

PARTNERS IN MINISTRY

EXODUS 18:1-27

There and Then

JETHRO COMES TO FAITH (VV. 1-12)

Jethro had sent word that he was coming, along with Moses' wife and sons; but Moses did not wait for them to arrive. Moses went out to meet them. Though he was the leader of a nation, Moses honored Jethro both as his father-in-law and as a legitimate priest of God. His position of leadership did not make Moses proud.

Notice the significant facts about Jethro this portion of the story reveals:

1. **Jethro believed in the Lord.** For the first time in Scripture a non-Israelite is "converted" to faith in the Lord. It began with Moses' witness (v. 8). He described their protection through what the Lord had done to Pharaoh and the Egyptians. He also told about all the hardships, including the lack of water and food, the quarreling, and the Amalekite attack. The intervention and provision of the Lord in each case had saved them. Moses' witness was to the grace and historical intervention of Yahweh in their midst. A verb that carries the theme of saving and delivering is used repeated four time. Jethro believed in the Lord as God on the basis of Moses' testimony although he did not see any of the dramatic historical events himself.
2. **Jethro was delighted.** More than simply believing the result he saw, he shared the joy (*khadah*) of what the Lord had done for Israel in rescuing them.
3. **Jethro confessed his conviction to Moses**, saying "Now I know that the Lord is greater than all other gods."
4. **Jethro sacrificed.** The final part of Jethro's confession of faith was his burnt offering and other sacrifices, brought to God and eaten together with all the elders of Israel. The giving of the burnt offering was more than a cultural exchange. It was an acknowledgement of one's devotion to God.

We might ask why this story information about Jethro is so crucial to the story.

- *Jethro was a model of hope for Gentiles.* Very early in biblical tradition, the promise God made to Abraham, Jethro's common ancestor with Moses, is fulfilled. By including the story of Jethro at this juncture, Israel's Scriptures acknowledged the possibility of righteous Gentiles who feared God and lived accordingly.
- *Jethro was a counselor to Moses.* It was important to include this story so that Jethro's counsel is seen as more than human advice based on human observation, but counsel spoken out of the treasure of God's wisdom.

JETHRO OBSERVES A SERIOUS PROBLEM (VV. 13-18)

Historically, deliverance from oppression was often followed by new forms of bondage. Scripture tells the story of another possibility: rule by law rather than by force. This is one of the greatest gifts of Judaism to the civilized world.

The problem the narrative presents is that Moses' caseload was overwhelming. It wasn't that Moses was unfit to hear their disputes; it wasn't that he didn't care about their disputes; it wasn't that the job was beneath him,

and it wasn't that the people didn't want Moses to hear their disputes. The problem was simply that the job was too big for Moses to do. His energies were spent unwisely, and justice was delayed for many in Israel.

Ironically, the same people who once quarrelled and complained against Moses are now coming to him to settle their disputes. These are the same people who asked, "Is the Lord with us or not?" Now they are seeking God's will through Moses. Some might say, this is evidence of some progress – some spiritual development.

Moses' answer to Jethro's question – "What is this you are doing for the people? Why do you alone sit as judge, while all these people stand around you from morning till evening?" – reveals three things:

1. The overwhelming amount of work Moses had (a real burden)
2. Moses' naive assessment of his ability
3. The reality that there are tensions, problems, hardships, struggles – many challenges – to living community.

Jethro gave Moses immediate, honest, wise and direct counsel. "What you are doing is not good" (v. 17). Jethro stated two reasons it was not good:

1. You and the people will become worn out.
2. You can not handle all this work on your own – it is too heavy.

"Men called by God to lead are always in danger of attempting to encompass more than they are able." (Morgan)

Moses was blind to his own limitations and the physical limitations of his simple procedure. He assumed that God's justice was all on his shoulders. He needed Jethro to explain that "good law" in a community must be accompanied by a good legal system of administration.

JETHRO OFFERS GODLY ADVICE (VV. 19-23)

Jethro suggested five steps:

1. **Pray.** ("Continue to be the peoples' representative before God.") This was the first essential step in effective delegation for Moses. He had to pray for the people. Moses had to bring the difficulties to God. Prayer is an essential aspect of leadership among God's people.

"The Christian pastor is in some respects comparable to Moses, for he is set apart as a leader in the band of brethren; and as such his business is not only to teach the people but to plead for them with God." (Spurgeon)

2. **Teach.** ("God's decrees.") For Moses to effectively lead and delegate, he had to teach the Word of God not only to those who would hear the disputes, but also those who might dispute. If the people knew God's Word for themselves, many disputes could be settled immediately. Moses' teaching ministry incorporated three actions:

- hearing God's instructions. (A good teacher is first a good learner.)
- giving God's instructions to the people. (Godly teachers communicate effectively and communicate biblically.)
- showing (demonstrating) how to live an obedient life. (Teaching is much more than a lesson; it is a patient, humble, shared life in which we all learn together.)

These first two foundation stones of justice were rule by law that was centered in God's instruction.)

