

## Exodus 18

### *The Tyranny of the Urgent*

PORT CHARLOTTE, Fla. (AP) - The Rev. Scott Borden survived Hurricane Charley by huddling in a small closet and praying as the storm passed over his home, then hit his nearby church, leaving the sanctuary in tatters.

Fearing his 600-member congregation would be scattered after Friday's storm, Borden was surprised when dozens of them turned up in the courtyard of First Alliance Church to pray and comfort one another.

Churches in the battered communities of Port Charlotte and Punta Gorda made do Sunday amid the wreckage that Charley left behind. Services were held wherever possible, including in a parking lot, a courtyard and a community hall.

Some people who sought a break from the chaos arrived in their Sunday best. Others came in sweat-stained shirts and jeans muddied from cleaning yards or salvaging homes.

All sought to have their spirits lifted, if only momentarily, through prayer.

With no air conditioning and only warm drinking water to offer for refreshment, the congregation at First Alliance lifted its voice in song - some with tears in their eyes.

A woman named Cassie sat in the front row with her husband, Terry, as the couple took a break from helping neighbors clear their damaged street.

"I've been waiting for church service ever since I heard that storm was coming," said she said.

Next door, the Rev. Rob Combs at Port Charlotte Church of Christ did not know if any of his small congregation would show up for services.

The main church building was damaged and unsafe, so Combs shepherded a few dozen parishioners into a small community hall and put out a sign offering a free hot lunch to anyone who happened by.

Combs said he does not know if the rest of his 60 parishioners were safe. He said some lived in mobile homes and have not been heard from since the storm.

Pastor LeeRoy Martin of Christ the King Lutheran Church put out a hand-painted sign advertising morning services and set up a few dozen folding chairs with a Bible on each seat. The church building was damaged and had no electricity.

Martin, who rode out the storm at his home said he believes people now realize the value of their lives.

"I guess at a time like this, you realize the significance of spiritual values when everything else is blown away."

I have to tell you, that last statement really gripped me.

"...you realize the significance of spiritual values when everything else is blown away."

Did you ever notice that sometimes it takes a hurricane, or a tragedy, or a crisis, to slow us down enough to take a different look at life?

Barbie Freeman, in a letter to this week's Newsweek Magazine writes, "I think of my cancer surgery every single day- and my surgery was 12 years ago. When I was first diagnosed, my doctor told me that I would look back at the experience as a Positive thing, I thought he was crazy, but the years have taught me differently." s

"For me the sky appears bluer and ice cream tastes colder than it used to. Bad hair day? Who cares? Tomorrow will be different."

Have you ever been so overwhelmed by problems and responsibilities that you can't see your way out? Do you find it really hard to find time for God?

Maybe your problem is that, the tyranny of the urgent has pushed out the significant in your life.

Why are we here on the planet anyway? What is the purpose of our life?

Ray Kurzweil is an inventor and the author of a number of books, including *The Age of Spiritual Machines*. He says that within decades we'll have a blending~ of humans and machines through nanotechnology and we'll skyrocket into a blissful future of super intelligence and capabilities.

Kurzweil says the technological future he projects has "similarities to the Christian vision of heaven."

Dr. Gregory Stock is the Director of the Program on Medicine, Technology, and Society at UCLA's School of Public Health. His latest book is *Redesigning Humans: Our Inevitable Genetic Future - Now available*.

He says "There is this strange urge in us to transcend our biology. If you can't buy into Christianity, there is a strong desire to create those same visions of heaven and transcendence through our technologies."

Here's two guys on competing ends of the spectrum, one thinks the future's in biology and the other thinks it's in machines and both say we're trying to replace Christianity.

Back in 1970 Crosby, Stills, Nash & Young sang in their song WOODSTOCK

*Well, I came upon a child of God  
He was walking along the road  
And I asked him, "Tell where are you going?"  
This he told me, Said, "Im going down to Yasgur's Farm,  
Gonna join in a rock and roll band.  
Got to get back to the land and set my soul free."*

*We are stardust, we are golden,  
We are billion year old carbon,  
And we got to get ourselves back to the garden.*

It doesn't matter whether it's drugs, machines, genetics, or mysticism, down in people's hearts is a longing to connect with God. Why? Because we were created to be connected with God.

