

Sunday 2nd August 2015 AM Tackling the scourge of self-reliance - Exodus 17v8-18v27

Title: Tackling the scourge of self-reliance - Exodus 17v8-18v27

Purpose: To emphasise the fact that we are to be LEARNERS through all of life and that here Moses is still learning at age 80. Here he learns two lessons which both serve to tackle our SELF-RELIANCE.

INTRODUCTION

L Plates

Q. Do you remember what you did (and I know that quite a few of us have had this experience)

Do you remember what you did when the driving examiner said "I am pleased to tell you that YOU HAVE PASSED"?

I can imagine that:

- for the more restrained of us - when we were out of sight of the examiner himself - we perhaps got straight on the phone to tell someone AND perhaps we indulged ourselves in a quick PUNCHING OF THE AIR!
- for those a little more expressive - when we got home we took hold of our PLATES

We kissed them with affection and then WE KISSED THEM - GOODBYE!!!

(*** RIP UP THE L-PLATES and place them firmly in the WASTE BIN***)

Life-long learning - 2 key lessons for Moses

But the question is:

Q. Having passed the test - does that really mean that we have now graduated?

Q. Have we really taken on board everything we'll need to know as a driver?

Passing the test was only really THE END OF THE BEGINNING - and for us as Christians we get given the title of DISCIPLE and this means LEARNER.

"Tackling the scourge of self-reliance"

The title of the message this morning is: **"Tackling the scourge of self-reliance"** and Moses (despite the fact that he has already had 80 years in God's Training School) - is still undergoing life-long-learning.

Today we see that Moses is being TUTORED in the area of DEPENDENCE:

- Lesson #1 - How to DEPEND ON GOD
- & Lesson #2 - How to DEPEND ON OTHERS

You see there are 2 types of work that we *cannot do*, in fact *must not* do:

- **THE FIRST** - is **GOD'S WORK** - there are so many things that God alone can do
- **THE SECOND** - is **OTHER'S WORK** - that which truly belongs in someone else's domain, in someone else's hands

Structure

This morning, as we follow through the episodes that were read earlier - I have **2 points which naturally mesh together**:

- **#1 DEPENDENCE - "When to SIT DOWN"** (this is the **Vertical Dimension** needed to kill the cancer of self-reliance)
- **#2 DELEGATION - "When to STAND BACK"** (this, then, is the matching **Horizontal Dimension**)

Ok, without any further ado we'll dive right in - Point #1

1] DEPENDENCE - "When to SIT DOWN"

People get taken by surprise

One of the things that we learn as we journey along with our OT counterparts (and we should be quite clear that these accounts (as 1 Corinthians 10 tells us) we written down for us, they are there precisely for our instruction - lest we fall into all the same traps that they did) - so one thing we learn is that **on a pretty regular basis this people get taken by surprise**.

Not expecting hardships along the way

As they go along in their wilderness travels things are frequently **not** the way they were expecting or predicting. So for example they seem to find it very incredible that there should be hardship along the way. Perhaps for them they felt that they had had enough hardship for a lifetime back there in Egypt as slaves. But of course you could say that this should have got them familiar and accustomed to things being hard and not the way they might have preferred.

In Exodus 18 Moses, there in Verse 8, tells Jethro (his father-in-law) of **"all the hardships they had met along the way"** - and I don't think he is merely talking about stuff that was back in Egypt.

The truth was that God had been regularly using **their desert wanderings as a testing ground** so that they would be humbled, so that they would reveal the truth states of their hearts and that they might learn the really crucial lesson that **"man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that proceeds from the mouth of God."** (Deuteronomy 8 Verse 2)

You've also made a beginning - and now you're also confused.com!

And maybe you have made a beginning with Christ, you have heard many of the stories that are in the gospels, you've perhaps got many of the most well-known stories of the OT - ***BUT* life is becoming confusing** - you feel that all the promise you felt was there is somehow **not** really crystallizing in your own experience.

