

Title: **MOSES' GREAT MISTAKE**

Text: Exodus 18:1-27

Subject: *Jethro's Counsel*

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Tape : Exodus #75

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Introduction:

Thus far in the Book of Exodus we have seen the Lord God performing both judgment and mercy, judgment upon Egypt and mercy upon Israel. In the exercise of his mighty grace, the Lord visited and redeemed his people; bringing them forth out of the land of Egypt, delivering them, first, from the hand of Pharaoh and then from the hand of Amalek. We have seen, in the manna falling from heaven, a type of Christ the Bread of Life coming down from heaven to give us life. In the Rock that followed Israel through the wilderness, we saw a type of Christ smitten for his people. And in the stream gushing out of the smitten rock, the Lord gave us a typical picture of God the Holy Spirit, “*the blessing of Abraham,*” given to us by our crucified Redeemer (Galatians 3:13-14).

We will pick up tonight in chapter 18. Moses and the children of Israel are encamped Rephidim, at “*the mount of God.*” The title of my message is **MOSES' GREAT MISTAKE**. Hold your Bibles open here at Exodus 18. I want to show you several things in this chapter we need to understand and lay to heart. May God the Holy Spirit be our Teacher.

MOSES' FAITHFULNESS

First, let it be clearly understood that Moses was a man of remarkable faith and faithfulness. Exodus 18 begins with Jethro, Moses' father-in-law, bringing his wife Zipporah and his two sons, Gershom and Eliezer, back to him.

(Exodus 18:1-6) “When Jethro, the priest of Midian, Moses' father in law, heard of all that God had done for Moses, and for Israel his people, *and* that the LORD had brought Israel out of Egypt; (2) Then Jethro, Moses' father in law, took Zipporah, Moses' wife, after he had sent her back, (3) And her two sons; of which the name of the one *was* Gershom; for he said, I have been an alien in a strange land: (4) And the name of the other *was* Eliezer; for the God of my father,

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father, *said he*, was mine help, and delivered me from the sword of Pharaoh: (5) And Jethro, Moses' father in law, came with his sons and his wife unto Moses into the wilderness, where he encamped at the mount of God: (6) And he said unto Moses, I thy father-in-law Jethro am come unto thee, and thy wife, and her two sons with her."

It had been a long, long time, at least a year, since Moses had seen Zipporah and their two sons. And their parting had not been exactly pleasant. You will remember God met Moses in an inn back in chapter 4 and almost killed him because he had not circumcised one of his sons. When Moses submitted to the will of God, Zipporah was required to perform the ordinance; but she did not like it. And she and Moses had words (Exodus 4:24-26).

(Exodus 4:24-26) "And it came to pass by the way in the inn, that the LORD met him, and sought to kill him. (25) Then Zipporah took a sharp stone, and cut off the foreskin of her son, and cast *it* at his feet, and said, Surely a bloody husband *art* thou to me. (26) So he let him go: then she said, A bloody husband *thou art*, because of the circumcision."

- Obedience is important.
- Marry someone who will not worship God with you and you marry trouble!
- Zipporah took the boys and went home to daddy.

Actually, Moses "*sent her back*" (v. 2) because she would have been a hindrance to him in the work of God! Moses went on to Egypt to do what God had called him to do. Now, a full year later, after Jethro heard what God had done with Moses, he brought Zipporah and the boys back to him.

TYPICAL PICTURE

Clearly there is a typical picture here of Christ and his Church.

- Zipporah being reconciled to Moses may be taken to represent the reconciliation of the Church to Christ.
- Zipporah was a black woman, a Midianite, an Ethiopian (Numbers 12:1) — A sinful woman, from a cursed race.
- She came to Moses with two sons: Gershom (A Stranger) and Eliezer (God is my Help — God is my Salvation).

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- She and Moses were reconciled “*at the mount of God,*” the place of divine justice.
- Moses was a husband of blood to Zipporah. — They were reconciled by blood, by covenant blood, — by the fulfillment of a covenant in a work of circumcision.

On the day that Jethro, Zipporah, and his sons came to meet him, Moses faithfully reported to his family all that the Lord had done (vv. 7-8).

