



THE WISE COUNSEL OF GOD'S GRACE

Exodus 18:13-27

There's a story in Exodus 18 that I think gives us some help in understanding why we make so much of two particular ministries in this church—the ministry of small groups and the ministry of the Word of God. These aren't the only ministries we emphasize, but certainly they're among the most important.

When I'm talking about the Word of God, I'm talking about the ministry of the Word—reading it, studying it, teaching it, preaching it, and receiving it when it's taught and preached. With regard to the Word, we get some wise counsel in Exodus 18 that Moses' father-in-law, Jethro, gave to him when he came to pay Moses a visit. I'm going to begin reading at verse 13 in Exodus 18:

The next day Moses sat to judge the people, and the people stood around Moses from morning till evening. When Moses' father-in-law saw all that he was doing for the people, he said, "What is this that you are doing for the people? Why do you sit alone, and all the people stand around you from morning till evening?" And Moses said to his father-in-law, "Because 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 I make them know the statutes of God and his laws." Moses' father-in-law said to him, "What you are doing is not good. You and the people with you will certainly wear yourselves out, for the thing is too heavy for you. You are not able to do it alone. Now obey my voice; 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 and hate a bribe, and place such men over the people as chiefs of thousands, of hundreds, of fifties, and of tens. And let them judge the people at all times. Every great matter they shall bring to you, but any small matter they shall decide themselves. So it will be easier for you, and they will bear the burden with you. If you do this, God will direct you, you will be able to endure, and all this people also will go to their place in peace.

So Moses listened to the voice of his father-in-law and did all that he had said. Moses chose able men out of all Israel and made them heads over the people, chiefs of thousands, of hundreds, of fifties, and of tens. And they judged the people at all times. Any hard case they brought to Moses, but any small matter they decided themselves. Then Moses let his father-in-law depart, and he went away to his own country." (Exodus 18:13-27)

Now, before we jump into fleshing out how we see those two ministries—the ministry of small groups and the ministry of the Word—in this passage of Scripture, I want you to understand something. While we note that the counsel that's given here comes through

Jethro, Moses' father-in-law, we need to understand this point: this is the will of God. This is God's counsel. So whatever it is we unpack in this passage of Scripture, we need to understand that.

Did you notice that Jethro framed his counsel with the same bookends? He said in verse 19, *"Now obey my voice; I will give you advice, and God be with you!"* And then if you come down to verse 23 on the other side of his counsel, *"If you do this, God will direct you, you will be able to endure, and all this people also will go to their place in peace."* Jethro wanted to emphasize that he understood that the advice that he was giving Moses about whatever it is that's going on in this passage of Scripture was actually coming from God. This is God's gracious will and provision for his people in two particular ways. The first one is what D. A. Cason refers to as common grace in his devotional book, *For the Love of God*. And that's where we need to start in this passage, because there is teaching here about God's common grace.

Common Grace

Now, I want to make sure that we understand what common grace is. It's written on your worship guide. You can look up here at the screen. When we talk about common grace, we're talking about the grace that God makes available to all people, without distinction between one person and another, believers or unbelievers. That's common grace. Everybody gets to play. This is not reserved for the church. It's not reserved for Christians. This is just a gracious manifestation of God in different areas of life that everybody gets to benefit from.

Now, let me give you some examples of common grace. One example would be the continuing care that God gives for His physical creation in sustaining it. Another aspect of common grace would be how He preserves the conscience of man with regard to determining right from wrong. Now, I'm not saying that all of your kids understand right from wrong automatically, or that everybody on the planet does, but generally among mankind, even among unbelievers, there is a sense of certain things being right and certain things being wrong. And that is a manifestation of God's common grace.

Another manifestation of common grace is God's restraint of evil that keeps us from disintegrating into an ungovernable and intolerable society. That is a manifestation of God's common grace, regardless of whether you're a Christian or not, whether you're good or bad, whether you're evil or righteous. You are the beneficiary of the common grace of God.

