

Sermon for Sunday, March 30th, 2025

First Baptist Church of Gaston

Returning to the Pulpit after a 30-day Sabbatical

‘Battling the Burden of Burnout!’

Exodus 18:9-27

Intro:

- Church Family, wow, it truly is great to be back and to see you all once again.
 - On Sunday, February 23rd, 5 Sundays ago, I preached from Mark 11:12-25, with a sermon entitled ‘The Rarity of Righteous Anger!’.
 - *As I’ve said many times in my ministry, I want to preach every sermon as if it will be my last.*
- ***To be completely honest with you, I thought that February 23rd might have been it for me.***
 - While the announcement of my sabbatical on February 26th seemed quite abrupt and strange, I understand that.
 - But, as I learned the hard way, when you burn out, you can’t control when it happens or even how it happens.
- ***For the last four years, I have given my all to the duties of Pastor here at First Baptist.***
 - I’ve tried over the last four years to be at every surgery, every home, every funeral, every ball game, every committee meeting, every invitation to supper, every conference, and every little thing.

■ ***And over time, I neglected my own personal relationship with God, my wife, my family, and the personal things in life that I enjoy.***

- To be completely honest and transparent with you this morning, Church family, I lost who I was.
- I was burnt out mentally, physically, emotionally, and spiritually.
 - ***And on Monday, February 24th in the evening, God made it so clear to me that I needed to request a sabbatical. And when God told me to do so, it wasn’t guaranteed that I would return as your Pastor.***
- It was a real possibility that I would become one of those statistics that we often hear about.
 - Statistics like:
 - ***Statistics tell us that the Pastorate in the United States is the 2nd most stressful job that a person can have.***
 - ***Statistics also tell us that more Pastors commit suicide every year than any other vocation.***
 - ***I also know that only 10% of those who start in the ministry, will actually retire in the ministry.***

- ***Church family, the Lord directed me to take a 30-day sabbatical during this season so that I don't become one of those statistics.***
 - The Lord showed me that if I was going to Pastor again, that I'd have to take a 30-day break, and do nothing but focus on Him and my relationship with Him.
- I had lost who I was, I had become very depressed, and exhausted beyond belief.
 - ***It wasn't fair to my wife, or to you as a congregation for me to continue on at that time as a shell of a the person I used to be. I needed God to do what only He CAN do, which is renew and refresh with me.***
 - During this time I was reminded of the well known verse, that I had heard all my life, but until I went through this valley, it took on a whole new meaning for me:
 - ***'but they who wait for the LORD shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles; they shall run and not be weary; they shall walk and not faint.' Isaiah 40:31***
- ***This abrupt and 'unplanned' sabbatical that I took, was my attempt to wait for the Lord, and to allow Him to renew my strength.***

- And I want you to know that what got me to this point personally, was not you as a congregation. It wasn't any particular person or group of people.

■ ***It was my fault.***

- It was my fault for over 4 years having unrealistic expectations of myself.
- It was my fault for not setting healthy boundaries.
- ***It was my fault for not prioritizing my personal walk with God and my marriage with my wife, over the work of the ministry.***
- It was my fault for fearing disappointing you, at the expense of my own personal well-being.
- I needed to learn to say no, and I didn't for a long time.
- ***On Tuesday, February 25th I had a called an unexpected meeting with Mike Rollison, Duane Johnson, and Allen Ott here at the Church.***
 - On that Tuesday morning I explained to them where I was at, and what I felt like I needed.
 - Church family, on that Tuesday and every day since, I have witnessed an outpouring and extension of grace from those men, as well as

many of you, that resembles that of our Lord Jesus Christ.