All these other people and philosophies and ideas ultimately claim to provide personal happiness. When our goal is personal happiness we'll never be satisfied.

Our created goal is for something very different. This is what the Bible says, 162 times in the Scriptures God says "I Am the LORD."

You're not the LORD. Idols and false gods are not the Lord. Technology is not the Lord. He says, I am.

*For thus says the LORD, Who created the heavens, Who is God, Who formed the earth and made it, Who has established it, Who formed it to be inhabited: "I am the LORD, and there is no other.*

*All the earth shall worship You And sing praises to You; They shall sing praises to Your name.*

*You shall worship the LORD your God, and Him only you shall serve.*

We're not going to experience life as it was meant to be lived by trying to get ourselves back to the garden. We're not stardust and we're not golden.

We're creations of almighty God who have rebelled against our creator.

We shake our fists, sing our little songs, play our games and say, "God, we've got it figured out without You.

You say, "Ed I don't do that. I believe that Jesus Christ died and rose again for my forgiveness. I believe that God has made me His child. I'm not against Him."

Then why does He get so little attention from so many of us? Why do we say the words but then allow the urgent to displace the important: time and intimacy with Him?

### **Open your Bibles this morning to Ex 18 page 66**

The Book of Exodus is the account of God's fulfillment of His promises to Israel. The Hebrews had been slaves in Egypt for 400 years. God had promised to make them a numerous people and to give them their own homeland.

Finally the time came for the fulfillment of God's plan. God used Moses, a man who had grown up in Pharaoh's court and then gained experienced living in the wilderness to lead the people out.

God brought out his people and destroyed the Egyptian army in the process.

By chapter 18 Moses is leading over 1 million people, along with their animals and possessions on a trek to the land that God promised them.

Let's see what principles we can learn from the Bible this morning.

I. *We Get So Focused On The Urgent That We Often Neglect The Most Important*

**Read 18:1-8**

This must have been like, *the* greatest time for Moses. God has used him to do awesome miracles in Egypt, he's led all these people out of slavery into freedom, he's seen God split the Red Sea and destroy Pharaoh's elite chariot forces.

We saw last week all the people are singing for joy and playing their tambourines. And now Moses is reunited with his wife and kids.

But there's a down side to this scenario. **Read 18:13-18**

What appears on the surface to be just a happy reunion is a really a divine provision to deliver Moses: ...not from Pharaoh, not from the attack of an army, but from himself.

Moses probably figured, "Well, God made me leader here so all the people are depending on me. They have their disputes and they need me to settle them for them."

So that's what he did. Or at least he was trying to do. He said, "*When they have a difficulty, they come to me, and I judge between one and another; and I make known the statutes of God and His laws.*"

What's the problem with that? Well, besides the fact that he was going to get so ragged out he'd probably have a breakdown, Moses didn't have time for the God he was telling everybody else about.

Maybe you have employees or you manage employees for someone else. Maybe you command others in a military setting. Maybe you're a parent with several children. Maybe you wear a couple of those hats.

Now, imagine taking all the time you spend trying to put out fires and keep people focused and working together: the time that you spend dealing with their issues.

Now divide the number of people your responsible for into a million. Now take that number and multiply it by the average number of hours you spend a week handling people's misunderstandings and disagreements.

You get the picture? Now tell me, how much time do you think Moses had a week to just turn everything off and get alone with God?

King David wrote in the Psalms: *As the deer pants for the water brooks, So pants my soul for You, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God.*

If the ultimate meaning of our life is found in our Creator/Savior/God then He has to have the priority in our life. If the urgent things grow to such a huge component of our life that that's all there is for us, we're headed for major problems.

- I. *We Get So Focused On The Urgent That We Often Neglect The Most Important*
- II. *God's Wisdom Brings True Peace to Our Lives*

Moses could have said, "Look, Jethro, you may know all about sheep but you don't know anything about leading people." He could have said, "Look you've been here one day and you're going to tell me how to do things" Or maybe he could have said, "Look, if God doesn't like the way I'm doing things, He can get someone else!"

Moses didn't say any of those things. We don't know if he thought them, but he didn't say them. Instead he did something really wise, he listened to the counsel of a spiritual guy.