Another manifestation of God's common grace is the help that He gives to us to live together as a people in a cooperative, efficient, and orderly manner. And that is what we have going on right here in Exodus 18. Jethro brings Moses' family and visits him while Israel is encamped at the foot of Mt. Sinai in the wilderness. Jethro observes how Moses is shepherding the people. Jethro gets up in the morning and he notices that Moses is sitting there on some kind of judgment seat in a central location, and all the people are trying to get to the front of the line. The Bible says that they were bringing Moses disputes and all kinds of questions. And so what does Jethro say? Well, after he observes this, he asks Moses what he's doing. Moses explains to him what he's doing. And then Jethro says this in verse 17, *"What you are doing is not good."* Translation: "Moses, this is a really bad plan that you've got working here." "Why?" Well, verse 18 says, *"You and the people with you will certainly wear yourselves out ..."*

Jethro's assessment is that this is a dysfunctional plan, so he just gives Moses some practical advice for how to deal with these people and how to shepherd them better—how to minister to them better. And he becomes a vehicle of God's common grace. And it's an incredible manifestation of essentially some common sense that works.

Matt Mason, our worship pastor, and I were talking about this a few days ago and he had some great insight about it. He said, "You know, this is like Jethro showed up out there and said, 'Hey, Moses, thanks for writing Genesis and Exodus and Leviticus and Numbers and Deuteronomy, but bro, you need to get organized.'" And that's essentially what it is. Moses wrote the first five books in the Bible (books that were inspired by God), but the problem here was not in that realm. The problem was that he had a bad organizational plan. And Jethro speaks into that. By the way, there's just a little side lesson in that. Sometimes we're looking for answers up in the heavenlies, some deep meaning or deep spiritual thing, and actually the answer to our problem and our issue is just some common sense—common sense that would be applied to anybody's life. We just need to act on it and then do it.

Notice that Jethro doesn't show up out there calling for a day of prayer and fasting. He does not tell Moses, "You need to bring in a ministry consultant." He doesn't say, "We need to organize a committee here and get them to study the issue and bring back a report." He just says, "Moses, you need a better organizational plan," and Jethro speaks into his life some common sense—the common grace of God that essentially could be applied to just about any organization, religious or secular, on the planet, and it would help them to be able to sustain their leaders longer and also give their constituents what they are supposed to be giving them.

Share the Work

I want you to look at this common grace of God as it's applied to the people of God in this situation. Notice, God gives grace to share the work. That's what Jethro tells them to do in verse 18, and then he comes back in verse 20 and says, "*You and the people with you will certainly wear yourselves out, for the thing is too heavy for you. You are not able to do it alone.*" And then he says, " ... *they will bear the burden with you*" (22). The common grace of God here is just the ability to share the work, to share the load, to spread the wealth, and that's what Moses does.

Enlist the Leaders

Now, secondly, the grace of God is here to enlist the leaders to help with this task. And that's what you see in verse 21: " ... *look for able men from all the people.*" There are characteristics here of men who fear God and who are trustworthy. They hate a bribe (21), which is important because of the kind of ministry that they were going to be giving. You couldn't afford to put guys in that position that would take a bribe under the table and tell a certain party what they wanted to hear. Jethro suggests to Moses, "You've got guys in this congregation that are able to help you. They're qualified. They have the ability to do this and you need to enlist them." God gives grace for doing that.

Organize the People

Then God gives grace to organize the people. In verse 21 he begins to flesh out for them what this looks like in an organizational strategy, and he says to organize the people all the way down to groups of ten. Why? Because the whole issue here is to keep the people from getting frustrated because they never get to the front of the line—they never get their case heard, they never get their need met. The wisdom of God through Jethro told Moses to organize down to such a degree that everyone involved is able to be heard and to have their needs met. Though it's not the only reason, this is why we do what we do with small groups and why we make so much of it. This is why we harp on this all the time. This is why we

don't want to see anybody who's not in a small group. It's why we keep emphasizing the word "small." We want to encourage groups to be of the size, or at least to be organized within their larger group, down to levels like this so that nobody falls through the cracks, and so that our leaders can lead us for a long time without getting burned out.

And I want to affirm you, Brook Hills, I want to affirm you in the value that you've placed on this: the way you've responded to this, the effort that you make to do this as leaders, as well as those who are being led in small groups, and I want to help you to see why we do this. And here is one of the reasons: because it's just common sense. This is not rocket science here. It is a doable, workable plan that is aimed at sustaining leaders and giving people the grace that they need.