- ***You all have been phenomenal in loving and caring for Hannah and I during this time.***
- ***Pastor Steve and Sandy, as well as the Church staff have done an incredible job in leading in my absence.***
 - Even now in speaking to you on this matter, the enemy is still seeking to through darts and feelings of embarrassment over this situation.
 - It was hard to come back, but just as God called me to be your Pastor on February 21st of 2021, I believe He's called me to come back and resume my duties for a time such as this.
 - ***The Lord made it clear to me, that we've still got a building to build that will impact generations to come with the Gospel. And that He wants me to be here to lead and see that through.***
- I've learned so much from the Lord in these last 30 days. And moving forward, things will certainly be different. Meaning, I'll be taking more proactive ways to protect myself and my family from burnout in the future.
 - ***I ask that you continue to be patient and understanding as I seek to find my 'new' normal.***
- There's been one song that God has used in my personal life during this time. I truly feel that during this time, I've been washed by the water.

- See, as a kid, I witnessed what could happen to those in ministries, because I felt the effects in my own family.
 - ***I heard the rumors that were said, I felt the pain, and I was affected by the choices of others.***
- ***But even though I grew up in that environment of ministry, I never thought that burnout and 'hitting a wall', would happen to me.***
 - That's when we get in trouble. When we think satan can't get us. And Church family, he got me down, but he did not get me out.
 - This time a month ago I wasn't sure if I was going to return to this pulpit and be your Pastor. Or anyone's Pastor for that matter.
 - I had prayed hard and considered doing 'something else'. But God would not allow me to do that. He made it clear that His grace is sufficient, I just had to be washed by the water...
- ****Sing Washed by the Water by Need to Breathe****
 - Daddy was a preacher She was his wife
Just tryin to make the world a little better
You know, shine a light People started
talking Just to hear their own voice Those

people tried to accuse my father Say he made the wrong choice

- Though it might be painful You know that time will always tell Those people have long since gone My father never failed Even when the rain falls Even when the flood starts rising Even when the storm comes I am washed by the water Even when the rain falls Even when the flood starts rising Even when the storm comes I am washed by the water
- Even when the Earth crumbles under my feet Even when the ones I love, turn around and crucify me I won't ever ever let you down won't fall, won't fall, won't fall as long as you're around me
- Even when the rain falls Even when the flood starts rising Even when the storm comes I am washed by the water Even when the rain falls Even when the flood starts rising Even when the storm comes I am washed by the water Even when the rain falls Even when the flood starts rising Even when the storm comes
- I am washed by the water Even when the rain falls Even when the flood starts rising Even when the storm comes I am washed

by the water Yeah, I am washed by the water

- For the remainder of our time this morning, I want to share with you what God has personally shown and taught me during this time...

‘Battling the Burden of Burnout!’

Exodus 18:9-27

Context of Exodus 18:

- In Exodus 18, Israel has gone through a lot of difficulties.
 - In Exodus 2, Moses is born and placed into the Nile River where he is discovered by Pharo’s Daughter.
 - Also in Exodus 2, Moses kills a man and flees.
 - ***In Exodus 3, at the age of 80, Moses is called by God through a burning bush while working as a shepherd for his father in law in Midian.***
 - Then, throughout Exodus 3-13, Moses leads the Israelites out of Egypt through a series of plagues that the Lord placed on the Egyptians.
 - ***In Exodus 14, The Israelites cross the red sea, and God does the impossible again.***
 - ***In Exodus 16, the Israelites are in the desert, and God provides manna from Heaven.***
 - ***In Exodus 17, Israel complains and begs for water, and God gives it to them. Then in Exodus 17:8-16, the Israelites battle against Amalek and the battle is won because Hurr***

and Aaron held up the arms of Moses in the battle.

