

Series: Exodus
Title: Faithful Stewards
Text: Exodus 18: 1-27
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Each of God's saints, especially those God has made pastors and teachers, are stewards of the grace of God.

A steward is the manager or overseer of a household to whom the owner of the house has entrusted the management of his house. A steward is responsible to give to those he oversees—the servants and children in the house—the things the owner of the house has provided him.

In some capacity all God's saints are "stewards" of God's grace such as husbands to our wives, fathers and mothers over our children, as older brethren to younger brethren in the church, as elder brothers or sisters in your homes to your younger siblings and so on. So this message applies to each of us called to faith in Christ by God's grace.

Speaking by God the Holy Spirit, the apostle Peter said, "*As every man hath received the gift, even so minister the same one to another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God.*" (1 Pet 4: 1) The apostle Paul said, "*Moreover it is required in stewards, that a man be found faithful.*" (1 Cor 4: 2)

Looking at Moses, we learn some things that we should and should not do if we would be faithful stewards of the manifold grace of God.

Yet, as we look at this, remember, our righteousness and perfection, even of our stewardship, is not by our faithfulness but by Christ the Preeminent Steward.

Hebrews 3:5: Moses verily was faithful in all his house, as a servant,...But Christ as a Son over his own house; whose house are we, if we hold fast [our] confidence [in Christ] firm unto the end.

In Exodus 18, Moses and the children of Israel are camped in Rephidim at "*the mount of God.*" The text begins with Jethro, Moses' father-in-law, bringing his wife Zipporah and his two sons, Gershom and Eliezer, back to him.

PART WITH HINDRANCES

Exodus 18:1: 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, 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.

If we would be faithful stewards then we must part with anything that will hinder us from the work God has put in our hands.

In verse 2, we find "*Jethro, Moses' father in law, bringing Zipporah, Moses' wife, after he had sent her back.*" This occurred in Exodus 4: 24-26. Moses had not circumcised one of his sons. Therefore, God sought to kill Moses. So Moses submitted to God. Zipporah was required to perform the ordinance. But

Zipporah was angry about it and she let Moses know it. Therefore, seeing that Zipporah would be an hindrance to him in the work God had called him to do in Egypt, Moses temporarily “*sent her back*” to her father’s house, along with his two sons. Then Moses went on to Egypt to do the work God had called him to do.

If we would be faithful to God then we must part with anything that will hinder us in the work God has given us to do. This is one reason a believer must never marry an unbeliever. An unbelieving spouse will be a constant hindrance to your faithfulness to God. But this applies, not just to a spouse, but to anything that will hinder us in being faithful stewards to God. Moses send back his wife, showing us that we must set aside even that which is dearest to us.

Yet, as faithful as Moses was in this, Christ the Son of God, was his righteousness in parting with hindrances. Temporarily, Christ set aside his glory and took flesh; made himself of no reputation and took the form of a servant. Then when it came time to enter his public ministry, he parted with his earthly parents because they would hinder his work. On one occasion, when preaching, they came saying “*Behold, thy mother and thy brethren are [outside] desiring to speak with thee.*” Did he let it hinder him from preaching? “*But he answered, who is my mother? And who are my brethren? And he stretched forth his hand toward his disciples, and said, “Behold my mother and my brethren! For whosoever shall do the will of my Father in heaven, the same is my brother, and sister, and mother.”* (Mt 12: 47-50) Christ is our perfection even in letting nothing hinder us from our stewardship!

Still, as we endeavor to be faithful stewards remember that God honors those who honor him. God’s book promises us that we will never lose out by honoring God in parting with that which will hinder us in the work God has given us to do for the cause of Christ. God honored Moses’ faithfulness a year after Moses sent his wife and children back to Jethro’s house by causing his father-in-law to bring his wife and children to him. Moses honored God and God honored Moses.