(Exodus 18:7-8) “And Moses went out to meet his father in law, and did obeisance, and kissed him; and they asked each other of *their* welfare; and they came into the tent. (8) And Moses told his father-in-law all that the LORD had done unto Pharaoh and to the Egyptians for Israel’s sake, *and* all the travail that had come upon them by the way, and *how* the LORD delivered them.”

- (Ch. 12-14) — Passover — Red Sea — Deliverance from Pharaoh and Egypt.
- (Ch. 15) — Songs of Redemption
- The sweetened waters of Marah – “*The Lord that healeth Thee!*”
- (Ch. 16) — Manna from Heaven – Christ The Bread of Life!
- (Ch. 17) — Water from the smitten Rock – Christ!
- The gushing stream from the Rock – The Spirit of God!
- (17:8-16) — Deliverance from Amalek – “*Jehovah-nissi*” — “*The Lord our Banner!*”

When Jethro heard Moses’ report of God’s wondrous works he was ecstatic (vv. 9-12).

(Exodus 18:9-12) “And Jethro rejoiced for all the goodness which the LORD had done to Israel, whom he had delivered out of the hand of the Egyptians. (10) And Jethro said, Blessed *be* the LORD, who hath delivered you out of the hand of the Egyptians, and out of the hand of Pharaoh, who hath delivered the people from under the hand of the Egyptians. (11) Now I know that the LORD *is* greater than all gods: for in the thing wherein they dealt proudly *he was* above them. (12) And Jethro, Moses’ father-in-law, took a burnt offering and sacrifices for God: and Aaron came, and all the elders of Israel, to eat

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of Israel, to eat bread with Moses' father-in-law before God.”

As we will see in a little bit, his heart was unchanged. But he was so excited by what he saw and heard that...

- He rejoiced in God's goodness.
- He extolled the Lord God, not as the only Lord God, but as the greatest of all gods!
- He even made sacrifices for God according to the law.

Here is another remarkable thing about Moses. – **The arrival of his family did not deter him from the worship and service of his God** (v. 13).

(Exodus 18:13) “And it came to pass on the morrow, that Moses sat to judge the people: and the people stood by Moses from the morning unto the evening.”

Moses had not seen his family in more than a year. But the day after they got there, he went out to do what God had called him to do, what God had given him the singular responsibility to do. His family arrived in the evening. The next morning Moses went into the congregation of the Lord.

John Gill wrote, “Though his father-in-law was come to visit him, yet, he did not neglect the care of his people, and the business that lay upon his hands for their good.”

NOTE: If you want to do your family good, do not allow your family to keep you from the worship and service of God. And do nothing that would keep your family from the worship and service of God.

HONORED OF GOD

Second, this man Moses, this man of great faith and faithfulness, was a man highly honored of God. Moses honored God and God honored Moses (1 Sam. 2:30).

(1 Samuel 2:30) “Wherefore the LORD God of Israel saith, I said indeed *that* thy house, and the house of thy father, should walk before me for ever: but now the LORD saith, Be it far from me; for **them that honour me I will honour**, and they that despise me shall be lightly esteemed.”

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The Lord God of Israel had made his servant Moses the Judge and pastor, the leader and the teacher of a congregation of more than 4,000,000 people! There were 600,000 footmen, not counting women, children, and aged people in the congregation! There were at least 4,000,000 of those Jews to whom Moses was pastor.

The work the Lord God had imposed upon Moses was...

- **A Great Work!**

(Ephesians 3:8) “Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints, is this grace given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ;”

- **A Demanding Work!**
- **A Work Involving Great Honor** (vv. 15-16).

(Exodus 18:15-16) “And Moses said unto his father in law, Because the people come unto me to inquire of God: (16) When they have a matter, they come unto me; and I judge between one and another, and I do make *them* know the statutes of God, and his laws.”

- **A Work for which God Equipped Him and Constantly Supplied Him!** – “*Our Sufficiency is of God!*”

But when Jethro saw what Moses was doing, he said, “*The thing that thou doest is not good. Thou wilt surely wear away, both thou, and this people that is with thee: for this thing is too heavy for thee; thou art not able to perform it thyself alone...Hearken now unto my voice, I will give thee counsel... (vv. 17-23).*

- “*Appoint judges to help you!*”
- “*God will be with you!*” – God was already with him.
- “*So shall it be easier for thyself!* — Easy Street is always a Wrong Way Boulevard!
- “*They shall bear the burden with thee!*”
- “*Thou shalt be able to endure!*”

A HORRIBLE MISTAKE

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Then, in the *third* place, Moses made a horrible mistake. – He followed the counsel of carnal reason (v. 24).

