

The Counsel of Jethro

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 17 November 2022

Preacher: Rev Donald A MacDonald

- [0 : 0 0] Let us now return to the chapter that we read, the book of Exodus, chapter 18, and we may read again at verse 5.
- Exodus, chapter 18, and at verse 5. And Jethro, Moses' father-in-law, came with his sons and his wife unto Moses in the wilderness where he encamped at the mount of God.
- And Jethro came unto Moses into the wilderness where he encamped at the mount of God.
- And I'm going to start by asking a question. How do you think of Moses? Do you think of him as a single man or as a married man?
- The reason I ask the question is that often there is not much mention in the Bible about his family.
- [1 : 2 0] And yet there is mention of a family and of a wife, so we have to be guided by the scriptures. But the impression almost is created, in my own mind at any rate, that the enormous duties that devolved upon him left him little time to be a family man and undertake parental duties.
- That he was so involved in leading the nation and all the duties that devolved upon him as the national leader throughout these wilderness years.
- So that his family seems so often to be the whole nation of Israel as a people.
- The nation, he's like a father to the nation. But as I say, we must be guided by the scripture and scripture tells us that Moses was a married man with a family.
- The opening words of the chapter that we read tell us the name of his wife and his two sons, Saborah his wife, Gerson and Eleazar his sons.
- [2 : 4 4] This is the first mention of the members of his family since chapter 4 of this book. And if I were to ask you another question, do you remember where Moses and Saborah met?
- Do you remember where it was? For those of you who are or have been married, I would go as far as to say that I doubt that any person present here met their husband or wife where Moses and Saborah met.
- Where did they meet? They met at a well. That's where they met. Interestingly, the Bible speaks of several relationships that began by meeting at a well.
- It was at a well that the servant of Abraham met the woman who was asked the question, Will you go with this man?
- And you will remember her unhesitating response. She said, I will go. Again, it was at a well that Jacob met his future bride, Rachel.
- [4 : 1 5] The Bible tells us as soon as Jacob saw Rachel, the daughter of Laban, his mother's brother, and the sheep of Laban, his mother's brother.
- Jacob came near and rolled the stone from the well's mouth and watered the flock of Laban, his mother's brother. Then Jacob kissed Rachel and wept aloud.

The Bible tells us as soon as Jacob had the love that Jacob had for this woman. He served seven years for Rachel and this seemed to him but a few days because of the love he had for her.

There is another meeting recorded in the Bible that I should like to mention, where a man won the heart of a woman in a way in which none other did in her life, before or since.

The effect upon her life was so great that she felt constrained to broadcast the news to the whole community where she resided.

[5 : 25] We don't know her name.

We don't know her name.

The woman was called to speak. He was possibly the fifth or sixth. I don't rightly recollect at this stage. He became very animated as he recollected his early struggles.

He told the congregation that day that he thought he should meet Christ by the well, just like the woman of Samaria.

And because there was a well close to his house and he was speaking of a time when there was no tap water in the rural villages of Lewis, he would go to sit there night after night, sit by the well.

[7 : 13] That was also the time when houses were very different to what they are today. When most villages had what was called black houses where the animals were domiciled at one end of the house and the residents at the other.

He used to be envious of the animals, quietly chewing the cud, seemed so content and he himself so upset and distressed until he finally learned that it wasn't yet the well he was to meet Christ, that he was to meet Christ in the word.

But I have strayed far from Exodus. You may remember after Moses had spent forty years in Midian as a shepherd, he requested of his father-in-law that he be permitted to return to Egypt.

Let me go and return to my brethren who are in Egypt, see whether they are still alive. And his father-in-law didn't raise any objection to his returning and departed.

Amigably, Jethro said to Moses, go in peace. And in the chapter we read this evening, we are told that Moses sent his wife, Sipporah, and two sons to her father's house.

[8 : 46] To her father's house? When did that happen? The Bible doesn't tell us. Then Jethro, Moses' father-in-law, took Sipporah, and Moses' wife after he had sent her back.

We are playing catch up. And we have been told here that he had sent her back, but we are not told when. So, we have been informed of a previous occurrence.

We don't know when it took place. Some think it could have been before the people of Israel left Egypt. Others that it took place after reaching Horeb, as it was in fairly close proximity to the home of Jethro.

It is not too clear. Others, because of the language that is used, he has sent her back, imply that there were marital problems and that they were separated.

I would suggest that that is unfounded speculation, and I do not accept it for one moment. It is interesting also to note the meanings attached to the names of both sons.

