

# Blessing and Cursing

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[ 0 : 00 ] Well, good morning, everyone. It is great to be with you this morning. My name is Jim Saladin. For those of you who don't know me, I usually spend my time in the evening congregation, and it's been my pleasure to serve with that congregation for the last nine months and to be part of that congregation for some time before that.

If you would open up your Bibles to Exodus chapter 18, we're going to focus on, and that's page 63 in the Old Testament section of your pew Bible.

If you've looked at your parish life notes yet, I hope you won't do that right now, but on the front you will see a letter from David about a conference that a group of us, about 16 of us from St. John's, attended this past week.

I was privileged to be part of that group. And we had a wonderful time. Particularly, we had a wonderful time with, in a sense, St. John's extended family.

There's something wonderful when you are able to fellowship with other biblically Orthodox Anglicans from across the country and some from around the world.

[ 1 : 16 ] Over the next few weeks, we'll be talking more about what happened at that conference. There was an offer of Episcopal oversight that was made to parishes like ours, and we will be discussing that option over the next few months.

But one of the things that became clear in the conference, and in this time where there is upheaval and change and transition within the Anglican Communion and across the Western Church, across denominations, is that in times like this, it's a time for us to begin asking some of the fundamental questions about who we are, what it means to be the church, what is it that God has called the church to be about, what is it and how is it that we are to relate to the world around us, what is the distinctive contribution that the church, the body of Christ, is to make within this world.

They're crucial questions, they're fundamental questions, and they're questions that we must ask. And how we answer those questions will have great consequence for us as a congregation.

It will determine what kind of decisions we make, how we spend our time and our energy and our money. We've been walking through the book of Exodus over these last few months, and one of the themes that develops through the first two books of the Bible, in Genesis and in Exodus, is the theme of Israel's uniqueness.

There is something strange, peculiar, unique, fascinating, about this nation that God is forming and establishing in these first two books of the Bible.

[ 3 : 08 ] And as the story unfolds, in Genesis and then in Exodus in particular, it begins to become clear that the fundamental uniqueness of Israel is not found in their moral purity.

They're not that morally pure. It's certainly not in their virtue. They're complainers the entire time through. It's not in their political might, because they're slaves.

And they don't even have enough money in the wilderness or resource to provide food for themselves. Their fundamental identity, their distinction, is the fact that God chose to deliver them. They were slaves in Egypt, without power, without freedom, without hope, and yet God reached down with His mighty hand, grabbed them, ripped them out of Egypt, and brought them to freedom. And it's this story that becomes the thing that shapes their uniqueness as a nation. Israel's distinction is their deliverance.

[ 4 : 13 ] And the story in Exodus, up until this point, has simply been the story of God exerting that deliverance. But chapter 18 is a bit of a switch.

In chapter 18, we come to a crucial moment. God has rescued and delivered Israel. God has made them a free nation. But now what? What does it look like for Israel's, what does it look like for Israel to live out their distinctive identity?

What does it mean to live out their deliverance? If deliverance is Israel's distinctive identity, how shall they live that out now that they're free? And in chapter 18, we get a glimpse, a kind of taste, of what it means to live in the light of God's deliverance.

The people of God, what we will find, the people of God, are to share the deliverance that they receive. They're not to keep it to themselves. And they're to share it in two directions. They're to share it outwardly with those who have not experienced that deliverance. People outside Israel. And secondly, they are to share it amongst themselves in such a way that they become a people for whom the deliverance that God gave them becomes the central paradigm of their lives. [ 5 : 45 ] And it's as Israel shares this deliverance with the outside world and with each other that they become the blessing that God has always intended them to be within this world. And so I want to look at these two halves to this chapter.

First, we're going to see how Moses shares the deliverance with someone outside Israel. And then we'll see how that person, Jethro, advises Israel to become a people that share God's deliverance one with another.

Now, Exodus 18 begins with a family reunion. Moses has been away on a very long business trip and quite eventful.