Leaders that Last

Jethro says that if you do these three things—sharing work together, enlisting leaders, organizing the people—you'll produce two results. The first result is leaders that last.

People at Peace

The second result of Jethro's counsel is people at peace. That's what you see in verse 23: *"If you do this, God will direct you, you will be able to endure, and all this people also will go to their place in peace."* That's why we do this.

Now, if I could just say a word to those of you who have resisted joining a small group—maybe you've found yourself saying, "I don't need that—I grew up in Sunday School, so I've been through all those lessons, and I kind of like coming to the worship gatherings and hearing the messages and singing and being a part of the good music. But I really don't have to join a small group." One of the things that I would want you to see is that this is not as simple as thinking you don't want to be a part of a particular program in the church. Here's what I want you to see: this is a manifestation of the common grace of God; this is His idea and this is His plan (certainly a plan that could be applied to any number of organizations, religious or secular) But if God is making sure that this concept is applied to the community of faith for reasons that are obvious, then when you and I push back against that and we say 'no,' do you understand that we are pushing back against the grace of God? We're saying, "I've got a better idea for my life."

I want to encourage those of you that are here today that find yourself in that place, and have not been connected to a small group, to hear the Word of the Lord. Don't hear a ministry program. Hear the Word of the Lord for the commonsense advice that is given here in Exodus 18 to share the work and enlist the leaders and organize the people—all to the end that our leaders would last a long time and wouldn't burn out, and our people, including you, would be able to be at peace because you're able to receive the ministry that God has for you in this way of organizing. This is the thing that's so overlooked sometimes—you can be a part of *giving* the ministry that needs to be given to people through this ministry organization. So we see the common grace of God that is given in this type of ministry organization.

It's at this point that those of you who are tracking with the Bible reading plan are asking, "Is that the only reason that this passage is in the Bible?" Is the lesson of the common grace of God the reason that this almost parenthetical story in Exodus 18 finds its way into the early stages of the Exodus narrative of God bringing the children of Israel out of Egypt and taking them to the Promised Land? We've got to ask that question. Is the purpose of this story simply to get an administrative and leadership plan that we could probably find in any number of articles in Forbes Magazine or Fortune 500, or maybe in the most recent

version of the leadership training manuals of a number of corporations, like Mary Kay Cosmetics or Amway—is this reason we have this in the Bible?

We have to remember that God did not give us the Bible primarily to be a book that documents His common grace. It does that, but the main reason we have it is not to have a practical manual for daily living or to know how to run a business or any other organization that could benefit from His common grace in an organizational plan. Nor is it for the purpose of showing us how to run a day-to-day operation in the ministry of a local church. That's not the purpose of the Bible. The purpose of the Bible is to show you and I how we can participate in God's plan for redeeming, sanctifying, and glorifying His people. And our responsibility is to look at a text and ask, "What is it in this text that contributes to that?" And by the way, I think that's an important principle for our Bible reading and our Bible studying—we want to ask the question, "What is it in this passage of Scripture that contributes to God's redeeming, sanctifying, and glorifying work?"

Special Grace

Now we come in this passage of Scripture to look for a thing that we call special grace. We've talked about common grace, but now I want us to think about special grace. What is special grace? Special grace is the grace that God makes available to do those three things that I mentioned a moment ago: to redeem, to sanctify, and to glorify His people.

Common grace is common because it benefits everybody, whether they're lost or saved. The organizational plan in Exodus 18 can benefit even secular businesses or corporations. It's just a common sense way of organizing so that leaders will last and the constituents, the people, will have peace. And we see that in the text. But we need to lean in a little bit to this issue of special grace. What is it in this passage of Scripture that either informs or is informed by the larger agenda of God? I would suggest to you that the answer to that is in the analysis that Jethro makes of the problem in this situation. Verse 14 says, *"When Moses' father-in-law saw all that he was doing for the people, he said, 'What is this that you are doing for the people? Why do you sit alone, and all the people stand around you from morning till evening?'"* Notice what Moses says in verse 15: *"Because the people come to me to inquire of God."* And I want you to note that and I want you to mark it down. The people want to know God and know what God thinks, and they *need* to know that. They're desiring that and that's an important thing for them to know. So Moses says, *"Because 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..."* (16).