The prospect of peace and joy, of assurance and hope and full salvation were remarkably attractive ***AND YET*** it seems that rather than finding HEAVEN instead ***ALL HELL*** seems to be breaking loose. It almost seems that life is more complicated now than it was before. Perhaps you now have more troubles rather than less troubles. **So all-in-all you are confused.com!!**

Don't give up

Well - let me say - if that is you right now - don't give up, don't assume that this means everything that Scripture teaches is really just one big SHAM.

What we see here in Exodus & Numbers is that the Israelites were simply unprepared for the various TRIALS and TRIBULATIONS that God was going to use to STRENGTHEN and EQUIP THEM.

The Amalekites

Here now we get introduced to these people called the **Amalekites** - these were descendants of Esau - Esau being that godless brother of Jacob. Now as we meet them here they are **portrayed in their true light** - Q. So what is that? Well - as **implacable enemies of God and of His people**.

Like various peoples and places in other parts of Scripture, the **Amalekites** are symbolic or representative of that which is aligned in full-scale opposition to God. It is for this very reason that God makes a clear point that He will always be at war against them.

See how Chapter 17 ends (Verse 16) "The LORD will be war against the **Amalekites** from generation to generation." and also in the verse just before He passes on a message that He doesn't want Joshua to forget - He tells him: "I will completely blot out the memory of **Amalek** from under heaven." - if you want another way to think of **Amalek** - it is a "kind of" **codeword for SIN**, for that captivating and destructive power of indwelling sin.

Amalek is such a persistent enemy of God's people that God's campaign against them is continued on into the reign of King Saul and it is because he does not do a wholehearted job against them that he loses the kingdom.

The battle

Now the details of the battle are fairly sparse all-in-all - however we get told as much as we need to know. Basically **Moses** is at the top of the mountain looking down (with **Aaron** and **Hur**) upon the two armies that are interlocked in conflict in the valley below.

Now **this battle is *not* one that is over in "straight sets"** - you know the typical 6-0, 6-0, 6-0 - game, set and match!! No - this is going to be **A REAL EPIC STRUGGLE**. And we learn that for some of the time Joshua is winning and then things turn around and their fortunes are going the other way and they start to lose. It's a bit **like one massive tug-of-war!**

Victory is not automatic

One thing that we are meant to notice is that VICTORY is **not** automatic here in the Christian life and particularly in the struggle against sin.

1 Corinthians 10v1-13 is the NT commentary on the wilderness wanderings of these OT people of God and this is the way that it interprets to us occasions like this one:

Verses 11-13 "These things happened to them as examples and were written down as warnings for us, on whom the culmination of the ages has come. So, if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don't fall! No temptation has overtaken you except what is common to mankind. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can endure it."

Our problem with sin - lack of struggle

The problem with so many of our struggles against sin is that they are **not** in fact struggles.

Q. What exactly do I mean?

Well what I mean is that when sin comes along and engages us - we believe that we can somehow stand at a distance and spectate it. We think that perhaps we can win by simply watching on and that is not never the case.

JC Ryle puts it like this in his book "A call to prayer":

"Praying and sinning will never live together in the same heart. Prayer will consume sin, or sin will choke prayer."

Writing in his most well-known book "**Holiness**" Ryle writes:

"Let us settle it in our minds that the Christian fight is a good fight - really good, truly good, emphatically good. We see only part of it as yet. We see the struggle, but not the end; we see the campaign, but not the reward; we see the cross, but not the crown. We see a few humble, broken-spirited, penitent, praying people, enduring hardships and despised by the world; but we see not the hand of God over them, the face of God smiling on them, the kingdom of glory prepared for them. These things are yet to be revealed. Let us not judge by appearances. There are more good things about the Christian warfare than we see."

What was Moses doing on the mountain

Q. So what was Moses doing on the mountain - if it wasn't spectating?

Verse 11 gives us the clue we need when it says that he was "**holding up his hands**".

As you may well have guessed - holding up of the hands is a reference to prayer - so for example during the plague of the hailstones back in **Exodus chapter 9** (ESV) we read Pharaoh's words and Moses' response:

"**Plead with the Lord**, for there has been enough of God's thunder and hail. I will let you go, and you shall stay no longer." Moses said to him, 'As soon as I have gone out of the city, **I will stretch out my hands to the Lord**. The thunder will cease, and there will be no more hail,...'"