[10 : 06] Because these, the meanings that are attached to both sons seem to me to sum up the early part of Moses' life. The name of the old is Gersom.

I have been an alien or a stranger in a strange land. Is that a reference to how he felt in the land of Midian?

That he was homesick for Egypt? It could be. But I prefer to think of it differently. That these words sum up how he felt during the years he spent in Egypt, despite the best efforts of the daughter of Pharaoh.

That is where Moses really was a stranger, despite being born there. He considered himself an outsider, and I base that on the way in which he conducted himself when he saw an Egyptian beating a Hebrew.

Moses took the side of the Hebrew, and the Bible states he viewed him as one of his brethren. In other words, Moses was saying, I am not Egyptian.

[11 : 26] I belong to the Hebrew people. So that when his firstborn makes an entrance into the world, he named him Gersom. As if to say, he now feels at home, even although he resides in Midian.

His youngest son is named Deleazar, and the meaning of his name for the God of my father said he was mine help, delivered me from the sword of Pharaoh. And this name indicates, among other things, that Moses was aware that he belonged to the covenantal people of God.

Where is evidence of that? Well, in the very fact that he speaks of the God of my father. In other words, he is speaking of the God of the covenant.

The faithful God of the covenant. What was true of this God? Well, in the words of the psalmist, Assuredly he shall thee save, and give deliverance from subtle, foul or snare, and from the noise of pestilence.

His feathers shall thee hide, thy trust under his wing shall be. His faithfulness shall be a shield, and buckler unto thee. And that brings me to our text this evening, from which I wish to set before you three thoughts.

[12 : 56] First of all, Jethro, we are told, came unto Moses. So, first thought is a compelling reason to visit.

First verse of the chapter tells us, when Jethro, the priest of Midi, and Moses' father-in-law, heard of all that God had done for Moses and for the king of Moses.

For his people, and that the Lord had brought Israel out of Egypt.

Jethro, Moses' father-in-law, came unto Moses. Now, from one point of view, what could be more natural than that members of a family gather together?

Would, in my view, be unnatural if they didn't gather together periodically. But I understand from this piece of information that it wasn't just pure family ties that brought about this visitation.

[14 : 28] It was because he heard all that God had done for Moses and for Israel's people. Now, did you notice how often the words, Moses' father-in-law, how that term is repeatedly used in the chapter.

I think if you counted as about 13. And from that I understand that this visit has not been made in Jethro's official capacity as the priest of Midian.

But he is coming as a member of the family as the father-in-law of Moses. And as a member of the family he comes to discuss with his son-in-law.

And what we are told is that the purpose of his visit was determined by what God had done for Moses and for Israel.

It wasn't just, let's go and visit Moses. The impression is created that this man wanted to find out for himself about the great things that the Lord had done for Moses and Israel.

[15 : 45] And in some ways Jethro's visit reminds me of the visit of another in the Bible, the Queen of Sheba. Although Jethro didn't have to make a long and perilous journey.

You remember how the Queen of Sheba, when she heard of the fame of Solomon, she came to test him with hard questions.

And you remember when she had tested him and when she had seen the wisdom of the house and the food of his table, the seating of his officials and the attendance of his servants, their clothing, his cupbearers, his burnt offerings and so on.

And she said to the King, the report was true that I heard in my own land. But I did not believe the report until I came and my own eyes had seen it.

And behold the half was not told me. Now, perhaps when you started going to listen to the Gospel, it was because you heard some of the wonderful things that God had done.

[17 : 02] And you wanted to find out for yourself. You wanted to test what you had heard. You wanted to know, was it really true what God was doing?

And that is in essence what Jethro did here. We don't know if Jethro had difficult questions. But we do know that he certainly wanted the factual information about the reports he had received.

And Moses gives him a very warm and hearty welcome. He went out to meet him and did obeisance and bowed down and kissed him.

And they exchanged pleasantries with one another. And then they came into the tent. That was the compelling reason to visit.

He heard of all that God had done for Moses and for Israel's people. That acted as a spur to bring him to visit his son-in-law.

[18 : 08] That brings me to my second point. A captivating conversation. Just in passing, did you notice that there is no further word in the chapter of Sipporah and her sons.

In some ways you feel a little sorry for Sipporah. She seems to be excluded almost all the time. But you can understand the burden of duties that were laid upon this man Moses.

And the emphasis in the chapter is on the conversation and the fellowship that took place between Moses and Jethro.

It took place in the tent. That's where it took place. Now, whether Sipporah and the sons were present listening, I don't know.