Anyone with any level of dispute came to Moses, but he's one guy, and he needs some help. Moses says in verse 16, *"I make them know the statutes of God and his laws."* So you have people who are wanting to know God and they need to know God's will, and they're bringing every kind of situation to Moses at every level of life. On top of that, Moses has the responsibility to teach them the statutes and the laws of God. Notice Jethro's advice to Moses in verse 19: *"Now obey my voice; I will give you advice, and God be with you! You shall represent the people before God and bring their cases to God."* Notice that the common grace teaching on ministry organization qualifies that statement, since other people will help Moses bring cases to God. Jethro speaks of these other people in verse 22: *"And let them judge the people at all times."* In other words, every great matter they shall bring to you, Moses, but every small matter the other judges shall deal with. When Jethro says, *"You shall ... bring their cases to God"* (19), he's obviously talking about major issues—big things—but the responsibility will be spread so that there are other leaders

involved and people can get the help they need. Notice, then, verse 20: *"...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."*

The end of verse 20 ought to sound familiar. Why? Because it was on Moses' list in verse 16. This is why he was doing this judging. It was part of his responsibility. But do you understand what Jethro was concerned with? He was concerned that the organizational plan and the leadership plan that Moses had in place was so dysfunctional that it was going to compromise the goal of teaching the people about God's law. That, beloved, that issue of access to God, to know His heart and mind, to commune with Him and communicate with Him on the part of the people with their God, that was the concern that Jethro addressed. It was the issue of the people's access to know God and to communicate with Him and to be able to commune with Him. When Jethro came back with his advice, he said essentially, "Moses, this is what you need to concentrate on (the big issues), and we need an organizational plan that won't threaten that. So let's get some other people involved to help with some of the stuff so that keeps happening."

Now, let's step back away from this and plug this in to the larger agenda of Scripture. We've already said that the Bible wasn't given to us to be a practical manual for everything we deal with in life. It was given to us to help us participate in God's plan of redeeming and sanctifying and glorifying His people. And special grace is needed for that to happen. If we go back to the beginning of creation, God—what did He do? How did creation come about? He spoke. He spoke creation into existence. By the word of His power it came about. And man was able to see the revelation of God, the self-revelation of God through His creation. In addition to that, God communicated directly with Adam and Eve. There is a suggestion in the garden account that God took walks with them in the cool of the day (Gen 3:8). He talked to them directly. They had conversation with Him. But sin messed all of that up, did it not? Sin entered the world and our communication, our intimacy, our access to God was compromised. At best, it became indirect, and it became distant. And so God began to use selected messengers and mediaries through whom He would speak to the people. Instead of speaking directly—because of the sin compromising His holiness—God began to choose men like Noah, Abraham, and Moses who would be the intermediaries. He would speak to them in various ways, still veiled ways, and then they would communicate with the people.

When we come to Exodus 18, the people of God as a nation have really been formed in their exile in Egypt, and this is the first part of their journey as the community of faith. Exodus 18 is the first time that access to God, communion and communication with Him, is threatened. And this is where the special grace of God in this passage comes into play through the counsel of Jethro. And do you know what we have? We have God's grace given through the spoken word. That's what we have here in Exodus 18.

The Spoken Word

There's the special grace of God—it is God's grace through the spoken word. And what we find in this passage of Scripture is God—remember, this is God's counsel—God taking initiative, using Jethro to give some wise counsel to Moses to put a more efficient and effective organizational plan in place that is going to help sustain leaders, and it is going to give the people peace because they'll get their needs met. But understand in Jethro's counsel what God is doing. He is protecting His people's access to Him whereby they can hear His Word and they can know His heart and mind and they can have communion and communication with Him.

But I also want you to know that the special grace of God doesn't stop there. This is where we have to look forward beyond Exodus 18. So I want you take a journey with me, all right?