You remember that when Moses first came out of Egypt, he was a refugee. He was a fugitive, actually. And he went into the desert and he found a family, Jethro's family. He began working for Jethro and married his daughter, which was apparently a good career move. But then Moses, 40 years later, he saw a bush that was on fire and yet not consumed. [ 6 : 55 ] And that sent him by the command of God onto a great adventure. And Jethro, his father-in-law, blessed Moses as he went out. And now, in chapter 18, this is the first time they've gotten back together.

And so they have a lot to catch up on. Everything has changed. Moses left, and he was a simple shepherd. A simple shepherd of sheep. He comes back and he's still a shepherd, but wow, it's a different set of sheep.

He's no longer just a son-in-law employee. He's the leader. He's a mighty prophet of a great nation. And you would expect, or I would expect, that when Moses and Jethro come back together, that Moses would be talking about himself.

Jethro, things have changed. Did you know what this staff can do? I mean, it's amazing. Red sea and all.

That's what I would have expected, but that's not what Moses does. He doesn't talk about himself at all. He talks about God. And he talks about God's deliverance.

[ 8 : 02 ] Look at verse 8. Then Moses told his father-in-law all that the Lord had done to Pharaoh and to the Egyptians for Israel's sake, all the hardship that had come upon them in the way and how the Lord had delivered them.

Do you notice? He doesn't tell the story even from his own perspective. He's not talking about himself. He talks about God and about God's deliverance.

About the Lord's deliverance. In chapter 9 of Exodus, God says a very important thing. It's in verse 16 of chapter 9.

God says, I raised up Pharaoh. I called Israel out of Egypt for this purpose, that my name might be proclaimed in all the earth.

And that's precisely what Moses is doing in this passage. He's proclaiming God's name. But then at this point, the text, the reader of this text, if you've read through Exodus, you get to this point and you're asking the question, how is Jethro going to respond?

[ 9 : 19 ] Because he's not an Israelite. And thus far, there haven't been any non-Israelites who heard this as good news. We read about the Amalekites.

They knew that Israel had come out of Egypt. But it wasn't good news. It was really threatening. And so they come and they make war against Israel.

And so far, that's been the pattern. But it's Jethro is the first non-Israelite, the first Gentile, who hears this message and hears it for the good news that it is.

Look at verse 9. And Jethro rejoiced for all the good that the Lord had done to Israel in that he had delivered them out of the hand of the Egyptians.

Jethro was a religious guy. And it seems from verse 1 that he had heard prior to this that something amazing was happening in Israel.

[10:22] That Israel's God was doing something astonishing. Jethro was a priest. He was a religious pro. He was a professional at the whole thing. He knew all about gods of the ancient Near East.

But the sort of gods that he had always worshipped were nothing like what he was hearing coming out of Israel. It was totally different. The gods that he had worshipped up until this point were the sort of gods that Psalm 115 describes.

They're silver and they're gold. They're the work of human hands. They have mouths but they do not speak. They have eyes but they do not see.

They have ears but they cannot hear. They have noses but they don't smell anything. They have hands but they can't feel. In a word Jethro's gods were a lie.

But when he hears Moses speak Jethro hears for the first time he begins to grasp for the first time the truth that there's a living God in Israel.

[11:28] And as the truth of God's deliverance enters Jethro's ears his heart is filled with delight. His heart is filled with the same joy that Israel knew when it passed through the Red Sea.

As he heard the words of redemption and deliverance he began to enter into the reality of deliverance. And just as Israel when they walked through the Red Sea they broke forth in song afterwards because they couldn't do anything else.

So Jethro in verse 10 says blessed be the Lord who's delivered you out of the hands of the Egyptians out of the hands of Pharaoh and has delivered the people from under the hand of the Egyptians.

Now I know great confession now I know that the Lord is greater than all gods. isn't that a wonderful song that Jethro sings?

It's an expression of the joy it's an expression of the delight of the human heart when the human heart gains that first glimpse of deliverance that first glimpse of knowing God that first glimpse of heaven.