3. **Delegate.** (*"Select capable ... leaders."*) Effective leadership is a partnership. But effective leadership also depends on the quality of the leaders. The people Moses chose were to be ...
 - God-fearing men
 - trustworthy men
 - honest men

There are four essential steps in delegating leadership:

- prayer and discernment
- enlistment
- equipping and training
- mobilization

4. **Organize.** (*"Appoint leaders over groups of one thousand, one hundred, fifty, and ten."*) Jethro advised Moses to organize a system by which leaders served as magistrates to settle minor disputes, while Moses would only hear the difficult cases. This made justice and restoration accessible to everyone.
5. **Implement.** (*"If you follow this advice ... if God commands"*) Jethro's instruction here implies that he was speaking, not from as a pagan, godless man, but speech that was generated from a redeemed heart and out of the depths of God's treasure of wisdom.

Every strategy of leadership must include godly wisdom, godly compassion, godly incentives, and godly endurance.

MOSES LISTENED (VV. 24-27)

This speaks to Moses' humility, teachability, and godly sensitivity. Even though he was raised in all the wisdom and education of Egypt, Moses perhaps learned more about real leadership from the priest and shepherd Jethro -whose flocks Moses tended until his call at Sinai. In his father-in-law, Moses found a peer, a friend, and a human counselor.

This also speaks to God's commitment to:

- justice
- an effective justice system
- a just society ruled by God's law rather than violent men who pervert justice (*often a danger in any community or society*)
- a peaceful community

Here and Now

1. Living in community is sometimes joyful, sometimes messy.
2. Living in community requires godly leadership that incorporates prayer, teaching God's Word, equipping and training godly leaders, and a structure that nurtures godly growth, godly justice, and godly healing.
3. Living in community is a partnership between God, godly leaders, and God's people.

Us and God

Based on Jethro's advice to Moses, we have a lot of work to do here at IBC Manila to reinforce our structure for partnership in ministry and good church health. We have a good start. God led us to a basic structure of five components a few years ago that provides the starting point:

Connect is the component that helps us to establish a good relationship with God and good relationships with people. Under the leadership of our Connect Team, we worship, we fellowship, and we welcome.

Grow is the component that equips and trains us toward spiritual growth and maturity. Our Grow Team leads us to grow in our understanding of God and our obedience to God's Word.

Serve is the component that mobilizes us to show compassion in the body of Christ through meeting each others' needs by sacrificial service. Our Serve Team is responsible for discovering the needs in the body of Christ, and then mobilizing servants to meet the needs. Primary to this component is our C.A.R.E. Ministry, led by our deacons.

Go is our training, equipping and mobilizing component for disciple-making and missions beyond the body of Christ. Our Go Team leaders point us to a dark world without Christ, and lead us to take the light of the Gospel into the darkness, both with our lips and our lives of surrendered obedience.

Prayer is the undergirding component for everything we do. Our Prayer Team leads us into the presence of God with hearts opened to the voice of God. In prayer, we find the wisdom for our ministry. In prayer, we find courage and power to act on God's command. In prayer, we get our hearts right with God. We bathe all of our plans in prayer – before we take a step.

These five components have re-shaped the way we "do church" for the past four years. We have experienced godly growth and are bearing godly fruit. Yet, there is always room for improvement; and we are working to strengthen each component of our structure. But there is one area of our body life at IBC Manila that needs a lot of strengthening; and this story in Exodus brings it to the surface. It's time to strengthen the way we share life together.

We're going to place a big emphasis for the next several months on improving our C.A.R.E. Ministry.

If we look closely at Jethro's plan for Moses, we will see some important steps we need to take.

1. **First of all, we need to enlist, train and mobilize more deacons.** Currently we have only five active deacons. I would associate deacons with the leaders of ten in Jethro's plan. So how many deacons do we need? We have about 350 active adults in our church. Divide that number by 10 and you get 35. I think you can see now why we have a lot of work to do. Who is a deacon? There are a lot of opinions on that subject; but here at IBC Manila, a deacon is a spiritually growing adult – man or woman, single or married – who has a heart for people and a desire to show godly compassion, serving others out of a passion for Christ Jesus.
2. **Second, we need to enlist C.A.R.E. Captains.** These are the leaders of 50 that Jethro suggested. How many do we need? Seven. Each Captain will encourage, pray for, work alongside, and hold accountable, five deacons.

3. **Third, we need to structure our church family in groups of ten.** We're in the process of doing that right now. C.A.R.E. Groups will be built, at least for now, primarily by geographic location. That way, if someone in the group needs some tender-loving care, they won't be completely on the other side of this massive, congested city. These groups will meet together occasionally for fellowship and prayer – focused primarily on encouraging each other and caring for each other.

4. **Fourth, we need to restructure our lives.** (1 John 4:7-12) This may be the hardest part of the journey toward a healthier church. Most of us live a very busy life: careers, family, and hours a day in traffic, reduce our time for others – or so we think. But since we are the body of Christ, we have received a mandate from the Lord to share life together – and not just on Sunday mornings during worship. We need to find ways to share life together; and that will require each of us to restructure our lives to make room for others. Right now, there are no easy answers or simple solutions for this challenge. All I can say is, "Let's find a way to love each other, care for each other, fellowship together, live together, in peace, harmony and rich relationship." This will manifest the reality of God in this city in profound ways.

John the Baptist's declaration in John 3:30 must come to life in our own hearts and break out of our language: *"He must become greater and greater, and I must become less and less."*

So here's my question: Are you ready to decrease so that Jesus can increase, God's love the centerpiece, and the Good News of Christ the conversation piece in our mouths and those in the city who need His peace?