

## **MARKS OF A GREAT LEADER EXODUS 18**

### **INTRODUCTION:**

The work of the Lord is always blessed when people with greatness are placed in places of responsibility that require greatness. It is always a sad day when responsibility for a big place of ministry falls on the shoulders of a little person. It is true that the work of God moves forward through the lives of those who serve as leaders.

Any list of the great men of history would have to include the name of Moses. He demonstrated in his years of leadership greatness time after time. Even though the incident reported in our chapter happened relatively early in his ministry with the people of Israel, we can see hints of his greatness even at this point.

This chapter reports the visit of Jethro, the father-in-law of Moses, and the things that happened during that visit. This man was evidently a priest of the Most High God, probably like Melchizedek, who makes an appearance in the book of Genesis. When he came to visit with Moses, bringing with him Zipporah and the two sons of Moses, he used it as an occasion for worship. He led Moses and the elders of Israel in a time of worship of the true and living God. His visit however is best remembered by the advice that he gave to Moses and the manner in which Moses responded to that advice. As he watched Moses responding to the responsibilities that were his day by day, he became concerned about his son-in-law. He realized that Moses was carrying too much of a load, so he gave him a plan to share the load with other trusted leaders in

Israel. This incident is a reminder to us that even though God ordinarily spoke to Moses in the tabernacles or on the mountain, God can also speak to him through a trusted servant. In his case the advice that came through Jethro was just as valid as what Moses heard when he stood at the door to the tabernacle. We see the greatness of this man in the way that he responded to this whole incident.

### **I. RECOGNITION OF THE GREATNESS OF THE WORK.**

One sure mark of men of greatness is that they are able to see the greatness of the task in which they are involved. They have that capacity to see more than just that which they are doing day by day. The father-in-law, Jethro, had the capacity to sense that he was seeing something great when he watched the people of Israel. He declared, "Praise be to the Lord, who rescued you from the hand of the Egyptians and of Pharaoh and who rescued the people from the hand of the Egyptians. Now I know that the Lord is greater than all other gods, for He did this to those who had treated Israel arrogantly." And then later he said to Moses, "The work is too heavy for you; you cannot handle it alone." He realized something of the magnitude of what Moses was involved in.

Moses recognized this. He knew that what God was doing with the children of Israel had eternal significance. He felt the weight of responsibility that rested upon his shoulders as he looked at it in the great scheme of things. He knew himself to be more than just a political leader of a group of slaves that had just escaped Egypt. He knew himself to be a part of something great.

Great men and women have this capacity. They are able to see beyond the task that they are performing day by day. They are able to understand the greatness of the work in which they are involved. None of us will ever fully recognize the greatness of the work we are involved in, but the greater our comprehension of that work the more likely we are to achieve greatness in our lives.

A part of what I am describing is a kingdom perspective. A kingdom perspective is able to look beyond just the local situation and the details that are involved there. A kingdom perspective is able to look at the all encompassing purpose of God and to see themselves in relationship to that purpose. This local church will be blessed if it has men and women with a kingdom perspective. They will be in a position to give the church leadership and that will enable the church to reach greatness. Great churches are built by great pastors and laity. These great pastors and laity are people who have seen the greatness of the task, the kingdom dimension of the task.

## **II. READINESS TO RECEIVE ADVICE.**

Receiving advice or criticism is always a test of character. Most of us do not receive advice or counsel very easily. I am especially referring to those of us who are men. We sense that to receive advice or to listen to criticism is to admit our own limitations. We can learn something from the way Moses responded to Jethro.

When Jethro approached Moses with some words of criticism that were void of condemnation, he found a son-in-law that was ready to listen. Jethro was correct in his evaluation. Moses was trying to do too much. He was acting as though he was the only person that God could use to

lead and to minister to His people. Jethro gave him a plan to address that need. His plan included choosing trustworthy leaders from the company of the tribes and putting them in place over thousands, hundreds and tens. He would break them down administratively so that Moses would be able to manage the affairs that were before him. These trusted leaders were to assume the responsibility for the minor administrative details that came up from day to day. They would bring to Moses only those critical problems for which they did not have the answer. In doing this the response to the needs of the people would be immediate and the servant of God, Moses, would be saved from physical and emotional breakdown.

When Moses heard this advice, he welcomed it. He embraced it and acted upon it. Almost immediately he implemented the advice that he received from his father-in-law.

This is a mark of great leaders. They have a teachable spirit. They are willing to listen and learn. They are in touch with their own limitations. They know that wisdom does not begin and end with them. I have known some persons that I would put into the category of greatness across my years of ministry. I can remember an occasion when the pastor of what was then the largest church in the Southern Baptist Convention was in a meeting with me. In the process of that meeting the thing that impressed me most was his teachableness. He came to the meeting with a note pad and pen and was ready to write down new ideas or suggestions that came out of the process of the meeting. Most every one in the room would have been ready to listen to any counsel or advice that he had to give, but we were all impressed with his readiness to receive counsel and advice. It is a mark of greatness.