[12:49] You see Jethro didn't know it but he was made for God's glory and when he heard of God's deliverance he knew the joy of one who is just beginning to fulfill the central purpose of his life.

It's an astonishing transformation. But then Jethro does something funny. He goes and he grabs the sacrifice and he brings it back he offers the sacrifice and he sits down to have a meal. Now this is not just any old dinner. This is a meal with profound significance. You see Jethro had received the deliverance that Israel had received.

He now shares the God that Israel has. He now has the same distinction as Israel and so it only makes sense for him to enter in to fellowship with Israel.

He enters into communion with Israel. In verse 12 he sits down and he has a meal and notice that it's a meal held with the elders of Israel before the presence of God.

[14:07] It's a picture. It's a beautiful picture of how at the end of the age all nations are going to be gathered together to dine with God in perfect communion in perfect communion with God and with one another.

And it gives us an insight as to how we are to understand the biblical notion of communion. You see in the scriptures communion is not produced first and foremost by organizational structures.

It's not produced first and foremost at all by ethnicity even in the Old Testament or by family ties. It's not produced by common history or heritage. Communion is the result of sharing God's deliverance. Communion is a union produced by the gospel. You see this is what it means for Israel to be a blessing to the world.

because it shares as Moses did the deliverance it has experienced with the outside world and invites them in. But then there's a second half of this chapter.

[15:28] Not only is Israel to share the deliverance they have received outwardly with those outside, but they are also supposed to share the deliverance within their community, one with another.

And that's what the second half of the chapter is about. next day, Jethro gets up in the morning and he decides to see his son-in-law in action, see if all the things he's been told is true, if he really is as great a guy as it seems.

And he goes out there and he watches Moses operate. And about halfway through the day, he begins to shake and say, Moses, Moses, Moses, Moses, what are you doing?

What are you doing? What he sees is a huge gathering of people crushing in around Moses, trying to get him to solve all their conflicts. And as they do, Moses is teaching them the statutes of God and the word of God.

At this point, there was no text widely available. All roads led to Moses. Moses. And Jethro looks at this bureaucratic nightmare and he says, Moses, get a clue, what are you doing?

[16:41] And Moses responds, well, verse 15, the people come to me to inquire of God. When they have a dispute, they come to me and I decide between one person and another and importantly, I make known to them the statutes of God and his laws.

You see, Moses knew that if Israel was to have any significant role in the world, if Israel was to continue with its identity, it was going to have to be inwardly saturated with God's word.

It was going to have to be inwardly saturated with the implications of the deliverance they had experienced. And so he was absolutely right to devote himself to teaching, to training, to coaching the people of God how they're supposed to live now that they've been delivered out of Egypt.

He was absolutely right. But the problem that Jethro saw was that there's no way one person can do it. It's a big country, big nation.

There's no way that one person, one person's ministry is going to be able to saturate the entire people of Israel with God's word. And so Jethro comes up with a great innovation.

[18:03] Common sense. But it's brilliant common sense. Common sense often is. Train up qualified leaders and delegate authority. Look at verse 19.

Now obey my voice and I will give you advice and God be with you. You shall represent the people before God and bring their cases to God and you shall warn them about the statutes and the laws and make them know the way in which they must walk and what they must do.

Moreover, look for able men from all the people, men who fear God, who are trustworthy, who hate a bribe, and place such men over the people as chiefs of thousands, of hundreds, of fifties, and of tens.

Moses was a prophet. The prophet's job is to receive the revelation from God. And then he was to teach God's word to the people. But particularly he was to teach the word to the leaders.

And then the leader's role was to spread out, to be distributed out amongst the people and take God's word to them and apply it in the most practical portions of their lives.

[19:19] It's simple. It's a straightforward plan. It's a brilliant plan. But more importantly than that, this becomes God's revealed plan.

In order that Israel could be shaped, molded into a people who are marked by deliverance. So that God's deliverance and its implications for life become the controlling paradigm in Israel's everyday life.