- Now this takes us to Exodus 18.
 - ***Jethro is Moses Father-in-law.***
 - ***In Exodus 18:1-6, we see that Jethro and Moses have a strong and peaceful relationship.***
 - Jethro heard of all that God had done through Moses, and wants to come and visit him and see Moses.
 - ***In verse 9, we are told that Jethro rejoiced and praised the Lord for what was happening:***
 - ‘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.’ Exodus 18:9
 - ***Jethro went on to explain what he had personally seen the Lord do, even from far away...***
 - ‘Jethro said, “Blessed be the LORD, who has delivered you out of the hand of the Egyptians and out of the hand of Pharaoh and has delivered the people from under the hand of the Egyptians. **11** Now I know that the LORD is greater than all gods, because in this affair they dealt arrogantly with the people.”^[d] **12** And Jethro, Moses' father-in-law, brought a burnt offering and sacrifices to God; and Aaron came with all the elders of Israel

to eat bread with Moses' father-in-law before God.’

- When God directed me to this passage, I could not help but see that God has done so much in our Church the last four years. It's been awesome, and incredible and only something that He can do.
- ***In the remaining verses, God used Jethro, as He has used Mike, Duane, Chris, Allen, Randy and others in my life during these last 30 days to give sound counsel.***
 - God has greatly used this passage to teach me, mold me, and shape me to be the Pastor He desires me to be. Not the Pastor that people may expect for me to be.
 - ***As we walk through this text this morning, I pray that God will also teach you that when you are overwhelmed and burdened with life, that there are steps that we can take to defeat burnout.***

****Read Exodus 18:13-27****

Question to Ask:

What has God personally taught me in my 30-days with Him?

Truth #1: A Heavy Burden. (vv. 13-16)

- When Jethro comes to visit, he also comes to watch Moses do ministry.

- Remember, Jethro has heard of the awesome things that God has done through him (Moses), so he now wants to see those things.
- ***So, the next day Moses judges the people, which was his job as the Leader of Israel at this time.***
 - ‘The next day Moses sat to judge the people, and the people stood around Moses from morning till evening. **14** 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?” **15** And Moses said to his father-in-law, “Because the people come to me to inquire of God; **16** 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.”
 - ***One thing that the Lord has certainly taught me over these last 30 days is that the work of the ministry is certainly a heavy burden, but it is not meant to be carried alone.***
 - Ministry in the Kingdom of God is so vast and unfathomable for the human mind that we can't do it all alone.
 - And for a time in my ministry, I tried to do a lot of it on my own.
- ***Look at Verse 13.***
 - Moses was working from morning till evening.

- To quote the country music storyteller, ‘Tom T. Hall’, quit working when your day's work is through.
 - ***Our bodies and our minds weren't made to work from sun up to sun down without any rest or leisure activity.***
- ***Look at Verse 14.***
 - The key word that Jethro points out in his response to Moses is the word ***‘alone’***.
 - No matter who you are and where you are in life this morning, you weren't made to do what God has called you to do, alone.
 - ***Based on Jethro's reaction to Moses daily work in verse 14, it shows that Jethro is somewhat shocked.***
 - ***Meaning that it is not natural that all of the work be placed on one man for all of the people.***
 - Sadly in Baptist Church culture, since the 1940s & 50s, we've seen a huge shift in the leadership model of the Church that looks more like a CEO structured business model, than the leadership model of the NT Church in Acts.
 - I've fallen in this trap, as many people do. So, we no longer view it as unnatural as we should because we've often made it the norm.

- *Whether it's Church ministry or any kind of vocational job, doing it 'alone' is not natural and not how it was meant to be.*

- I truly believe God honors when we humble ourselves and realize that we can't do it **alone**.

- **Look at verses 15 & 16.**

- Moses explains to his father-in-law what is role is to be.
 - He is to know the Word of God and His laws, and judge the people in their disputes and matters concerning the law.

- ***Jethro does not have an issue with Moses fulfilling His pastoral duties, I think (as we are going to see), Jethro advises him to do so in a way where there is a more faithful and workable balance to the burden of caring for the people.***

- Which means that the people are going to have to be okay if Aaron, Joshua or someone else handles a matter for them and it wasn't necessarily Moses.
 - We can't always expect the 'top' person to be available 24/7. That is not reality, it's not sustainable, and it's not effective.