I want to take you on a journey where I'm going to ask you to look at a few passages of Scripture, because I want you to see the special grace of God in His pursuit of making sure that you have unhindered access to Him—so that you can know His heart and mind, hear His Word, and so that you can be in communion and communication with Him.

Many of you have been tracking with our church's daily reading plan, and you know in Exodus 19 God begins to delineate His laws for the people. They're at Mt. Sinai and God begins to speak with Moses. I would call your attention to the fact that all of the avenues of God giving His Word—they're still limited. There are parameters around them. Even on Mt. Sinai, the people can't go up there. There's a line drawn. Only Moses can come up and a few others can go to certain places. You still see this indirect access. God begins to delineate His commands, including the Ten Commandments, in chapter 20. He also gives some laws about altars in chapter 21. If you just keep turning the pages, there are laws about slaves and laws about restitution. And in chapter 22 there are laws about social justice. In chapter 23, there are laws about the Sabbath and the festivals. At the end of chapter 23 God essentially tells the people (paraphrased), "If you'll obey this stuff, if you'll just do this and you'll trust Me on this, when you get into the land you will see My power manifested. I'll be there to defend you and I will show the world that my hand of favor is on you."

And then you come to chapter 24. God and the people are going to ratify this covenant together. And I want you to look at verse 3: "*Moses came and told the people all the words of the LORD and all the rules.*" This is a reference to the spoken word that has been the economy thus far. Verse 3 continues, " ... *And all the people answered with one voice and said, 'All the words that the LORD has spoken we will do.'*" But watch this in verse 4: "*And Moses wrote down all the words of the LORD.*" And then look at verse 12: "*The LORD said to Moses, 'Come up to me on the mountain and wait there, that I may give you the tablets of stone, with the law and the commandment, which I have written for their instruction.'*"

The Written Word

Notice, we have moved now from the spoken word to a different installment of the grace of God—the written Word—to ensure that His people will have access to His heart and mind—that they will be able to know Him, have communion and communications with Him. First the spoken word and now the written word. God essentially says, "Write it down. Write it down so the people can have access—so they can have a record of it and so they can have a representation of all the things that I have shown to you."

But you know, God wasn't done. Forty years later—we kind of skim through Exodus, Leviticus, and Numbers, and we come to Deuteronomy—the children of Israel are standing on the banks of the Jordan River, finally ready to cross over into the Promised Land. Forty years later. Why? Because there's no guarantee that just because you have God's Word written down you will always obey it.

If we had time, I would show you Exodus chapter 32, which is proof of this truth—the golden calf experience. Moses had been up on the mountain for some time. The people got weary, so they decided they didn't want to trust God, even though His statutes had been written down already for them, and they began to worship other gods. And God knew. He's always known that the written record of His Word would never be sufficient to provide and preserve constant access and intimate communication whereby His people can know Him and walk in communion with Him.

So on the banks of the Jordan River, Moses gives this book of sermons in Deuteronomy. That's what the book of Deuteronomy is. And one of those sermons includes chapter 6 and

a very familiar passage of Scripture. Verse 1 begins, *"Now this is the commandment—the statutes and the rules—that the LORD your God commanded me to teach you, that you may do them in the land to which you are going over, to possess it."* Moses is talking about the statutes and the rules that have been written down. And then he comes to verse 4 and he says,

"Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise. You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates."

What's the point? Make them (the statutes and rules) as visible as you can, so you can revisit them often. Put them everywhere you can. Take the spoken word and the written word and put it where you're going to come back to it over and over again. Why? Verse 12 tells us: *"then take care lest you forget the LORD ... "* I want you to notice another installment of the special grace of God. He's given Israel the spoken word and then He's had them write it down so they have the written word, and then we come to this place in Deuteronomy 6 where God emphasizes that hearing the Word taught and seeing it written down will never be sufficient. God says in effect, "You guys need to learn this."

The Learned Word

So what we have is the special grace of God through the learned word. God says to come back to it over and over again and repeat it. Repeat it to yourselves. Repeat it to your children. Put it where you won't ever forget about it, so that you'll always be seeing it, so that you can internalize it. Scripture even says so that you can get it [the Word] into your heart. God emphasizes to the people His grace of the learned word so that they would never forget. But they did forget, didn't they?

