passed down, was breathed out by you Using Moses. And yet every word of it, your own word of God. And so does with great hope in you O God, that we ask for your Holy Spirit, who gave the word now, to write on our hearts that which was written on the page.

So not only that we would understand and remember but that it would take root in us and stir up all of our affections are emotions. Are desires are decisions our goals that your spirit would help us now by your word and conform us to Christ through it. And so help the one who preaches and all of us as we hear Since this is the means that you have appointed.

And we come with that wickedness and that weakness that knows its necessity. Hoping in your abundance and generosity for our need Even in Christ through whom you have answered for all that. We need now and forever and then whose glorious name. We ask it. Amen. Exodus 18 beginning in verse 13 and going through verse 27.

These are God's words. And so it was in the next day, that Moses sat to judge the people and the people stood before Moses from morning until evening. So when Moses's father-in-law saw all that he did for the people, he said, what is this thing that you are doing for the people?

Why do you alone? Sit, and all the people stand before you from morning until evening here. And Moses said to his father-in-law because the people come to me to inquire of God, when they have a difficulty, they come to me. And I judge between one and another and I make known the statutes of God and His laws.

So Moses's father-in-law said to him. The thing that you do is not good, Both you. And these people who are with, you will surely wear yourselves out For this thing is too much for you. You're not able to perform it by yourself. Listen. Now to my voice I will give you counsel and God will be with you Stand before God for the people so that you may bring The difficulties to God and you sell, teach them the statutes and the laws and show them the way in which they must walk and the work that they must do.

Moreover, you shall select from all the people able men Such as fear. God. Men of truth, heading covetousness and place such over them to be rulers of thousands. Rulers of hundreds, rulers of 50s and rulers of tens, and let them judge the people at all times. Then it will be that every great matter, they shall bring to you.

But every small matter, they themselves shall judge, So we'll be easier for you for. They will bear the burden with you If you do this thing and God. So command you, Then you will be able to endure. And all this people, We'll also go to their place in peace, some Moses heeded, the voice of his father-in-law and did all that he had said, and Moses chose Able men out of all Israel and made them heads over the people Rulers of thousands rulers of hundreds, rulers of 50s and rulers of tents.

So the judge the people at all times, the hard cases they brought to Moses but they judged every small case themselves Then Moses, let his father-in-law depart and he went on, went his way to his own land So far the reading of God's inspired and inerrant worked Well in God's providence.

We come to this passage in the same day that we came to the end of Acts 5 in the beginning of Act six. And if you thought Several thousand, genuinely converted, or mostly genuinely converted people. Among whom the Holy Spirit was working had problems because there was still remaining sin and the complaint arose.

And I understand we didn't get to the complaint this morning but we'll get to the complaining next week. If you thought several thousands of the New Testament church trying to function together was a

problem, just try several million of the Old Testament church among whom there has not been a great amount of conversion.

Indeed of this generation. That is described here. The Lord says in Hebrews three and four that when they fell in the wilderness, they did not enter His rest and he did not mean Canaan. He meant his everlasting rest that has occurred procured by Christ. Now, that doesn't mean that every last one of them was unconverted, but it does mean.

That God can generally speak of a church in which there are few who are converted as under his wrath and God prevent us from ever becoming such a congregation. Or from presuming that we couldn't apart from his continual sustaining grace and mercy to us which we seek by the means that he has appointed.

And means that he has appointed are the point of Exodus 18 verses 13 through 27 because not only are the people wicked, but Moses and the people are weak, and they are on their way to wearing themselves out. Indeed, Moses himself, who knows the Word of God and receives it, apparently immediately at this point in order to answer the disputes and the problems, he needed a word from God that he doesn't seem to have received or perceived himself It had to come from his father-in-law.

We are all not only sinful but also needy and Moses was and Jethro speaks here. Not only is the priest of Midian who just led in that worship that we saw last week and the sacrifice and the worship meal and in the praises of God and with a wonderful sermon on how God had displayed himself above all gods.

And the very way that he brought Israel out of Egypt, But Jethro also speaks as a father-in-law. Let me see that towards the beginning and towards the end of our text. He speaks as a father-in-law, who's just brought His daughter, and his two grandsons back to Moses. And Moses, apparently, not thinking that there's anything wrong with it, sits down, as it's bring your father-in-law to work day and the father-in-law observes, what Moses does all day long.

And he's a little bit concerned that this is what he brought his daughter and his grandkids back to because his son-in-law who has the Word of God and is justly administering according to the Word of God. All of these disputes that the people are bringing to him. He's gonna be worn out.

And now he has the added duty of once again, leading his household. But being a husband to his wife and a father to his children, so you can see how Jethro speaking, both as representative from God. And at the same time as a concerned father and father-in-law and grandfather would be eager to bring to Moses God's solution, Not only for wickedness, but also weakness in the church and all of the old churches will have this problems.