The first time Moses' father-in-law is mentioned he's called "the priest of Midian." Midian was a son of Abraham by a wife other than Sarah so he wasn't actually a Hebrew per se, but he was "in the family."

At this time the father in a family, or the head of a clan was considered the "priest" or spiritual leader.

So we know Jethro was a spiritual man. He had lived with Moses for 40 years so he knew about Jehovah God. The Midianites generally were idolaters. Now Moses fills him in on all the details of the exodus.

Look how Jethro responds: **Read 18:9-12**

Robert Dieffenbaugh writes: "Jethro's response seems to be much more than just oriental courtesy. It seems that Jethro here professes a personal faith in the God of Israel, which he had not had previously. First, Jethro rejoiced with Moses, praising God for His grace manifested toward Israel, as evidenced by Moses' report,

then, Jethro seems to acknowledge, for the first time, the superiority of God over all other "gods," which one would suppose included his own previously worshipped pagan gods. Jethro's faith is demonstrated in his offering of sacrifices to God, and in the sacrificial meal, which Jethro, Moses, and all the elders of Israel shared. "

Moses has been through a lot with God. He's been seasoned by years of experience. But right now he's in need of some help. And while Moses was letting the tyranny of the urgent get the best of him, he still recognized the wisdom of a spiritual man.

Jethro might have been new in his faith but he could see God's wisdom and he wasn't afraid to share it.

### **Read 18:19-23**

It sure looks to me like Jethro has become a believer. The light has really come on for him.

What he was saying was, "Moses your so busy, God's not the focus of your life anymore. Doing stuff for God is keeping you busy, but where's the person of God?"

Jethro helps Moses define his priorities, first he tells him that his calling is to pray for the people, "Stand before God for the people, so that you may bring the difficulties to God" (v. 19). His primary responsibility, his priority should have been to spend time praying for the people.

Moses had a counseling ministry that kept him going from early morning to late at night.

Jethro said, "Moses, you need to spend more time praying and teaching and get other guys to share the load. They can handle the small things and then just bring the bigger stuff to you."

Jethro was a perceptive guy. This wasn't just about easing the work load. This was about spiritual priorities.

If Moses didn't guard his relationship with God, how could he ever lead the people? If we don't guard our relationship with God how can we ever be the person that God's called us to be?

You say, "Ed, I leave for work at O dark 30' and don't get home till evening. My kids hardly see me, my wife thinks I'm a Stranger, and I'm so tired I fall asleep in church. I don't have time for God the way I'd like."

There's a passage in Matthew, chapter 23, where Jesus spoke to the Pharisees. And I think by way of application, He's making this point. The Pharisees were religious leaders were guilty of focusing on the immediate, obvious responsibilities. But in the process they missed the s important and weightier responsibilities. They missed the spiritual dimension.

Listen to what Jesus said. Matthew 23:23, *"Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You give a tenth of your spices--mint, dill and cummin."* You're tithing on all these minute things in your life (that's the urgent). *"But you have neglected the more important matters of the law--justice, mercy and faithfulness."*

Now Jesus said, *"You should have practiced the latter, without neglecting the former. You blind guides! You strain out a gnat"* (a tiny little gnat, you pay attention to it and make sure and get it out of the way-that's the urgent) *"but swallow a camel."* That's the important. He's saying you need to do the important, put the important first.

Now, there's nothing wrong with the tithing on the spices. God told the Jewish people to give a 10th back to Him. In fact, Jesus says, "You should have done that."

But He also says this, "You should have understood that it's not the outward mechanical, 'going through the motions,' kind of stuff that God wants. He wants you to see the spiritual: justice, mercy and faithfulness."

Why did God want the Jews to tithe? You tithe to God to show you acknowledge everything comes from God and that you ultimately owe everything to Him. That you live by His grace.

When these guys tithed on the smallest stuff but didn't show mercy to others it showed they didn't get it.

Should you go to work? Of course. God says we're to take care of our family, pay our



debts, give to the poor. All that takes earning money.

Should you keep working the hours your working? That's between you and God. Many times we don't have any choice in that.

But if you earn your paycheck, and then get proud, or self-sufficient, or greedy you've blown it big time. You've missed the whole spiritual thing that God wants to do in your life and in your families' life.