God told the children of Israel that they would forget His Word. The paint was not even dry on their houses in the Promised Land before they began to hitch their wagons to the pagan peoples that inhabited this land. Israel turned their backs on the God who was in the process of redeeming them. They came up with better ideas. They decided the theocracy that He set up wasn't sufficient. They wanted to be like the world. And so they said, "Give us a monarchy," and God gave them a monarchy that launched them in to 700 years of a succession of leaders, most of which were bad, a few of which were good. Israel had forgotten the very words of God. This was proof that the spoken word, the written word, and even the learned word, (memorized and revisited), would not be sufficient to address the problem of the people's disobedient and evil ways. The people were finally carried off into exile by pagan nations.

But God wasn't done. He wasn't finished with His special grace. One of the prophets that spoke into the despair and the despondence and the desperation of the children of Israel on the dawn of their exile was the prophet Jeremiah. I want you to turn to his book of prophecy later in the Old Testament. There was about 700 years of disobedience between Deuteronomy 6 and Jeremiah's prophecy. Now in Jeremiah the people were going into exile, but God speaks a word of hope into their lives. Here's what He says in Jeremiah 31:31-34:

"Behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah, not like the

covenant that I made with their fathers on the day when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, my covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, declares the LORD. For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the LORD: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be my people. And no longer shall each one teach his neighbor and each his brother, saying, 'Know the LORD,' for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, declares the LORD. For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more."

Here's the heart of the issue. God knew all along that the spoken word and the written word and the learned word would never be sufficient to deal with the sin problem. You can hear it taught, you can read it on the pages of the written word, you can even internalize it and learn it in your mind, but it still won't be sufficient for the sin problem that we have. But thanks to God, who's gracious and kind and loving, and who all along was in hot pursuit to do this for His people, that He wrote His word on their hearts so that two things would happen. Number one, they would not be dependent any longer on external catalysts—on external means to know Him and to have access to Him and to commune with Him and to communicate with Him. And number two, when God did this and He wrote this on their hearts, not only would they not be dependent upon external means, but their sins would be forgiven forever. Forever. And God would make good on this promise through the Savior, the Messiah that He would send into the world.

The Incarnate Word

God's sending of His Son brings us to the New Testament. The word "testament" means covenant. This is where we come to the record of the New Covenant. Maybe this connection is made most clearly by the apostle John in his Gospel, the fourth book in the New Testament, at the very beginning of what He writes. He helps us to understand that what God is now doing with His special grace is giving His grace through the incarnate Word.

This is now the manifestation of the grace of God in the New Covenant—that God would send His Word in the flesh. It would be alive where people could see it and reach out and touch it. And so John begins his Gospel in 1:1, "*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God.*" In the next few verses He identifies this Word as the creator and as the light and as the life, the only hope that people have. And then verse 14 says, "*And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.*" Verse 16 says, "*For from his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace...*" for the law that was given through Moses was insufficient to bring about the forgiveness of sins. It was insufficient for someone to be dependent upon it to give them access to God, to know His heart and mind, and to have communion and communication with Him.

Next John says, "*Grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.*" God came in pursuit of His people in the person of Jesus Christ. And as Jesus walked on the face of this earth, He was the perfect picture, the perfect representation of God's image, of His nature, of His truth, of His grace, of His righteousness. The incarnate Word that God had promised would be the means by which God wrote His Word on people's hearts.

I want you to see how the author of Hebrews begins his letter: "*Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets*" (Heb 1:1). This verse is referring to the spoken word and the written word as these individuals wrote it down. It was also the learned word as the people memorized it and internalized it. Then we read the

following in Hebrews 1:2-3: *"But in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world. ³ He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power. After making purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high."* This is the incarnate, eternal, creating Word of God, and the author of Hebrews says this is where all this was headed in these last days. This is how God has spoken to you, to me. And this is how He writes this Word on our hearts.

You say, "Well, is it automatic because Jesus came?" The answer is no. I want you to look at what the author of Hebrews says about this, so turn to Hebrews 10. The author of Hebrews actually quotes from Jeremiah 31—the passage we read earlier—twice in his letter: once in chapter 8 and then once here in chapter 10. I want to show it to you in chapter 10 because of the things that the author uses to flesh it out.