These problems people who are still sinful and foolish and sin against each other and very limited in their mental, physical, and spiritual capacity are, the only kind of people from whom the church can be composed this side of glory. And so it is a great mercy that God not only gives us His Word to correct our sinfulness.

But he also gives us his ways in which he has gently and wonderfully wisely, made accommodation for our weakness. So that as we make, use of his ways in applying his word, we're depending on his wisdom, that ultimately God by his righteousness. And by His strength will bring his blessing.

So those are the three things that we have before us very briefly this evening. First, God's word to solve our wickedness. That's what the people needed. Moses might have been perplexed at the question. Why do you alone sit? And Moses say, well, I know you just met him Jethro, but surely you ought to know already that they need the Word of God bad because the people come to me to inquired of God, Can you imagine the chaos if everything was decided by popularity, content contest, or by who wields more influence or has more power?

A people like we are we need the Word of God to rule. We need the Word of God to answer, what's right and wrong and what to do in every situation. So when they have a difficulty verse 16, they come to me and I judge between one and another and I make known the statutes of God and his laws and just throw agrees.

If that's what they need, They need the Word of God. And the instruction that he gives is actually means by which Moses will be freed up to do more preaching and teaching proactively, rather than having to reactively, bring whatever corrective word is necessary. For whatever problem is immediately in front of him.

If he stands before God, and prays verse 19, and if he brings the difficulties to God, and He is teaching them as a as a principal ongoing systematic plan, not just immediately in response to every single case, among the people verse 20, and he teaches them the statutes and laws.

And he shows them the way in which they must walk and the work they must do. And children probably have had this experience where mom and dad short on time, you do something wrong and they immediately just tell you what you did wrong and, and to stop it. But it's a lot more helpful to you, isn't it?

If mom and dad, whenever they have the time and making the time in order to do, so are often taking the time to explain to you. Whether here's a situation you're in and here's what the Word of God says to do and you did this, which was wrong. But here is how you could follow what God says, which is better, which is good, and maybe even practice that with them.

Moses didn't have any time for proactive progressive instruction because he was sitting from morning till evening, answering all the problems and just you're wrong, you're wrong, you're wrong, you're wrong, you're wrong. You're both wrong. Actually has probably you're both wrong and almost every case there Israel in the wilderness after all.

But the plan was not so that Moses would do less teaching but that by what is put in place, he would be able to do more teaching of the Word because that's what we need And that's what Moses himself needed. That's why this plan would work because God had to command it.

If you do this thing. Jethro says Jethro comes as a father-in-law comes, as the priest of Midian comes with wisdom, he gives Moses all this instruction. And says, if you do this thing and and the if is distributive, and if God commands you, he's urging Moses to consider whether this is just the good advice of his father-in-law, or whether God is addressing him through the priest, to give him his word and we don't have time to go.

Look at Deuteronomy chapter 1 and the parallel passage. But that's how Moses presents it when he recounts for them. What happened in this moment in Deuteronomy chapter 1 it comes across very much. He doesn't even mention Jethro that comes across very much that this was the instruction of God, from his word.

That's what we need. We need, we need His Word to answer our disputes. We need His word to, to govern our work. We need His Word to correct. Each one of our characters somewhere in in Israel, they were supposed to get for these tens and 50s and hundreds and thousands of particular kind of man.

And what kind of man were they supposed to get people who are able men? Such as fear God. Well, and hate covetousness. How in the world are you gonna get out of the Israelites able men? Well, Abel men. We might be able to vote if you define Abel As fearing God and hating covetousness.

We just narrowed the pool a great deal. It's because even now there has been at least the preaching and teaching of some of God's truth and it's his truth that produces the kind of men that they're looking for. And the more they follow the plan, the more time messes has for the general preaching.

And teaching the more they'll have the kind of men that they need for the plan. So God's word is what must solve our wickedness and that's what Moses thought he was doing. He thought he was bringing the Word of God home to him versus 15 and 16. You don't want to impute to Moses the way we are.

Especially since God describes Moses as meeker than anyone else on earth at this time. And so he's not subject to the same level of pride, and, and self-esteem. As we are following the 80s. God have mercy on us, but Moses seems at the end of verse 16, probably to thought that he made his case.

Maybe a surprising when Moses' father-in-law says to him. The thing that you do is not good, it's surprising the way in Genesis 2. God having made all of the creatures in the first five and a half days of of creation and having made the man in his own image.

Having formed him with his own hands and breathed into his nostrils, the breath of life, the God would then, look at that man. And say not good. Why it was not good for the man to be alone. God had designed for him to be completed by a helper exactly meet unto him.