(Exodus 18:24) “So Moses hearkened to the voice of his father in law, and did all that he had said.”

Jethro’s counsel probably arose from loving concern for Moses’ health. It was, in a fleshly sense, wise and prudent counsel. But Moses did wrong in obeying Jethro’s counsel. He made a great mistake, from which there was no recovery. That will be obvious in a moment.

Remember, Jethro was an unbeliever, a heathen priest. He had no spiritual discernment. The servant of God must never allow himself to be guided by natural principles. — “*I conferred not with flesh and blood*” (Galatians 1:15). — What is best for me? — What is best for my family? — What would family and friends have me to do?

Illustration: *Abraham and Isaac on Mt. Moriah!*

That man who is engaged in the service of God must never heed the counsel of carnal wisdom. We are to take our orders only from our Master. — “*Whatsoever he saith unto you, Do it!*” (John 2:5).

If we would obey our God, if we would serve him in any area of life, our actions must be determined only by...

- The Word of God!
- The Will of God!
- The Glory of God!

A GREAT BURDEN

Fourth, that which was once Moses’ highest honor and greatest privilege became a great burden to him once he began to consider himself. How sad!

A son or a daughter in a young family is nothing but a delight to a loving mother. **The cries** of the child do not annoy her. **The dirty diapers** are not repulsive to her. **The aching breasts** do not make her resentful. **But let that mother begin to think of herself and all that the child is costing her and that newborn child may be in grave danger at its mother’s own hands.** So it was with Moses. When he began to consider himself rather than the

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than the will of God, the glory of God, and the people of God, **he began to look upon his service as a great burden and greatly resented it** (Number 11:11-15).

(Numbers 11:11-15) “And Moses said unto the LORD, Wherefore hast thou afflicted thy servant? and wherefore have I not found favour in thy sight, that thou layest the burden of all this people upon me? (12) Have I conceived all this people? have I begotten them, that thou shouldest say unto me, Carry them in thy bosom, as a nursing father beareth the sucking child, unto the land which thou swarest unto their fathers? (13) Whence should I have flesh to give unto all this people? for they weep unto me, saying, Give us flesh, that we may eat. (14) I am not able to bear all this people alone, because *it is too heavy for me*. (15) And if thou deal thus with me, kill me, I pray thee, out of hand, if I have found favour in thy sight; and let me not see my wretchedness.”

Moses was willing to relinquish the work and the post of high honor to which God had called him. — True his responsibility was immense. But faith would have said, “God’s *grace is sufficient*.” Instead Moses’ heart failed him. “*I am not able to bear all this people alone, because it is too heavy for me*” (Numbers 11:14).

- God never called him to bear the burden of his people alone.
- And God had never left him alone.
- Moses was only the instrument.
- God was carrying the load; and God was doing the work.

NOTE: Any place where God puts me is a place of honor. Any work God puts in my hands is honorable work (1 Corinthians 1:26-29).

(1 Corinthians 1:26-29) “For ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, *are called*: (27) But God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty; (28) And base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, *yea*, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are: (29) That no flesh should glory in his presence.”

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Moses' relinquishing of his burden had the appearance of humility, but it was only an appearance of humility. Many fail here. With his lips, he was saying, "I am not sufficient." But he was really saying, "God, you are not sufficient!"

- We must never thrust ourselves into any work.
- But to shrink from any work or responsibility God has put upon us is both cowardice and unbelief. — *"Is anything too hard for the Lord?"* — No work is too great. — No burden is too heavy for God!

"With him the weight of a mountain is nothing; without Him, the weight of a feather is overwhelming."

(C. H. Mackintosh).

(Philippians 4:13) "I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me."

It is never an act of humility or faith to depart from any divinely appointed post, or any divinely appointed work for any reason.

- Difficulties are nothing to God. — The Red Sea!
- Needs are nothing to God. — The Egyptian's Gold! — Manna!
- Proud men are nothing to God. — Pharaoh!
- Our inabilities are nothing to God. — (1 Corinthians 1:26-29). — *"When I am weak, then am I strong!"*

God can draw a straight line with a crooked stick. He can conquer a nation by an old man. And he can speak to the hearts of sinners by a stuttering, stammering tongue. God can speak as easily by a jackass as by a man. The power by which we do his work is not ours, but his!