You could assume that they were. And Norris had told us how did Jethro hear the reports of what had happened. Did he hear factual reports?

[19 : 18] Or were they exaggerated or fabricated reports? You see, sometimes when reports are communicated, they're not always strictly factual.

But you see here, Jethro hears first-hand from a most reliable source. That's important.

And not only that. But Moses was someone whom Jethro had known for 40 years. Someone he had learned he could trust.

And that again makes a huge difference when you are being told something that is of weight and importance. Jesus, who is telling you what took place.

And you see, here, Jethro has been informed first-hand by Moses. The source was reliable.

[20 : 25] So you see, he couldn't doubt the source. And Moses begins by telling of the good news of their deliverance as a people.

Moses told his father-in-law all that the Lord had done unto Pharaoh and to the Egyptians for his fear's sake. And you know, Moses had a big story to tell.

Didn't he? He could speak of the time of the plagues. He could speak of how the people celebrated the Passover supper.

He could speak of how they put the blood on the doorposts and on the lintel and how they waited. Some apprehensive, some fearfully.

Would the angel of death strike in their home. He could tell of how they had come out safely out of Egypt.

[21 : 31] He could tell of the guidance of the Lord in the pillar of cloud and the pillar of fire. One pillar but two appearances. He could tell of the miracle of the Red Sea crossing and the destruction of the pursuing Egyptian forces.

And you could say that what Moses had to tell was the equivalent of the Gospel. He had good news to tell.

That's what the Gospel means. Good news. The Gospel tells us how God in Christ has won the victory over death and the grave.

So that life everlasting might be in the lives of all who are brought to trust in Christ alone for salvation. Good news for unworthy sinners.

And Moses had more to tell. He tells of the cost of following the Lord.

[22 : 38] He doesn't just tell what took place. But he tells of the cost. And you know, as the Lord instructs believers in this life.

As they are educated through the illumination of the Holy Spirit. They don't just dwell on their conversant experience.

They have much more to tell. They can tell how the Lord has led them during their years in the wilderness. They can tell of how they have experienced the presence of the Lord during these years in the wilderness.

And how he has made himself known to them through the Word. And so Moses could tell of the struggles, of the cost of following the Lord.

It can be seen in the earlier chapters how the Lord tested this people. It wasn't always an easy journey right up to the present. But throughout it all, God graciously and mercifully provided for them in miraculous ways.

[23 : 56] And you know, would you not like to have been a fly on the wall of that tent. Listening to the conversation. Listening to what Moses had to tell his father-in-law.

What was Moses doing in that conversation? Was he not witnessing to his father-in-law? As he related what their great God had done by way of deliverance and salvation.

Despite trial and tribulation, God is unswervingly faithful. And that too is implied in the good news of the Gospel.

It is summarized for us by the Apostle Paul when he writes to the church at Philippi. And he assures the church that, my God, will supply every need of yours according to his riches and glory in Christ Jesus.

Well, Moses is citing us a good example in this conversation. He is reverently in love and with deep affection for his father-in-law, placing before the mind and heart of his father-in-law the great work of salvation performed by God in the life of this people Israel.

[25 : 27] And we too, who profess Christ, should be enabled to say with the hymn-writer, Were the whole realm of nature mine, that were an offering far too small, love so amazing, so divine, demands my life, my soul, my all.

And he was witnessing in the home, in the tent. We can witness in the home, we can witness at our work, we can witness in our neighbourhood.

You see, just tell it, the good news in Christ. And there was fruit born by this witnessing. You know, it has happened, and I trust it still does.

But when people know each other very well, and one person is converted, the unconverted person may come to enquire as to what has taken place in the life of the converted person.

What accounts for the change that has taken place? Well, here there is fruit born by this conversation.

[26 : 54] We are told, Jethro rejoiced. Jethro rejoiced. For all the goodness which the Lord had done to Israel, whom he had delivered out of the hand of the Egyptians. Jethro rejoiced.

The word that is translated rejoiced here, it's a rare word in the Hebrew text. And there is implied in the word, a depth of conviction in this rejoicing.

He was deeply moaned. The other versions of the Old Testament, the Septuagint, that's the Greek version of the Old Testament, translates this word as fear and trembling.

If you remember in the New Testament, when Peter preached at Pentecost, we are told those who heard him, they were cut to the heart. Well, Jethro's experience here appears to be on a par with that, so that there is conviction of sin mingled with great and deep rejoicing.