Exactly. Corresponding to him in such was not yet found in all of the creation because God had not yet made the woman who exactly corresponds to him and is made from the man. He was incomplete. He wasn't unrighteous, he wasn't sinful. He just wasn't operating in the God designed way.

That would accommodate his being finite and weak and needing help Jethro comes. And he says the same thing, doesn't he? So I'm not picking on the needfulness of the Word, Moses. You know, exactly what these people need. And you're bringing the right word to the right situations, but it is not good for it.

To be you alone, you are finite. You have a limited amount of mental and physical energy and you, and these people are going to get worn out. Being human demands, humility.

Why do you alone do this verse 15? It is not good for him to be alone. Sorry, The why do you alone is from verse 14? It is not good for him to be alone verse 17. And so God's way from God's Word and this specific instance of facilitating, the peace and life of the church was not for Zipporah to give Moses all of the advice about what he was supposed to do.

That's how like the the northern Ahmed dynasty. And during the divided Kingdom works Ahab doesn't have a clue what he's doing. And Jezebel knows all the tricks. No, Moses had a helper exactly meet unto his needs and his household, but God for the purpose of governing and facilitating the life of the congregation had the appointment of officers as the way he would not only answer wickedness with his word, but accommodate weakness with his ways.

If you were one of the 10 or 50 or 100 or thousand, who was appealing, your case up the ladder and you weren't getting the the way you wanted you might be tempted to say, why are we doing it like this? The answer is because God said, so, because God loves us because God, God commanded that a certain kind of man be appointed for this office in this structure.

And, and so God's way from God's Word included properly qualified, judges properly, organized with a proper procedure to follow. Sorry. I don't know what got into me with number three. There properly qualified properly organized, for the proper procedure, properly qualified. Able men who in the ordinary course of life have already shown some aptitude.

Some some capacity for judging well and the way we know judging well not just because they were able to to smooth things over and bury the problem until it arose later. But men who were not fearers of men. But we're fears of God, They weren't like Ananias and Sapphira worrying, what everyone else would think they were concerned with what the Living God, who had called Israel out to himself.

And and now was displaying himself in the cloud and and the fire And who on multiple occasions had made some display of himself to the people. They were concerned what he wanted and what he would see. And so it's able men who fear God, men of truth when they answer, they answer, according to what the Word of God has said.

They're both understanding of what the word says and able to explain what the word says and the hate covetousness. Not only do they reject and refuse to desire, the praise of men, they reject and refuse to desire. The property of men too. Those two things desiring, the praise of men and desiring the property of men.

Leave a judge in a position where he is easily manipulated. If you craves the praise of men, he will not be thinking how to determine the case before him, according to what the Word of God says. But according to what pleases the most people for the most time so that he can get the most praise that he craves in his heart.

He must be a fear of God, not man, and the same thing with covetousness, Not that he isn't just not covetous. He hates covetousness, He recognizes in his own heart, the temptation to be discontent with what God has appointed for him. And he knows that if he's not content with the food and the clothing and the shelter, the providence that God has provided for his earthly needs that he will be covetous and he will open himself up for those who have things that they can use to manipulate Him for the judgment.

They want instead of the judgment that God commands When we think about those who ought to be officers in the church and this is the first appointment of officers in the church at least the first appointment of officers that they're supposed to recognize and choose so far. God himself had, you know, if he shows up to you in a bush, it's you But the kind of men that were to have as officers in the church.

We're gonna see this again in that six when it, when we get to the qualifications of the deacon are the kind of men who do not crave, the praise of other men and do not crave. The property of other men. Not only do they desire to please. God above all, but they are pleased with what God has done.

They are stable and thankful and peaceful and humble the kind of man that Nobody can hate right. There are a couple people. I won't name them by name.

A couple of people that you all know, and I'm not saying that they're, you know, I'm not pontificating that they are automatically qualified for office. You might not even come up with the same list as I do. If you heard someone say something about them being a hard-hearted or unkind or worldly or foul, or you would you'd think that the person who told you that had lost their mind, Just because of the spirit formed character that God has produced in them.

So what you're looking at, when you're looking for blameless men, right? Not somebody that no one blames, but that somebody, that everybody knows that the people who blame them are insane. And there are insane people who blame blameless men So properly. Qualified properly organized thousands, hundreds 50s. Tens, this helps, you know that you're in a group of 10 and you've got a particular man assigned to you, you got a problem between someone in your household and someone in the other household.

I mean, if it's within the household it's the head of the house, right? But there's between two of the households, within the 10, there's a problem, they know exactly who to go to, and they go to that guy and he repeats, whatever the part of the word. The statutes, the laws of God are that applies to that, and he makes a judgment and, and both parties are satisfied.

Praise God. But one party isn't satisfied. Okay, that's more like it. Well, more likely or neither party is satisfied. Now we were in Israel. Well, for those 10 and another 10, and another ten and another 10. There's there's a man. Who's the appointed? A pellet guy for 50 and they go to him.