Little men feel like they have all the answers to everything. When I was elected as the Executive Director of the Tennessee Baptist Convention, at the next meeting of the Executive Directors from the different states across the nation, I along with some other new Executive Directors went through some initiation at the hands of the older Executive Directors. They had a way of discerning your flaws and holding them up before you. I remember that a younger Executive Director on the night of recognition was given a book entitled, "Three Hundred Questions For The Man Who Has All the Answers." It had become obvious to some of the older and wiser men that this young leader felt that he had all the answers. There was no readiness in him to listen to men who might know more than he. If I gave out his name tonight, you should not be surprised that that attitude caught up with him. He found himself in a position that demanded greatness but all he had to bring to it was his own littleness. The end of all of that was embarrassment for him and the institution that he was leading. Remember that this ability, this readiness to receive advice is a hint of greatness.

### **III. READINESS TO SHARE THE LOAD**

This is another mark of the greatness of this notable leader, Moses. When he received counsel from Jethro, he acted upon it. He did not live by the philosophy that no one can do it as well as I can. Rather he followed the counsel of Jethro and sought out from the tribes leaders from the people. Actually another report of this same incident indicates that the tribes themselves nominated the leaders that were to be used by Moses. They were to be men with evident abilities, men of trustworthy character, men with a genuine walk with God, and men whose motives were pure. These leaders were identified and consecrated to the Lord. Moses freely and

gladly transferred from himself to these leaders responsibility for day to day details of administration among the tribes.

It says something about the character of this man when you see the kind of people that he gathered around him to share his leadership. When you find a man with little people gathered around him, people of questionable character, people whose ethics are doubtful. You can know you are dealing with a little man. Great men attract to themselves men of strength and character. They attract to themselves others who are able to share the load with them. They are not afraid of having strong men in their organization.

This is a mark for all of us to reach for. A pastor needs to be willing to entrust to his staff responsibilities. The staff must be willing to entrust to lay leaders with responsibilities. Lay leaders must be able to call out and challenge others within the organizations to carry responsibilities. This is a distinctive sign of greatness in the work of the Lord.

#### **IV. MAINTENANCE OF YOUR PRIORITIES**

Moses had become somewhat confused in his priorities when Jethro met him. Jethro recognized this weakness in him and challenged him to maintain his priorities. He said, “You must be the people’s representative before God and bring their disputes to him. Teach them the decrees and laws, and show them the way to live and the duties they are to perform but select capable men from all the people- - - men who fear God, trustworthy men who hate dishonest gain and appoint them as officials over thousands, hundreds, fifties and tens.” Jethro understood what should be the priorities from Moses as the leader. He should give priority to prayer, standing before God

pleading for the people. He should give priority to bringing God's solutions to the problems that the people might face. He should give priority to teaching the people the law of God and its implication for their daily lives. He should give priority to being a model of what God wanted them to become. He should give a priority to training other men to share in the responsibilities of giving leadership to the people of God.

It must be acknowledged that there is a mark of greatness in the way Moses recognized these to be his priorities, and the way he was ready to make whatever adjustments were necessary to maintain these as his priority. He restructured everything so that he would have time to do that which he was most capable of doing. In order to maintain this priority he turned over many details of ministry and leadership to these selected representatives from the tribes.

Great men excel in maintaining their priorities. They are able to keep from being diverted from or confused about the main thing that they are responsible for. As Dr. Bill Pinson reminded our staff so often when I worked with the Baptist General Convention of Texas, they have a way of keeping the main thing as the main thing. Little people have a way of letting little things become the main thing.

In all of our discussion of spiritual gifts this fall, this is a part of what we are addressing. There is a recognition on my part and on the part of the staff that God has called us together in this place, that none of us nor all of us are capable of doing all that needs to be done at First Baptist Church the task, the burden is greater than your staff. The only way we will ever accomplish the mission God has given us is for many of you to accept responsibilities. We pray that you will discover

your spiritual giftedness, and be willing to accept responsibility in the body for a place of ministry. For some of you this will involve accepting places of leadership. For others it will involve accepting a place of service. In the scheme of things it may seem that the leader of a thousand is more important than the leader of ten. But the reality is that the leader of the ten may actually contribute more to the success of the movement than the leader of the thousand. If the leaders of the ten do not measure up to their responsibilities, then the leaders of the thousands will be nullified.

Have you found your place of responsibility? If you have I pray that you will have about you that greatness of character that will match the responsibility that God has given to you. Give yourself a little examination. Do you recognize the greatness of the work in which we are involved? Are you ready to receive advice? Are you ready to share the load with others? Are you maintaining your spiritual priorities? If you can give a positive answer to these four questions, then there may well be the hints of greatness already present in your life. May God bring all of us to kingdom greatness for the sake of His work.