When you find Hebrews chapter 10, you'll see the quote from Jeremiah 31 in verse 16 and 17. It talks there about this New Covenant. God declares, *"I will put my laws on their hearts, and write them on their minds, then he adds, I will remember their sins and their lawless deeds no more."*

One of the reasons that I want to bring you to Hebrews 10 is because of what is being talked about before and after the citation in Jeremiah. Previously in verse 14 the author of Hebrews fleshes out the superior sacrifice that Jesus made on the cross, and he says, *"For by a single offering"*—meaning His death on the cross—*"He has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified."* For all time. Underline that. Mark it. And then he comes to verse 18. After he says, *"I will remember their sins and their lawless deeds no more,"* he says, *"Where there is forgiveness of these"—i.e., where Jesus' sacrifice took care of sin—"there is no longer any offering for sin."*

The Indwelling Word

There's no more need for religious sacrifices. There's no more need for a works-based salvation. There is no more need for you to earn brownie points with God and hope that He accepts you. Jesus has taken care of that forever. And when God puts Jesus Christ in your life as the indwelling Word, He gives grace to you by forgiving you sins forever, by setting you on a process, a course of being shaped or recreated into His image forever. All of that is permanent because of Jesus Christ.

Then in the rest of Hebrews 10 and in Hebrews 11, the author emphasizes how this salvation is appropriated in an individual's life—how this becomes yours. How the incarnate Word becomes the indwelling word in your life and my life. How we get the forgiveness of sins forever. How we get this complete sacrifice applied to our lives. This salvation is appropriated by a thing called faith. He mentions it in Hebrews 10:22—"the full assurance of faith." He then quotes from Habakkuk in verse 38 and says, *"The righteous one shall live by faith."* Then in verse 39 he says that the people who receive this salvation and the indwelling Word—Jesus Christ—are not destroyed, but rather they have faith and persevere. And thus begins chapter 11, that great Hall of Faith, where the author of Hebrews keeps hammering this point home. This is how you become a child of God and have His word written on your heart. This is how it happens.

Believer in Jesus Christ, this is how you appropriated it. This is how Exodus 18 found its way into your life. This is how you gained eternal access to the presence of God. When Jesus died on the cross, Matthew and Mark both record that the veil of the temple, which represented a separation of the people from the holy presence of God, was torn from top to bottom. It was flung wide open in order that God's children might have eternal access to Him, because of Christ's death on the cross. And when you trusted Christ, you did it by

faith, and God took the Incarnate Word and He wrote Him on your heart. He seared Him into your life. And this was His plan all along. Exodus 18 was only the first installment, to bring us all the way to this place.

Applied Grace

So how do we obey Exodus 18? How do we respond to the common grace and the special grace that is manifested in this passage of Scripture? I want to make four applications for our obedience—our living out—based upon what the author of Hebrews says in chapter 10. After citing from Jeremiah in verses 16-17, he says,

"Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus, by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain, that is, through his flesh, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water ... " (Hebrews 10:19- 22).

That's something the spoken word, the written word, and the learned word could never do. But it is what the incarnate Word who became the indwelling Word in your life has done. And so the author of Hebrews says in verse 23,

"Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful. And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near."

I want us to stir one another up with these applications. I want us to spur one another on. Here's the first application, and these first two go together. This first one is especially speaking to those of you who are on the outside looking in. Maybe God's Spirit is wooing you to desire what we've talked about, to have God's Word written on your heart, that you might have eternal access to Him, to know His heart and mind, and to commune and communicate with Him forever.

Confess Jesus as Savior & Lord

Application number one: Confess Jesus as Savior and Lord. If God did all of this that we just traced through Scripture, if He did all of this in order to make it possible to write Himself, His eternal Word on your heart forever and forgive your sins, it would be foolish to push back on that, to reject it. My plea with you today is that you would repent of your sin, acknowledge that you have sin, that you're separated from God, that you're on the outside looking in, that you're not one of His children. Repent of your sin and place your faith in Jesus Christ alone to save you.