So, the leaders are to go out and interact with the people and say, guys, guys, hang on, hang on. That thing you're doing, we don't do that.

We're different. Remember, God took us out of Egypt. We used to be slaves. We're not slaves anymore. And God brought us out. And that means that, for instance, we don't worship other gods. So that idol, put it away. Now, similarly, we're not slaves to labor anymore, so we rest on the Sabbath. We're not slaves to sexuality, so we don't commit adultery.

[20:29] And so on and so forth for the commands of God. And they were to apply God's commands so that the reality of deliverance gets into the nitty-gritty of our lives and of their lives.

So that Israel could live as a thoroughly delivered people. So the simple plan was to raise up leaders, put them over smaller groups of people, and that these leaders were to be people who were competent in knowledge and in skill and in character and were able to bring and apply God's word.

Now, let's ratchet it back a little bit. Pause. What does this mean for us? Well, you know that the Exodus was not the final redemption.

It was not the final deliverance. In fact, it wasn't even the main show. It was a rehearsal for the main show. The main show came when Jesus came.

In his ministry and in his life, in his death and in his resurrection and ascension, Jesus procured for us a redemption, a deliverance, that is far greater than anything Israel had ever known.

[21:46] And we, the church, live on the other side of that great deliverance. But our task in the world is the same as Israel's. We, the church, have received God's deliverance.

It's the thing that makes us who we are. God's deliverance defines us. God's deliverance in Christ is our distinctive identity. And if we are to have any significance in the world at all, then our task in the world is to bless the world by sharing Christ's deliverance.

First, we are to share it outwardly with those who are not in the church, who do not know Christ. But secondly, we are also to share it one with another, so that we become a people that are saturated with God's word.

And in this time, when there is uncertainty and transition and change and questions being asked, it's time for us to refocus our attention on the task at hand.

God is calling us to be a people who rehearse again and again God's deliverance one to another. And the strategy for that is that we raise up leaders.

[ 23 : 10 ] Now, you might be able to anticipate the fact that this is our Tidzo Sunday and so the application is pretty straightforward. Although, you should know that that was not planned at all, actually.

You see, God wants a lot of leaders in his church. He doesn't just work through superstars. Do you know that? God wants to bring up a lot of leaders. He wants to spread out a lot of leaders across Canada.

And that's what our Tidzo is all about. It's about training up new clergy and lay leaders and sending them out to preach the word of Christ's deliverance. But we haven't gotten it right if we exclusively talk about our Tidzo here.

Because the application is more than just our Tidzo. It means that God's calling the rest of us to take leadership in sharing God's deliverance one with another.

In all the interactions that we have in the world, outside the church, and within the church. Our families, for instance. Our families are to be schools of God's deliverance.

[ 24 : 25 ] Parents are God's ordained teachers to train up children to live with Christ's deliverance as the central paradigm of life. It means we get to take responsibility for each other in our Bible studies and home groups.

And that some of us are to be leaders in those groups. And the wonderful thing, friends, is as this happens, it's God's intention through the Spirit to shape us to become that peculiar, weird, strange, wonderful place called the church.

A place that's uniquely qualified to share God's deliverance with the world. Because, friends, the world is looking at us and desperately wants to know, is there anything different in that community? Or are they just like us, but they have a funny hobby on Sunday mornings? But if they see something authentic, oh, friends, that is compelling.

They see the gospel in people's lives and in the life of the community. That is our distinction. In these times when we have so much trouble in our denomination and in these next months as we need to make huge decisions.

[ 25 : 56 ] And when it seems at times that our church is out of step, perhaps with the prevailing culture around us, we get to keep our eyes focused on Jesus and on his deliverance.

And we share it. And the wonderful thing is that God is faithful. And he will do that which we cannot do. He is strong where we are weak.

And he will use us, even us, to bless the world, to call people to receive his deliverance. And we'll get to see people come to know that joy, that joy that Jethro knew.

And that is the most compelling mission in the world. world. Let's pray. Let's pray. Let's pray.