So, not only is that deep conviction expressed in rejoicing, but he celebrates the good news. And I cannot but liken him to someone who is on the mountain top of new found spiritual liberty, who does not care a whit who hears about it.

[28 : 29] And that too is a duty that is placed on believers in the world to declare and show forth what God has done.

Remember how the psalmist expresses it? I of thy glorious majesty, the honour will record. I'll speak of all thy mighty works and show thy mighty deeds.

Thy glory, thy glory to advance, thy greatness will declare. So, at the core of this praise, he speaks of the marvellous, great salvation effected by the Lord in the lives of this people.

So, you find Jethro saying, blessed be the Lord who has delivered you out of the hand of the Egyptians, out of the hand of Pharaoh, delivered the people from under the hand of the Egyptians.

And so, you would like to think that a new day had dawned in the life of this man, especially in the light of his confession, where he says, Now I know that the Lord is greater than all gods.

[29 : 40] Now I know, and these words particularly reveal that he has a freshly acquired insight into the person and work of the Lord.

And what I believe is true of everyone who is born again from above. You have a new and a fresh insight into God.

Remember, just recently I spoke in, I think it was a Sunday morning service, last time I was here, of the terrorist on the cross as being an example of someone who was given a fresh insight.

He saw behind the apparent weakness of the crucified Christ. He saw beyond the crown of thorns.

He saw a crown of glory on the head of the one who was being crucified in apparent weakness, but who triumphed over the cross, over death and the grave.

[30 : 56] Well, a captivating conversation. Perhaps you can think. Captivating conversations in your own life. Where you engaged in fellowship with fellow believers and the time just flew.

A compelling reason to visit and finally canny council. Verses 13 to 14 tell us of some of the practices that Moses and the people engaged in.

It's very evident that Moses not only acted as leader of this people, but he was expected to pass judgment and to give advice.

People brought their concerns and anxieties to Moses, small or great. Didn't matter what it was, when people fell out and didn't get on and so on.

And that went on day after day while they were encamped as a people. And Jethro obviously took careful note of what was taking place. And you find him posing the question to Moses, What is this thing that thou doest to the people?

[32 : 15] Why sittest thou thyself alone, and all the people stand by thee from morning unto evening? And what comes across from this is that Moses appears to be trying to do everything himself.

If I can use just a simple example. Let's say that you had a minister in the congregation. And the minister said, I'm not only going to do the preaching, but I'm going to do the presenting.

There's no need of office bearers. I'll look after the Sunday school. I'll look after the youth groups. I'll do everything in addition to my preaching and pastoral visitation.

That's the kind of thing that Moses was attempting to do. He was attempting to do everything on his own. And you know, it's impossible for one person to do everything on their own.

His father-in-law doesn't deny that Moses isn't doing many useful things. But he understands also that Moses is not able to be a true leader if he is to be plagued by all the relatively mundane issues that are brought to his attention and which he was asked to adjudicate and pass judgment on.

[33 : 49] And Moses himself seems to be so caught up in these matters that he seems unable to step back and reflect on whether that was the best way to run affairs, whether it was the best usage of his own time.

Sometimes it's very profitable just to step back and reflect. Not always just to do things just because that's how it was done.

Step back and reflect and think. Could it be done better? Could there be better usage of time? And so on. And so you find Moses responding to his father-in-law's question.

And the answer he gives is this, the people come to me to inquire of God. And you can't help but wonder whether part of the problem was that they had been an enslaved people for so long.

They had been so used to being told what to do, when to do it, and what not to do. They weren't allowed to think for themselves.

[35 : 06] And Jethro speaks very plainly and bluntly even. The thing that thou doest is not good. Thou will surely wear away and so on. And what Jethro is saying here is, you're going to suffer burnout.

You're going to collapse from sheer exhaustion. Now the term burnout is something that we're familiar with. That's obviously what Jethro sees happening to Moses.

And so he gives a canny or wise counsel. He doesn't ask him to relinquish his primary task as leader of the people and as the intermediary between the people and God.

But what he does do is to advise and to choose men from across the tribes suitable men who would bear the burden with Moses.

And these words in the end of verse 22, they shall bear the burden with thee.

[36 : 16] And so, everybody who has a crushing burden will know how appreciative you are when others bear the burden with you.

When you know that they are bearing it with you, holding you up when the burden is crushing you down. And it seems to me that this man Jethro had great insight into the working of the human psyche.

And he was counseling Moses to get help so that they would bear the burden with him. And he said, Thou shalt provide out of all the people, able men such as fear God, men of truth, hating covetousness, and so on.