THE BURDEN REMOVED

Fifth, when Moses complained of the burden God had imposed upon him, the Lord quickly took it away (Numbers 11:16-17).

(Numbers 11:16-17) "And the LORD said unto Moses, Gather unto me seventy men of the elders of Israel, whom thou knowest to be the elders of the people, and officers over them; and bring them unto the tabernacle of the congregation, that they may stand there with thee. (17) And I will come down and talk with thee there: and **I WILL TAKE OF THE SPIRIT WHICH IS UPON THEE, AND WILL PUT IT UPON THEM;** and they shall bear the burden of the people

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people with thee, that thou bear *it* not thyself alone.”

God will never force us to serve him. If I do not want to speak for him, he can raise up stones to do so. If I do not want to wash and kiss the Master's feet, somebody will. If I do not want to break my alabaster box of ointment and anoint him, somebody will. If I do not want to be bothered by serving Christ, he will not force me to do so. He does not need me! And he does not need you!

If the honor and privilege God has given us in his service becomes a burden to us and we want to lay it down, he will let us. We can step down from the place of dignity if we want to, and sink into the place where base unbelief is sure to put us. Thus God took the burden away! (Read Numbers 11:16-17 again.)

(Numbers 11:16-17) “And the LORD said unto Moses, Gather unto me seventy men of the elders of Israel, whom thou knowest to be the elders of the people, and officers over them; and bring them unto the tabernacle of the congregation, that they may stand there with thee. (17) And I will come down and talk with thee there: and **I WILL TAKE OF THE SPIRIT WHICH IS UPON THEE, AND WILL PUT IT UPON THEM;** and they shall bear the burden of the people with thee, that thou bear *it* not thyself alone.”

The Lord God has given this assembly a great, great privilege, a high, high honor.

(Ephesians 3:8) “Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints, is this grace given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ;”

(2 Corinthians 4:7) “We have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us.”

Oh, what a blessing! Yet, the blessing is a burden.

- “*The burden of the Word of the Lord!*”
- The Burden of Opposition.
- The Burden of Sacrifice.
- The Burden of Labor.
- The Burden of Being Misunderstood by Those We Dearly Love.

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If the burden gets to the point where it becomes greater to us than the blessing, we can lay it down. But, **when you are tempted to lay it down, remember what happened when the Lord God granted Moses' desire and took away the burden.** The Lord God took the spirit with which he had invested Moses, and the power which had resided in Moses, and divided it among seventy men.

- Nothing was gained.
- No more work was done than before.
- But Moses lost his place of dignity and honor as the leader and judge of the people. — What Moses alone had done before was now done by seventy men.
- God's purpose was not hindered; but his servant was greatly injured!

MOSES' WITHERED

Sixth, when the Lord relieved Moses of his burden he also relieved him of his honor, the blessing of the burden, and Moses withered (Numbers 11:21-23).

(Numbers 11:21-23) “And Moses said, The people, among whom I *am, are* six hundred thousand footmen; and thou hast said, I will give them flesh, that they may eat a whole month. (22) Shall the flocks and the herds be slain for them, to suffice them? or shall all the fish of the sea be gathered together for them, to suffice them? (23) And the LORD said unto Moses, Is the LORD'S hand waxed short? thou shalt see now whether my word shall come to pass unto thee or not.”

The man of great faith, who brought Israel across the Red Sea, when he relinquished his burden, when he sought to retire from the field of service, became a man of great unbelief!

NOTE: Those who do nothing for God expect nothing from God. Those who attempt great things for God expect great things from God!

TROUBLE FOLLOWED

Seventh, after wreaking havoc by his “wise counsel”, Jethro went back to Median and went back to his gods; and Moses was left to live with the mess he had made. (v. 27; Numbers 10:29-30).

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What trouble followed!

(Exodus 18:27) “And Moses let his father-in-law depart; and he went his way into his own land.”

(Numbers 10:29-30) “And Moses said unto Hobab, the son of Raguel the Midianite, Moses' father-in-law, We are journeying unto the place of which the LORD said, I will give it you: come thou with us, and we will do thee good: for the LORD hath spoken good concerning Israel. (30) And he said unto him, I will not go; but I will depart to mine own land, and to my kindred.”