And if they can't solve it, they go to the guy who's over a hundred and if they can't, if he can't solve it, they go to the guy who's over a thousand. And if he gets all that they go to Moses and that he might not be able to solve it, but they do have.

And you can understand in the wisdom of the qualifications. You pick the men who best fit the qualifications for the thousands, right? Moses we we presume by God's grace to him and calling him. The meekest man on earth at the time. God picked from the one at the top of the thousand, the above, the thousands level.

And so there's an organization here that is actually commanded by God. This is where you get the idea of expanding church. Courts wasn't so much that there's one judge who was who was over that it was hierarchical but just the broader you get the the more wisdom you need and one out of a thousand, you hopefully have a little more help than a guy who's just one out of a hundred.

Yeah, you don't want to look at one of your children. Say, oh my dear son. You're one in 10 But there are kids who you know apart from the proper love and affection of a father. If you were just objectively speaking, there's one in 10.

So there's properly qualified men, probably organized with a proper process and we already described what is implied here as the process. You don't say, I'm so upset, I'm going to the thousand and you go to that guy. No, you have to go to the 10 first and the 50 and the hundred and the thousand, But there's right of appeal and their safety in that to some extent.

But what if you run out of appeals? Well, then you ran out of appeals following God's way of seeking God's Word. And you still didn't get there. Why because even Moses and all of the other guys who are in the structure, they're still sinners and there's still finite, They don't have perfect wisdom and they don't have perfect righteousness, and that's not gonna happen in the church either.

And so you might make an appeal to your deacons, or your elders, depending on what it is and we'll sort that out in the, the preaching, in the coming weeks, am I make it appeal to your elders? And it's not resolved and you try the Presbytery, does not resolve.

You try the sin and that's not resolved and maybe there's been a Reformation and the sentence are back together and you try the general assembly of this and it's still not resolved, there's all lost. Now, of course not because you did all those things because that's how God has established his church.

And even when men get things wrong, God is still getting it, right? The hope was not that they could assemble enough men of a good enough quality. That all the cases would finally be judged correctly in Israel. That was the hope. You know, Moses should have just took Zipporah and Gershom in Eleazar, and yeah, went home with Jethro and lived in the back of Sinai for the rest of his life.

And the hope dear congregation is not that your elders are going to get it, right? Every time or that by the course of appeals to the broader courts of the church that you will be able finally to get it right eventually in this life. Your hope is that God who gave you this process?

And this structure and these men in whom he did this work that he is getting right what he does with you. Even if the men involved all happened, have gotten it wrong. That's why we hope and God's wisdom. You notice what? Jethro says Listen now to my voice. I will give you Council and God.

He'll be with you Stand before God for the people, so that you may bring the difficulties to God. This is the guy at the top and his hope is not that by all the guys, in the lower stages or the. The narrower courts that he will be able to get everything.

Right. Has hope is in God. He has time not just for teaching, but for crying out to God and that God would be with him and that when he brings the difficulties, God would give him wisdom and that even if he gets it wrong, that God would get right?

What he does through him. We depend upon God as we follow His ways, which are suited to our weakness in order to seek his word, which correct our wickedness. Do we want God's wisdom to overrule our wickedness and our weakness? I hope so. Because that's the only way we're going to have health and fruit and prosperity in our homes, in our churches, In the nation.

Well, if we want God's wisdom to overrule our wickedness and our weakness, Then we should make use of God's appointed ways so that we may avail himself, avail ourselves. Well, of his corrective word, let's pray.

Our Father in heaven here. We are even now having preached in weakness and having heard in weakness, wary of our own minds and hearts and sins effect upon them. And yet rejoicing to know that even this exercise we have done because this is what you say you use. And so we pray that you would give that faith that comes by hearing the Word of Christ that you would sanctify us by your truth.

Your word is truth that you would give us meekness and diligence that your spirit would make your word unto us that implanted word, that is able to save our souls. Because by the grace of your spirit we would be not only hearers but doers and we thank you and bless your name for the providence in which this passage comes with the morning passage and all at a time when we are looking for new officers and plus your name of God for the kind of goodness and display of your providential mercy.

That so often makes us shake our heads and laugh and say the Lord has done great things for us. We pray O, Lord, that you would produce such fruit that others would be able to look when we are as ones who laugh and that they too would say, the Lord has done great things for them and grant outpouring of your spirit that it would be not just our congregation.

But that in a multitude of congregations, we would be as those who laugh when you restored. The fortunes of Israel Kamo, God to your church and restore her fortunes revive her reform. Her and give us that walking with you and enjoyment of you even in this life that we may have.

When we follow your ways according to your word independence, on your wisdom for, we ask it in Jesus name, Amen.