Also, in this, we see a picture of God honoring his faithful steward by bringing his people to Christ by his sovereign grace through the gospel we promote—“*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.*” This is what God does through his faithful stewards through the preaching of the gospel. If we never let anything hinder us from faithfully bearing witness of God our Savior, God will use us to make his lost elect hear of what God has done for his people in delivering us out of bondage. God did not call Jethro spiritually. But this pictures God bringing his lost sheep to hear and rejoice in Christ. Those Christ reconciled unto God by his blood are made to hear the good news. Through the gospel, Christ’s bride and children are brought to him like as Moses’ bride and sons were brought to Moses.

We see the gospel typified in their names—*Zipporah* was a Midianite, an Ethiopian (Numbers 12:1) meaning she was black, sinful, a heathen from a cursed race. That is a picture of all who God saves from our sins. *Gershom* means a stranger in a strange land. That is what God makes his sons when he gives us faith in Christ. We are strangers and pilgrims in this earth. *Eliezer* means God is my Help, my Salvation. That is what God makes his sons confess when he brings us to faith in Christ.

So by Moses parting with every hindrance and faithfully serving God, God honored his servant, reconciling Moses’ family to him. And we get a picture of God doing so in spirit and truth through his faithful stewards. “*Wherefore the LORD God of Israel saith, ...them that honour me I will honour, and they that despise me shall be lightly esteemed.*” (1Sa 2:30) Brethren, part with anything that will hinder your stewardship.

GIVE GOD ALL GLORY

Exodus 18: 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. 9: 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 bread with Moses' father-in-law before God.

If we would be faithful to God then we must give God all the glory as we declare the wonderful works of God in salvation. Moses told his father in law all that the LORD had done. He did not speak of any works of his own, only what the LORD had done.

As Moses rehearsed the LORD's works to Jethro, Moses declared how God provided all the firstborn in Egypt a lamb to die in their place and passed over them when he saw the blood. (Ch. 12-14). We must faithfully declare Christ our Passover who laid down his life as Substitute of his people for whose cause God passes over the believer.

Then Moses declared how God provided Israel riches by causing the Egyptians to give their possessions to them. We must faithfully declare how God has provided his people the unsearchable riches of Christ's wisdom, righteousness, sanctification and redemption.

No doubt Moses declared how God redeemed them out of Egypt, destroying all their enemies in the Red Sea. We must faithfully preach Christ our Redeemer in whom all God's elect were baptized in the Red sea of his blood and have been made to sing the song of redemption.

Next, Moses surely declared how God provided the tree which sweetened the bitter waters. We must declare Jehovah Raphi-- "*The Lord that healeth Thee!*" (Ex 15: 26)

Then Moses would have declared how God provided manna from heaven and sabbath rest. We must declare Christ the Bread of Life who is also our Sabbath rest from all vain works! (Ex 16)

With great delight, Moses surely declared how God provided water from the smitten rock. We must declare Christ by whose stripes we are healed. Through his blood we are born-again of the Holy Spirit which is the water given from Christ our Rock. (Ex 17)

Lastly, Moses would have declared how God delivered them from Amalek. We must exalt Jehovah-Nissi, *the LORD our Banner* who overthrows our sinful flesh (Ex 17: 8-16).

Yet, even in preaching the gospel, Christ was Moses righteousness and he is ours, too! Christ honored the Father who sent him by preaching only the doctrine God the Father sent him to preach. He said, "*My doctrine is not mine but his that sent me.*" (Jn 7: 16) He preached in perfect faithfulness giving God all the glory. Brethren, I do not look to my preaching to save me. I mar this by my sin, too. Christ is my perfection even in preaching the gospel.

Again, Jethro was not saved. But we have a picture beginning in verse 9 of what God does when he honors his faithful steward by bringing our hearers to rejoice in Christ. As we declare God's wonderful works, God brings his people to rejoice in God's goodness and to exalt the Lord God as the greatest! Those God draws come to God through faith in Christ, pictured in Jethro's offerings. Then they rejoice in sweet fellowship with our brethren.

If we would be faithful stewards then we must speak “*not with excellency of speech or of wisdom, declaring [unto others] the testimony of God. [but be] determined not to know any thing among [them] save Jesus Christ, and him crucified.*” (1Co 2:1-2)

GIVE OURSELVES TO THE WORK

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.

