

Text: Exod. 18:13-27

Title: "Jethro: the encouraging counselor"

Time: 2/14/2021 am

Place: NBBC

Introduction: I was thankful to have some help shoveling snow last Monday. Sean and Antonio joined in to take care of some of the snow clearing needs we have here at our church property.

I was a bit surprised when I saw Sean pushing his snow shovel down the long driveway of our entrance. After asking him why he was doing that, I found out that both he and Antonio thought that the job they had to do was to shovel our entire parking lot. They were willing and ready to do so.

Thankfully, none of us have to shovel our entire parking lot. We only need to get those spots that Mark's tractor cannot reach. So I was able to give Sean and Antonio some encouraging counsel. I told them that shoveling the entire parking lot was too big a job for their snow shovels and that help was on the way.

Moses's father-in-law, Jethro, has brought his family back to him and has spent a day listening and rejoicing over all that God had done for Israel. We saw that in the first 12 verses of this chapter. Now after a good night's rest, he rises to find something that surprised him, kind of like Sean shoveling the parking lot surprised me. He finds Moses occupied for the entire day, from early in the morning to late in the evening, with judging the people.

Jethro understood that Moses did not have to do that this way, and so he switches at this point in the chapter from

encouraging listener to encouraging counselor. That is an important order to keep in mind. We often are more quick to give counsel than we are to really listen. Jethro is a great example for us to be “swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath, for the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God” (Jam. 1:19).

Jethro’s counsel would work the righteousness of God. He was an encouraging counselor, and I want us to focus on three truths about his example this morning – the need for his counsel, the solutions offered by his counsel, and the reception of his counsel.

I. The need for Jethro’s encouraging counsel – a good thing done in a bad way (vv. 13-18).

Illustration: We often are stuck trying to do good things in a less than optimal way in this world of Adam’s curse. It is a good thing, for instance, to have water here at our church building, and we have a system by which we make that happen each Sunday. But I am reminded that we are doing a good thing in a bad way every time one of you has to ask me on Sunday morning, “Pastor, did you remember to turn the water on?” Sometimes doing a good thing in a bad way can cause the good desired to not happen. Kathy’s drainage system has illustrated that truth for us in recent days.

Application: From the conversation between Jethro and Moses, we can discern that Moses was trying to do a good thing in a bad way. I want us to see specifically what was good about Moses’s work on this day and then what was the evidence that it was done in a bad way.

1. The work was a good work because it brought God’s truth to people in need (vv. 15-16).

Did you notice how many times the word *people* comes up in these first six verses? If I include a pronoun and the phrase *a man and his neighbor*, I count nine times in these few verses. Moses's work was work for God's people. That made it good work.

Paul felt the same way about working for Christ's local churches. He told the Thessalonian church: "For what is our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? Are not even ye in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at his coming?" (1 Thess. 2:19). And he said to the church at Philippi: "Therefore, my brethren dearly beloved and longed for, my joy and crown, so stand fast in the Lord, my dearly beloved" (Phil. 4:1). The good work of believers that brings a crown of reward and joy is work for other believers. In Moses's day that was Israel; in our day it is the local church.

And both Moses and Paul see their greatest service to God's people as ministering God's word to them. People would come to Moses to inquire about the Lord. They had questions they needed God's answers to. Moses gave them God's answers. He did not tell them what He thought; he told them what God says. The reference to God's statutes and laws likely refers to parts of the book of Genesis already authored as Scripture, or it may also refer to special revelation Moses received as a gifted prophet (in Numbers 11 that gift is going to be distributed to others).

So Moses is a great example of our need to bring God's truth to people in need. 1 Pet. 2:2 says we must desire God's word like newborn babes desire their milk, and then 3:15 says we need to be ready to provide answers for the hope that is within us with meekness and fear and with Christ sanctified as Lord of our hearts. That was Moses's good work, and that is ours as well.

2. The work was done in a bad way because it was done alone in peril of weariness (vv. 14, 18).

Illustration: Last Monday I shoveled snow without being alone. At times, I have shoveled while being alone. So, I know what it is like to shovel snow for our church alone, and what it is like to do it with the help of others. Can you guess which I prefer? I think you can because you have been there too.

Application: The work of the Lord is designed not to be done alone. The reason this is so is that the work is never to be done in weariness and being alone is a strong temptation for becoming weary. Paul gives a clear command in Gal. 6:9, "And let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not." It is wrong to be weary in well-doing, therefore it is advisable to not be alone in well-doing when you are able to join in with others instead.

In Numbers 11 the great Moses commits the sin of weariness with the work of God. He comes to a breaking point and cries out to the Lord: "I am not able to bear all this people alone, because it is too heavy for me. And if thou deal thus with me, kill me, I pray thee, out of hand, if I have found favour in thy sight; and let me not see my wretchedness" (vv. 14-15). This weariness even leads to Moses's doubts that the Lord would feed the complaining people as He had so many times before. The Lord has to ask Moses, "And the Lord said unto Moses, Is the Lord's hand waxed short? thou shalt see now whether my word shall come to pass unto thee or not" (v. 23).