*I. We Get So Focused On The Urgent That We Often Neglect The Most Important*

*II. God's Wisdom Brings True Peace to Our Lives*

*III. Our Real Strength Comes From The Lord*

### **Back to Chapter 17 Read verses 8-10**

The Jewish patriarch Isaac had a son named Esau. Esau had a son named Eliphaz and Eliphaz had a son named Amalek. His descendants were known as the Amalekites. They were nomads in the desert south of Canaan.

They probably wanted the water in this place called Rephidim where the Hebrews were camped.

Up until this point the Israelites who had been slaves in Egypt for generations hadn't fought anyone. God destroyed Pharaoh's army in the Red Sea. Suddenly their attacked by the marauding Amalekites.

Up until this point God did everything for them from sending the plagues on Egypt, to parting the Red Sea, to sending bread from heaven, and giving them water out of a rock.

In the process God had used Moses walking stick. The Bible calls it the "Rod of God." In other words, anything in God's hands becomes powerful, whether it's an old stick or one of us.

So Moses went up to the top of a hill and lifted the rod of God up over his head.

### **Read 11-13**

This is one of those passages that you read it twice and you go, "Say what?" What's that about?

Remember last week we said that God loves object lessons. God used ceremonies, sacrifices, miracles, all kinds of things to instruct His people.

They couldn't open a Bible at this point. There wasn't any video series for them to watch. This was a lot of people who needed to get the message so God gives it to them in dramatic ways they could see.

Try to picture this: The Hebrews are in their first battle. It's doubtful that any of them had any military training. Slaves don't get military training.

So here they are facing what was probably a pretty good sized band of nomads who were experienced fighters.

Up on the hill overlooking all this is Moses. Skin leathery from years in the desert. White beard flowing in the wind. And what's he holding up? Not a sword. Not a spear. He's holding a symbol of something much more powerful. The rod of God. He's holding it up over his head with both hands. Why?

To show that he recognized that they were totally dependent on God.

The raised hands were a symbol that Moses was crying out to the Lord. This didn't mean that the people didn't need to fight to the best of their ability. It didn't mean that could be careless. It didn't mean that they didn't have to plan effectively. But what it did mean was that they had to always remember where their success came from.

There's a powerful lesson for all of us.

Maybe you're fighting some battle right now.

" some kind of addiction that holds you " a relationship that is falling apart \* a body that is under attack by a disease " financial demands that seem like they're going to bury you " a work load that seems like a mountain you could never scale " a spiritual battle that's deep and fierce and tough ~ family problems that have you wondering how you're going to survive

In the middle of your battle it's essential to remember where our strength comes from. It's God that'll bring us victory.

See how dangerous it is to get so caught up with doing life that we ignore God? To become so focused on scrambling to keep up with the urgent that our walk with God goes down the tubes?

God loves us and cares about our day-by-day relationship with Him infinitely more than we'll ever realize. He wants to bless us with a sense of closeness to Him. He doesn't want it to take a hurricane to cause us realize the significance of spiritual values.

You say "Ed, I am so busy just trying to survive as a single mom, or a college student working unbelievable hours at a job and graduate school, or a guy that commutes a couple of hours each day and passionately wants to have time with his family. What can I do to begin to give God His rightful place? I'm maxed out already!"

Let me closer with these simple suggestions. They're also at the bottom of your sermon notes. Use these that apply to you as a basis for developing your own list. Then share yours with someone else here at church.

- a) Use some of your commute time to pray and listen to the Bible on CD or cassette
- b) Take your cue from Deut 6:4-9 and talk to your kids about God during some of the normal events of life
- c) Go along once a month to the rescue mission, prison, or nursing home and serve others
- d) Plan part of your next vacation to include doing something for the poor and needy
- e) Help out in a class at church and catch the excitement of being part of ministry. Start out part time and see where things go from there.

I'm just about to close in prayer. When I finish there will be members of our Prayer & Care Team up here.

Ed Orner's not going to come up to conclude the service today. Instead we're going to close with a one minute clip on the screen. I'd ask that you be quiet. No shuffling papers and Bibles, no talking. Just watch.

And when it concludes your dismissed.

Be Still DVD (Visual Reality, Vol 6)