If we would be faithful stewards of God’s grace then we must give ourselves to do whatever God has put in our hands for the furtherance of the gospel and the good of our brethren.

Remember, Moses had not seen his wife and children in over a year. But where do we find Moses the very next morning? He was right back doing what God had given him the honor to do. He judged the people from morning till evening.

This is very timely for me. The week I prepared this message, my father-in-law, sister-in-law, nephew and niece came to visit. So let me remind you of this from fresh experience. When family comes into town we are prone to think, “What will they think *of me* unless I take off work and miss services to spend time with them?” Instead, we should think, “What will they think *of my God*, if I do?”

Brethren, if we truly love our family and friends then worship and serve God faithfully. And remember, Christ is our Perfect Righteousness in this also. When Joseph and Mary came and found him in the temple teaching those old scholars, he said to his earthly parents, “*I must be about my father’s business.*” (Lu 2:49) Oh, believer, rejoice! Christ is our Righteousness even in giving ourselves to the work God has given us to do.

NEVER FOLLOW CARNAL COUNSEL AND REASON

Exodus 18: 14: And when Moses’ father in law saw all that he did to the people, he said, What is this thing that thou doest to the people? why sittest thou thyself alone, and all the people stand by thee from morning unto even? 15: And Moses said unto his father in law, Because the people come unto me to enquire 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. 17: And Moses’ father in law said unto him, The thing that thou doest *is* not good. 18: 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. 19: Harken now unto my voice, I will give thee counsel, and God shall be with thee: Be thou for the people to God-ward, that thou mayest bring the causes unto God: 20: And thou shalt teach them ordinances and laws, and shalt shew them the way wherein they must walk, and the work that they must do. 21: Moreover thou shalt provide out of all the people able men, such as fear God, men of truth, hating covetousness; and place *such* over them, *to be* rulers of thousands, *and* rulers of hundreds, rulers of fifties, and rulers of tens: 22: And let them judge the people at all seasons: and it shall be, *that* every great matter they shall bring unto thee, but every small matter they shall judge: so shall it be easier for thyself, and they shall bear *the burden* with thee. 23: If thou shalt do this thing, and God command thee *so*, then thou shalt be able to endure, and all this people shall also go to their place in peace. 24: So Moses hearkened to the voice of his father in law, and did all that he had said.

If we would be faithful stewards of the manifold grace of God then we must never follow carnal counsel and carnal reason.

This is one place it appears Moses made a mistake. God had given Moses great honor by giving Moses the privilege to be the judge and minister of the one church of God in the whole world. What great, great honor God had given to Moses. Moses could say what the apostle Paul said, *“Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints, is this grace given, that I should preach among the Gentile of Christ.”* (Eph 3: 8)

Brethren, whatever God has given you to do for his people, no matter how small, we ought to consider it the greatest of all honors, the greatest privilege we could possibly be given, because it is!

Yet, we should never heed counsel in spiritual things from carnal men and never do anything from carnal principles. Jethro was an unregenerate, heathen, idolater. He appealed to Moses carnal flesh—*“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.”* All of that would be true if God’s people had to do anything in our own strength. We cannot even believe in our strength, much less persevere in faith. But God promised to be Moses strength. In the burning bush, when Christ called Moses, Moses said, *“Who am I, that I should go to Pharaoh, and that I should bring forth the children of Israel out of Egypt?”* *“And [Christ] said, Certainly I will be with thee; and this shall be a token unto thee, that I have sent thee: When thou hast brought forth the people out of Egypt, ye shall serve God upon this mountain.”* (Ex 3: 11-12) The thing that made Moses error so grave is that Moses made that mistake standing right back at the very mountain, with the children of Israel just as the Lord promised. Christ used Moses (and uses you and me) because Christ says, *“My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness.”* (2 Cor 12: 9)

Yet, Jethro said, *“Hearken now unto my voice, I will give thee counsel, and God shall be with thee.”* But God was already with Moses. Jethro told Moses to choose out men to judge lesser cases at various levels and to send only the hard cases to Moses for this reason *“so shall it be easier for thyself.”* Brethren, do nothing in the kingdom of God on the carnal principle of making it easier on yourself! By sending his only Son, did God our Father do what was easier on himself? What about when Christ took flesh? When he bore our sin? When he bore the fury of God’s wrath for his people? If Christ had done what was easier on himself we would have no salvation.