Are we trying to do a good thing in a bad way? Do we feel alone in our effort to do the work of the Lord? "Lone Ranger Christianity" leads to weariness and unbelief. We all need Jethro's encouraging counsel this morning. Let's not

go it alone. Which brings us to our next truth from the passage.

II. The solution from Jethro's encouraging counsel – more laborers in the harvest field (vv. 19-23).

Illustration: I can remember sitting in a class in business school called “Organizational Behavior” being taught by a professor who was advocating something he called “consensual validation.” His point was that when an organization faces a problem, the only valid way to arrive at a true solution is through consensus – getting everyone to agree equally on the truthfulness of the solution. I raised my hand and asked where the role of expertise was found in his formula, and he denied that such a thing exists. For him, expertise was invalid.

Applications: Jethro is providing some important expertise for a solution to what is wrong in the work of God in this chapter, but in doing so he is careful to recognize a greater expert than himself. All of the solutions to the problems in God's work must come from God (vv. 19, 23). He is the divine expert. As we think of the problems of the work of our churches today, I think we will find our solutions are parallel in important ways to the solutions that God's work through Israel needed here. I will mention two parallels.

1. Just like Israel needed Moses's headship, our church needs the headship of Jesus Christ (vv. 19-20). Jethro counselled that Moses provide representation before God through prayer and instruction in God's laws and statutes through special revelation. Jesus Christ is our mediator and advocate. He represents us before the Father, and we appear there blessed in Him. He prays for us, like He prayed for Peter, whom Satan had desired to sift like wheat. He prays for our unity and for our holiness (John 17).

And He has sent the Spirit of Truth who brought to the remembrance of the apostles and New Testament prophets all that He had commanded us, leading them into all the truth, which became the foundation for this new work of the church in our day and age. And so our work as a local church must recognize Jesus's headship, must trust His advocacy and intercession for our forgiveness and strength in trial, and must heed His word as it is revealed to us in Scripture. This is where every solution to every problem to every work of God in every church and heart is to be found.

2. Just like Israel needed men of character to lead, so do local churches (vv. 21-22). According to Jethro's counsel, some of these leaders would have more responsibility than others, but all would be equally men of character. They would fear God, they would be men of truth, and money would not be their master. Deut. 1:13 tells us additionally that they would need to men of wisdom, understanding, and high esteem among God's people.

This is what Jesus asks us to pray for. He speaks of a problem and a solution in our work today: "The harvest truly is plenteous, but the laborers are few [the problem]. Pray ye, therefore, the Lord of the harvest that He would send forth laborers into His harvest [the solution]" (Luke 10:2). Are you praying such a prayer? Are you the Lord's answer to this prayer?

III. The reception of Jethro's encouraging counsel - water drawn out of the well (vv. 24-27).

Illustration: I would like us to think of our plumbing one more time. It is a tremendous blessing to have a well full of fresh, clean, water. But if you do not have a pump and plumbing to bring it out of the well, that blessing ultimately

does little good. In our case here, our well does little to help us on Sunday morning unless I turn the plumbing on.

Application: Prov. 20:5, “Counsel in the heart of man is like deep water; but a man of understanding will draw it out.” Jethro provided some encouraging counsel that was a blessing like water in a deep well. Moses did more than recognize the wisdom of his father-in-law’s plan. Moses drew the water out. He implemented Jethro’s good idea.

That our town would have a gospel-preaching, Bible-teaching, disciple-making local church is a blessing of an idea. We would all see the wisdom in this plan, one first given to our founding pastor over 50 years ago now. But it has required men of understanding over the years whose lives and actions demonstrated their belief that our town should have such a local church. They have pulled the water up out of that well. We must do so in our day.

Conclusion: The potential weariness of Moses was greatly helped by Jethro’s counsel, but his burden was still heavy, as we saw in Numbers 11. Whether alone or with many helpers, the only true solution to the difficulties of our work is the help and strength of the Lord Himself. In the end, the only solution we really need to our weariness is not the help of human hands, but an Almighty arm.

I would like to close with the prayer of C. H. Macintosh, a man who recognized that whether we labor for the Lord alone or with the help of many hands, we can be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might: “O for a heart to serve Him! — a patient, humble, self-emptied, devoted heart,—a heart ready to serve in company, ready to serve alone,—a heart so filled with love to Christ that it will find its joy, its chief joy, in serving Him, let the sphere or

character of service be what it may! This assuredly is the special need of the day in which our lot is cast. May the Holy Ghost stir up our hearts to a deeper sense of the exceeding preciousness of the name of Jesus, and enable us to yield a fuller, clearer, more unequivocal response to the changeless love of His heart!"

"A man came—I think it was actually in Philadelphia—on one occasion to the great George Whitefield and asked if he might print his sermons. Whitefield gave this reply; he said, 'Well, I have no inherent objection, if you like, but you will never be able to put on the printed page the lightning and the thunder.' That is the distinction—the sermon, and the 'lightning and the thunder.' To Whitefield this was of very great importance, and it should be of very great importance to all preachers, as I hope to show. You can put the sermon into print, but not the lightning and the thunder. That comes into the act of preaching and cannot be conveyed by cold print. Indeed it almost baffles the descriptive powers of the best reporters."

—David Martin Lloyd-Jones,

*Preachers and Preaching*