- ***Jethro sees that, and we should as well.***

Truth #2: A Healthy Balance. (vv. 17-23)

- As I have prepared to come back and be your Pastor, God has shown me carefully and consistently, that right here in these verses, there is a Healthy Balance for the work of the ministry.

- 'Moses' father-in-law said to him, "What you are doing is not good. **18** 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. **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, **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. **21** 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. **22** 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. **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."

- **Look at verses 17-18.**

- Jethro is clear and up front, that what Moses was doing was not sustainable. It was not

healthy. He needed to make some changes in order to continue in the ministry.

- *I've learned during this 30-day period of time that sometimes it's necessary to take a step back, regroup, and get ready for what God has in store.*
 - As embarrassing and hard as it was to take a step back from the Pastorate and people that I love, I knew it was necessary to keep going. Church family, it's okay to take a step back from time to time.
- I got to the point where I 'wore myself out', quite literally. Aka, I hit a wall.
 - *And here's the thing, I have had Jethro's in my corner and in my ear my entire ministry here.*
 - Many of you lovingly telling me that I'm going to hard, I can't do it all, and that I need to slow down. But, I did not heed the warning signs and I didn't listen.
 - *While that's hard to admit, it's imperative that I be transparent with you today about the mistakes I personally made that got to this point.*
 - Now that Jethro makes it clear that Moses is on an unsustainable

path, he gives some directives/imperatives for the changes he should make.

- *Look at verses 19-23.*
 - Jethro gives some great advice for how we can be better leaders for the Lord in ministry and in life!
 - Here's the advice I see that Jethro gives here:
 - *#1: Listen to those who want to help you. (v. 19a)*
 - *#2: Keep studying the Word of God and teaching the people, just don't fulfill your duties alone. (v. 20)*
 - *#3: Look for and recruit able men to help with some of the matters. (v. 21-22)*
 - *Burden bearers are to be the norm, not the rarity that they often are in Churches.*
 - Sadly, we want to create burdens for other people, not bear their burdens.
 - *#4: When we take the right steps to allow others to come alongside of us to do ministry, God WILL bless this. (v. 23)*
 - The advice that Jethro gives here is golden, but it only works if we actually heed it and follow it so that God may get even more glory from our ministry.

- A healthy balance is important to sustaining a God honoring life and ministry.

Truth #3: *A Holy Business.* (vv. 24-27)

- ‘So Moses listened to the voice of his father-in-law and did all that he had said. **25** 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. **26** And they judged the people at all times. Any hard case they brought to Moses, but any small matter they decided themselves. **27** Then Moses let his father-in-law depart, and he went away to his own country.’
- I don’t use business in the term of making money, I mean that Moses heeded the words of Jethro, in order to conduct the Holy Business of the Lord in a Godly manner.
 - *Moses listened. And when God sends us Jethro’s in our lives to give us advice, it’s important that we listen and heed their words.*
 - *If Moses hadn’t made the necessary changes at that point in his ministry, it’s quite possible that all the incredible things God did through Moses after Exodus 18 may not have happened.*
 - Even if our own personal obedience frustrates others, it does glorify God, and God does honor that.

- I’m sure some of the Israelites were very upset and wanted to meet with Moses, the top guy, as they had done before. But they had to learn over time, that changes had been made.

- *And that ministry is not meant to be alone, in fact it’s better when we involve others and seek to do the work of the ministry together.*

Conclusion:

- I know that my message this morning is quite different than usual.
- But I am truly so excited to be back with you today.
 - I can’t wait to see what God is going to keep doing. I am excited for what He’s done in my own life and the personal rejuvenation and refreshment that I have received.
- **Truth #1: *A Heavy Burden.* (vv. 13-16)**
- **Truth #2: *A Healthy Balance.* (vv. 17-23)**
- **Truth #3: *A Holy Business.* (vv. 24-27)**