In other words, Jethro was advising Moses to select men of discernment. Men who had the ability to discern the truth. And there are three particular qualifications that had to characterize the candidates that were chosen.

First of all, men that fear God. That is placed first. And I cannot but believe that that is the primary and most important qualification.

[37 : 45] Remember how the psalmist expresses it, the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. Where there is such fear, they will seek to shun evil.

And the Bible assures us that the Lord takes pleasure in those who fear him. So, the fear of the Lord is the first qualification.

And in addition to being godly, there was something else that was necessary. They were to be men of truth. Men, in other words, who were trustworthy, steadfast.

Men who weren't swayed by every wind that blew. Men of mature judgment. So, dependable.

Godly, dependable. And the third reason is hating covetousness. Men who wouldn't be motivated by self-interest.

[38 : 47] Who wouldn't want to serve. Who wouldn't want to serve. Who wouldn't want to serve. Just to further their own ends. That's what it means by that. That their standard would be the word of God.

Men who hated dishonest gain. Who couldn't be bribed. Because it was an influential position. They couldn't be bribed by the offer of money or gifts or whatever other inducements might be offered to sway their opinion.

Men whose standard would always be, what says the Lord. Men who prayed to the Lord. And you notice, Jethro was very keen that Moses consults with the Lord in the matter.

Although Jethro was given this counsel, he wished to have the blessing of the Lord on the counsel. If thou shalt do this thing and God command thee so, then thou shalt be able to endure.

And all those people shall also go to their place in peace. And you see, the context there gives us a window into the character of Moses, doesn't it?

[40 : 09] You see, Moses doesn't come across there as a proud, selfish person who rejects counsel out of hand.

He doesn't say to his father-in-law, hey, but wait a minute. I was educated in the Egyptian court. I was brought up to think this way and that way and the other way.

I received all that education. How can you advise me? That's not what Moses says. He comes across as a humble person who is willing to accept useful and wise counsel.

He is willing to listen and to delegate responsibilities. Where do we see that? Well, just there, verse 24. Moses hearkened to the voice of his father-in-law and did all that he had said.

Some see in what took place here as if this is the beginning of Presbyterian form of church government.

[41 : 23] And of course, a Christian God – that's the point you will believe you will have to. Algernon's government is committed to the Catholic government. was Moses' kirkcession. These men who were chosen and selected out of all the tribes of the people to bear, but the critical thing is they were to bear the burden with them and that is very important. So we have a compelling reason to visit the reports of the work of God in the life of Moses and in the life of the nation. There is no end to speaking about that. Eternity will be taken up with speaking about what God has done in the lives of his people and they'll never tire of speaking and discussing about what God has done for them and in them and through them. So that was the compelling reason, the captivating conversation. Moses relating his own experience firsthand of how the Lord had dealt with him and how he had dealt with the nation and how he had brought them to this place and then the canny counsel, the wise counsel of Jethro, so that Moses didn't suffer burnout but that he had helpers along the road to enable him and to share in the burden that he bore. Let us pray. O eternal God, help us to learn from thy truth. Help us to profit from the experiences of those who were set before us in thy word to wear examples in their old day of the power of great grace and infinite mercy and extravagant love. May our lives too bear that witness and the glory shall be thine. In Jesus name we ask it. Amen. Let us conclude by singing to God's praise from Psalm 147.

Psalm 147. Praise ye the Lord, for it is good praise to our God to sing, for it is pleasant, and to praise it is a comely thing. God doth build up Jerusalem, as we sing to the Lord and to praise it is a comely. God doth gather unto one. Those that are broken in their heart, and grieved in their minds he healeth, and their painful wounds he tenderly abides, counts the number of the stars, he nameeth, and their pain. He names them every one. Great is our Lord, and of great power his wisdom search can none.

Let us sing these verses. Praise ye the Lord. Praise ye the Lord, for it is good, his truth, and God to sing, for in his presence and hand to praise, praise it is good, His mercy. God to sing, for in his presence and praise, it is a comely thing. God doth build up Jerusalem, and he is Jerusalem, and he is alone, The Lord of Jerusalem, and He is His alone, That the dispens of Israel doth gather into one.

The Lord of Jerusalem, and He is His alone, And He is His alone, and He is His alone.

O homes, he mayorly abides. He cuts another John of the stars.

[46 : 51] He gives an every one. It is our Lord, and all in power, His wisdom set shall now.

Now may the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God the Father, fellowship and communion of the Holy Spirit, rest on and abide with you all, now and forever. Amen.