Not only this we see this at the end of our present passage - **Verse 16** "...for hands were lifted up to the throne of the **LORD**."

Q. So what then is the clear lesson here that we are supposed to grasp?

Well let me read **Verses 11-13**:

(Verses 11-13): "As long as Moses held up his hands, the **Israelites** were winning, but whenever he lowered his hands, the **Amalekites** were winning. When Moses' hands grew tired, they took a stone and put it under him and he sat on it. Aaron and Hur held his hands up - one on one side, one on the other - so that his hands remained steady till sunset. So Joshua overcame the **Amalekite** army with the sword."

When Moses was praying, when he was communing and looking to God and calling for His divine strength to be given, then and only then did they prevail.

It is such a simple lesson but somehow it is too demanding for us - we need something quicker, or more dependant on our own working.

Moses has to **SIT DOWN HERE**, there is a sense in which Moses must be in the **BACKGROUND**, and God must be to the **FORE**.

There is a sense in which Moses - if there is to be any true prevailing - has to be **RELEGATED into a DEPENDENT STANCE** and our human nature find this humbling very hard to take on board.

One other sense you get is that this is, in it's own right, **TIRING** - Moses has to take *not just* a back seat - he has to take a seat because it is making him weary. Communing and depending on God takes a certain commitment and effort. It's not quite a case of let go and let God (simply because that is all just a bit overly passive in sentiment).

Recap

So the first type of work that we **cannot do** & **must not do** - is God's work AND so we MUST be DEPENDENT - **Dependent Vertically**. Our role is to **SIT DOWN** and allow God to work victory in our stead and on our behalf.

Aaron and Hur

I don't know whether you noticed the fact that Moses was not actually alone there on the mountain this time. He has two companions - Aaron and Hur - and they also have a crucial part to play - you see the truth is that Moses is **NOT** merely vertically dependent - he also is HORIZONTALLY DEPENDENT as well and he needs to rely on God AND others as well.

Which brings us naturally to Point #2 and here were turning over to Exodus Chapter 18:

#1 DEPENDENCE - "When to SIT DOWN"

2] DELEGATION - "When to STAND BACK"

External to internal threat

Now here in this new chapter - we find that we are simply **moving from one threat to another**.

The first threat was an EXTERNAL THREAT and it came from OUTSIDE, from the AMALEKITES.

Here now, we have another THREAT and **this time it is coming from WITHIN**, it an INTERNAL PROBLEM. If you like one problem was threatening an EXPLOSION and one was signalling the danger that there might be an IMPLOSION.

Moses is having to learn on the job (his humility)

I personally find it **a great encouragement** to see that in both of these episodes **Moses is getting things wrong** and is having, therefore, to **learn on the job**.

It let's us see that Moses does **not** consider himself some sort of "know-it-all" - he is not exactly making it up as he goes along BUT he is certainly **having to learn many new lessons along the way**.

It shows us the great value of **HUMILITY** and we should **not** perhaps think that this comes in the category of some sort of AUTOMATIC WISDOM that we all possess - we need to let the words of God from the book of Proverbs sink into us:

Proverbs 12 Verse 15 "The way of a fool seems right to him, but a wise man listens to advice."

Proverbs 27 Verse 9 "Perfume and incense bring joy to the heart, and the pleasantness of one's friend springs from his earnest counsel."

Proverbs 15 Verse 31-33 "He who listens to a life-giving rebuke will be at home among the wise. He who ignores discipline despises himself, but whoever heeds correction gains understanding. The fear of the Lord teaches a man wisdom, and humility comes before honour."

Q. I wonder whether we consider ourselves good learners or maybe we now feel that we have gone beyond that stage because now we are really the teachers and others need to listen to us?

Perhaps we would do well to have the words from James ringing in our ears - that we should be "quick to listen and slow to speak...".