- The trouble with Korah (Numbers 16) began right here!
- Numbers 10:31 – Once Moses hearkened to Jethro's counsel, he groveled before him. — “Come with us Jethro, we need you. You shall be God's eyes to us! God and his people need you!” Jethro said, “Well, if God needs me, I don't need God.”

Jethro (Hobab) preferred his gods to Jehovah. He preferred the comforts of Midian to the troubles of the wilderness. He chose the people of Midian over the people of God. He preferred the pleasures of life in Midian to the blessings of life with God. This is the man whose counsel Moses followed.

APPLICATION

- God has blessed us in this place with great opportunity to serve him. — Our Assembly — Missionaries — CDs, DVDs, Tapes, Television, Books, — The Grace Bulletin — FreeGraceRadio.com — Our Conference.
- The blessings we have do involve a burden.
- If ever we choose to relinquish the burden of the work, we will also choose to relinquish the blessing.

The greatest privilege and the highest honor any man or woman can ever enjoy in this world is the privilege and honor of being allowed to do something for God! Be sure you understand what I am saying. **The Lord God does not need us for anything!** He does not need us to give him anything. He owns the cattle on a thousand hills, and the all the gold in the deep mines of the earth belongs to him. There is no lack on God's part that

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his creatures supply. There is no vacuum in his Being that must be filled by us. We add nothing to the happiness, glory, and majesty of the Almighty! He is independent and self-sufficient. He does not need us! **The solitariness of God is the majesty of God! God does not need man!**

- He created us without our assistance (Genesis 1:26-27).
- He redeemed us without our aide (Galatians 3:13).
- Righteousness is his work alone!
- Atonement is his work alone!
- He saved us without our co-operation (Ephesians 2:1-9). We are his creation. He chose us. We did not choose him. He called us. We did not call him. He came to us. We did not come to him. He found us. We did not find him. He gave us life. We did not give ourselves life. — *“Salvation is of the Lord!”*

Do you understand what I am saying? **God does not need man. He does not need us for anything! Yet, in great, condescending mercy, love and grace, this great and mighty Lord God does use men to accomplish his work in this world.** The holy Lord God permits some men and women, fallen depraved men and women, to do some things for him! Imagine that! What a privilege!

- When God allows a man or a woman to do something for him, he places that person in the position of highest privilege, honor, and favor.
- If God honors you by giving you a work to do for Christ, rejoice in it. Do not murmur and complain. God just might take away the blessing that is such a burden to you.

O may he give us hearts to serve him cheerfully, resolutely, and faithfully for the glory of Christ and the interests of his kingdom. **Do what you can for Christ, for his honor and his glory, honor him, and watch him honor you.**

(Mark 14:3-9) “And being in Bethany in the house of Simon the leper, as he sat at meat, there came a woman having an alabaster box of ointment of spikenard very precious; and she brake the box, and poured *it* on his head. (4) And there were some that had indignation within themselves, and said, Why was this waste of the ointment made? (5) For it might have been sold for more than three hundred pence, and have been given to the poor. And they murmured against her. (6) And Jesus said, Let her alone; why trouble ye her? she hath

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wrought **a good work** on me. (7) For ye have the poor with you always, and whensoever ye will ye may do them good: but me ye have not always. (8) **She hath done what she could**: she is come aforehand **to anoint my body to the burying**. (9) Verily I say unto you, **Wheresoever this gospel shall be preached throughout the whole world, this also that she hath done shall be spoken of for a memorial of her.**”

- This woman wrought a good work
- It was a good work because it was a work done for Christ alone.
- It was a good work because it was a work of faith.
- It was a good work because it involved great, personal sacrifice.
- It was a good work because it was the work at hand and the work she could do.
- I know it was a good work because the Lord Jesus made it a perpetual honor to her.

Illustration: *Faith's Dandelions*

Spirit of God, give me grace to do some good work for God my Savior while I live in this world. **Let me count the burden of the work a blessing, and never the blessing a burden.** O my Heavenly Father, as you promised in blessing Abraham to make him a blessing, make us a blessing to your people, make us a blessing to many in this the day you have given us, for the glory of your dear Son.

Amen.