Everything a child of God does in the kingdom of God must be determined by the Word of God, the will of God, the glory of God and the good of God’s people.

Let us learn this truth. From Egypt up to this point, when Moses depended on the LORD to be his strength, Moses did everything God sent him to do. But when Moses considered what Jethro said then he considered how hard the work was and he gave in. A few days ago, I heard a woman tell how she married her husband when she was young. Things went fine for a while. Then about six years in, she began thinking about all the things she wanted to do in life. When she began thinking of those things, she decided she would never be able to do those things with this husband. It was then that being married to him became more than she could bear and she left. When Jethro turned Moses to himself away from God, and Moses began considering himself rather than the word of God, the will of God, the glory of God and the people of God, the work became too heavy and he stopped. Moses was thinking in his heart, what he said on another occasion,

Numbers 11:11: 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?.

Brethren, as a pastor, husband, father and friend, every time I have found the burden too heavy, it was because I was thinking of myself. Every single time! I guarantee the same is true of you! Does God ever

tell his people to look to ourselves, to our strength, to work we have done, or to a burden we carry? Never! What does he constantly tell us to do?

Hebrews 12: 1:...let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset *us*, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, 2: Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of *our* faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame,...3 For consider him that endured such contradiction of sinners against himself, lest [looking to yourself] ye be wearied and faint in your minds. 4: Ye have not yet resisted unto blood, striving against sin.

1 Corinthians 16: 13: Watch ye, stand fast in the faith, quit you like men, be strong.

How can we do that? When the load gets heavy look to the cross and it will lighten!

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

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.

Learn one more thing on this point, if we do not want the honor God has given us, God will take it away and give it to someone else. In Numbers 11 when Moses complained, the LORD told Moses to choose 70 men and the LORD said,

Numbers 11:17:...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.

God will never force us to serve him. He does not need us. We need him! God's purpose and work will be carried out. He will simply use someone else to do it. But it will cause us to go backwards in unbelief. In Numbers we find this man who had seen all that God had done for Israel became weak in unbelief when he considered himself,

Numbers 11:21: 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.

Also, when we take carnal counsel or follow carnal reason, we may make it easy for ourselves temporarily but we usually make more trouble for ourselves down the road. Making these men judges to help him is where Moses' problem with Korah began. (Nu 16) Our unbelief and unfaithfulness will never hinder God's work but it will hinder us.

Knowing sin is mixed with our best efforts at never taking carnal counsel or looking to carnal reason, we are thankful to know that Christ is our Righteousness in this, too! When Christ told his apostles he was about to go to the cross. Peter rebuked him with carnal counsel, "*Be it far from thee Lord: this shall not be unto thee!*" Christ loved Peter. But Peter's rebuke was carnal. So Christ said to Peter, "*Get thee behind me Satan: thou art an offense to me: for thou savorest not the things that be of God, but those that be of men*" (Mt 16: 22-23). It is by Christ's perfect faithfulness that God, in the new testament, never mentions any of this unbelief and unfaithfulness in Moses. Under the new covenant of grace, robed in Christ's perfection, God only says, "*Verily, Moses was faithful in all his house!*" (Heb 3: 5) So it is with you and I who believe on Christ!

What a privilege that God would allow us to do anything for him! May God give us grace to do the things he teaches us in the chapter. And may we look upon that which God gives us to do like Paul did when he said, *“As we were allowed of God to be put in trust with the gospel, even so we speak; not as pleasing men, but God, which trieth our hearts.”* (1 Thess 2: 4)

Amen!