Recap the background

Now most of the key parts of this second episode arise from **Verses 13 onwards** - so let me just summarise the parts leading up to this:

- **FIRST-OFF** - we see that **A VISITOR has come** - and his name is **JETHRO** - he is none other than **Moses' own Father-in-law**.

So what we have here is a definite case of: **"the IN-LAWS are coming to town!!"**

And what is particular striking here is that Moses seems to have a very strong relationship with his in-law.

- **OK, NEXT** - we see that there's a **CATCH UP SESSION** - **Verse 8**:

"Moses told his father-in-law about everything the Lord had done to Pharaoh and the Egyptians for Israel's sake and **about all the hardships** they had met along the way and **how the Lord had saved them.**"

And you can see something of the strength of their relationship in as much as Moses doesn't hold back - he shares both the good and the bad - he talks of the hardships and he talks about how God had matched their needs at every point.

Rigorous honesty - when we speak about the faith - does not take away from things - rather it tends to give that crucial ring of truth, that sense of authenticity that people are looking for.

- **ONE LAST THING** - and that is Jethro's response. **MOSES TELLS HIS STORY** about how they got **taken out of the cast-iron grip of Egypt** - and Jethro responds:

Firstly he is delighted about it - and it takes some **HUMILITY** to be transparently glad when someone else meets with great success.

It is just possible that something of Moses' own **HUMILITY** might have been learned by watching his own Father-in-law across all of those 40 years he spent in the far corners of the desert.

Perhaps some of the keenest lessons and character traits have to be learned over an extended period of time. They don't grow over night.

Secondly - Jethro comes to a **deeper knowledge of Yahweh - of the LORD**. **Verse 12** "Now I know that the LORD is greater than all other gods..." and he praises God and brings offerings.

The key lesson - "What you are doing is not good" (Verse 17)

All the way up until **Verse 17** everything is very positive - the family reunion is really going well BUT (and there's always a BUT) one day Jethro accompanies Moses to the office and he shadow Moses around. He is just an observer - however he is a very **KEEN OBSERVER** and when he get Moses alone he has some questions.

You see Jethro is the older man and he has more years of life experience from which to contribute.

Q. Do you ever look to those that have walked the road ahead of you and let them speak into your lives?

Perhaps you like to operate rather autonomously, rather independently thinking that if there are problems to be solved then you will tackle them on your own.

Jethro doesn't jump to conclusions

Now Jethro's approach is good - he doesn't jump to conclusions he asks appropriate questions in order to get confirmation from Moses own mouth.

And only then does he confront what Moses is doing.

Notice that he doesn't only confront - he doesn't merely say (Verse 17) "What you are doing is not good." and when we feel it right to confront something - we will do well to learn a lesson here.

Jethro comes with **BOTH** a concern **AND** with a practical proposal.

What Jethro says

Jethro in effect has two things to say:

- **FIRST** he is saying - **Moses, you and the people are currently in a LOSE-LOSE situation.**

YOU -> as sole judge for all the people - are bearing an unsustainable burden - you are on the road to **MINISTERIAL BURNOUT** - the work is too heavy and you will wear yourself out.

THE PEOPLE -> they are having to wait around all day long and even then perhaps they have to go home and come back another day and so they are also experiencing unnecessary suffering - they too will have their patience stretched and they will also be worn out just waiting around!

- **THE SECOND THING** he goes on to point out is that - **You and the people can easily swap into a WIN-WIN situation.**

This is where the DELEGATION word comes in.

All Moses has to do is learn to STAND BACK and let others into the MINISTERIAL PICTURE.

He must chose a set of men to be his assistants - this will free him up to tackle just the hard cases and all the many cases that are coming for judgment will be processed with a much greater efficiency.

Moses **WINS** because his burden almost overnight becomes manageable, sustainable and therefore more enjoyable.

The people also are **CLEAR WINNERS** because when they step up to the ticket machine to have their case heard - it doesn't have a large number printed on it - ("You're case is number: NINE HUNDRED AND THIRTEEN!! Estimated queue time - 8 days 4 hours and 10 minutes!!").