Nurture Your Relationship with Him

Application number two: For all who have repented and believed, nurture your relationship with Jesus. I know that seems obvious, and we talk about it all the time, but I think it's important to say it here. If God did all of the things that we've heard about today, if He did all of this through history—going all the way back to Jethro's counseling of Moses—in order to protect and preserve His Word that He might write His Word on your heart, the last thing in the world He desires is for it to lie dormant. We don't want to have it written on our heart and then spend the rest of our Christian lives having it lie dormant. And so my challenge to

you is to posture yourself. Put yourself in a position to nurture and grow your relationship with God. The indwelling Word in you is a living and powerful Word that needs to be flamed—fanned into flame and stirred up.

Consume the Bible Regularly

One of the ways that we do that, one of the ways that we nurture our relationship with God, is actually this third application that I'm about to give you, but I wanted to give it to you separately for a particular reason. So here's the third application: consume the Bible regularly. Consume the Bible regularly. You see, it would be real easy at this point for us to draw the conclusion, "Well, you know what, if God writing His Word on my heart was the end game, and that's what He's done, because I've placed my faith in Jesus, then all of these other installments of His activity of preserving access to Him through history are irrelevant." Not so.

I have included in your worship guide, in the outline, some references in the New Testament to remind us about something. I'm not going to look at them this morning. I just want you to know they're there and know that they're there to remind us about this. God has left all of those manifestations of His special grace through history active and in place to serve as catalysts for stirring up and growing the relationship that we have with His eternal Word that indwells and is now written on our heart. He has ordained it this way. The spoken word, the written word, and the learned word are there all the way through history. So here's my challenge to you: sit under the teaching of the spoken word every chance you get. I know I'm preaching to the choir right now, because you're here doing this. But do it. Do it regularly. Do it often. Be committed to it, as you are. Do it in your small groups. Be a part of these small groups as you listen to the Word of God taught. Access good, solid teaching through media every chance you possibly can. Sit under the spoken Word of God. And then consume the Word.

Engage the written Word of God on a daily basis. Read it. Study it. This is why we're doing what we're doing in our church as a people of faith—going through the Bible together, reading it every day together. It's why we talk about that being an important discipline in our lives. Not because it is sufficient to bring about the forgiveness of our sins and to sanctify us forever, but because God has ordained that His special grace in this manifestation remains in place to stir up and feed the written Word on our hearts.

Finally, I would encourage you to learn the Word by memorizing it and meditating on it. There's so much in Scripture about seeing God transform our way of thinking by doing this. Consume the Bible regularly. Every day give yourself to it.

Invest in a Healthy Small Group

One last application: invest in a healthy small group. Do you remember the common grace we talked about earlier in Exodus 18? It is as much the grace of God as the special grace, and it is here where I believe we find these two intersecting. Isn't it true that the core of our small group ministry is studying God's Word together? The common grace comes together with the special grace. On top of that, we need this organization that was fleshed out in Exodus 18. It is essential if we're going to provide effective pastoral care for the membership of The Church at Brook Hills. And so what do we do in order to make that happen? We entrust to faithful men and women frontline shepherding of our people to serve as deacons through being small group leaders. And we entrust to qualified men that we call elders in our church to oversee this ministry in a similar way to what we see these men doing in Exodus chapter 18. These individuals are there for the purpose of leading us to see God's mission accomplished and fulfilled in our lives as individuals and in our life as a church. It won't happen any other way.

So here's what I challenge you to do: submit yourself to their leadership by investing in a small group. Learn the Bible in your small group and have it applied to your life. Be equipped to be a disciple and a disciple maker. Let your small group help answer Bible questions and address relational issues in your life. Let them care for you in times of crisis. Let them be a part of helping you to live out the "one anothers" in the New Testament with other believers in Christ. Let them pray for you and your family and your ministry, and let them foster accountability between you and other members of the Body of Christ.

Invest in a healthy small group, knowing that it is part of the grace of God given to ensure that we will continue to preach the Word of God and teach the Word of God and help people to understand through the gospel of God that He desires His word to be written on their hearts. Understand that the crescendo of this activity of God all the way through history is the sacrificial death of Jesus Christ. It's because of that that God made it possible to write His Word on your hearts.

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