DELEGATION

Delegation of ministry certainly is shown to be what you might call "**a bit of a NO-BRAINER**". Thankfully Moses listens to the wise advice he receives - he is not too proud to be corrected - instead he shows his own wisdom by receiving good advice even from an unlikely source, his in-laws.

Now **delegation** is not just an OT teaching - let me anchor it into the NT by simply pointing out 2 examples:

Acts chapter 6 and the first signs of growing pains in the infant early church - I'll read **the first 4 verses**:

Verses 1-4 "In those days when the number of disciples was increasing, the Grecian Jews among them complained against the Hebraic Jews because their widows were being overlooked in the daily distribution of food. So the Twelve gathered all the disciples together and said, "It would not be right for us to neglect the ministry of the word of God in order to wait on tables. Brothers, choose seven men from among you who are known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom. We will turn this responsibility over to them and will give our attention to prayer and the ministry of the word."

They saw the plain facts of the case - the job was too big for them alone - problems of scale were arising and if they personally tried to tackle it then the NEGLECT would simply move somewhere else - and that would be an even greater DISASTER - YES people would get PHYSICAL FOOD **HOWEVER** they would then fail to get their SPIRITUAL FOOD!!

The second passage is **Ephesians chapter 4**:

Verse 11-12 "So Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, **to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up...**"

Verse 16 "From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, **as each part does its work.**"

So very clearly we can see that although God gives some the calling to be leaders of God's church, he does **not** at the same time call them to DO THE WORKS OF SERVICE - only to EQUIP HIS PEOPLE FOR WORKS OF SERVICE.

Delegation - A two-way street

Now it bears saying that **DELEGATION** - is very much **a two-way street**:

- The one delegating must be willing to **STAND BACK** and **become a SPECTATOR**
- Equally the one being delegated to has to be willing **to STEP FORWARD** and **cease being a SPECTATOR**

If you believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, have been saved by His once for all sacrifice then that we are all **SERVANTS** of the Living God and **not** to be **SPECTATORS** of the Living God.

A question on delegation that this passage addresses - and that is: Q. Can just anyone step forward? And the answer is revealed by the fact that Moses was to appoint capable men and also that capability had to be properly assessed. We see this because some were to be leaders of large numbers and others who were not so able were to be given charge over just a few people.

Perhaps you would say - well that's exactly why I don't do a lot in the church - because I don't have any very strong gifts!

Q. But how do you think those who were very capable got that way?

Because they, by degrees, became more capable. They started off in a junior role and as they made mistakes, learned lessons, they honed their spiritual gifts and became altogether more useful in the Lord's service.

CONCLUSION

This morning these chapters help us in TACKLING THE SCOURGE OF SELF-RELIANCE.

Q. When you think of yourself - do you see yourself as one wearing an L plate? Disciple of Jesus - student, pupil, learner.

If this is to be the case then you will know that learners never are always in the company of another - they never drive independently - they are always under instruction.

This morning:

- PERHAPS - you feel that you have arrived - you've had the L plate in earlier years but you have essentially GRADUATED.

Well Moses was 80 and he didn't feel that was - he was glad to have the label of disciple - learner.

- PERHAPS - in terms of VERTICAL LEARNING - your hands have grown weary, prayer is patchy and you are therefore strongly self-reliant.

And maybe you bear all the marks of that frustration that arises from everything being a hard slog.

- PERHAPS - your problem is in that other HORIZONTAL DIMENSION - maybe you've taken on too much and you need to give aspects of God's work into the hands of others.

Maybe you feel if you do this then you'll be giving away some of the turf of your own self-importance. Just remember it is Christ you are serving - it is not meant to be self-service.

PERHAPS - you've got to be willing to receive work from others - learn some new skills, bring up to the next level the gifting that are lying fairly dormant.

Maybe you start be a leaders over 10, and then you find that your capacity is not exhausted God has enabled you to be a leader over 50, maybe even a 100.

Let's pray shall we - and just in the quietness - examine yourself in regard to this scourge of self-reliance:

- Consider whether you, like Moses, are falling down in one OR both of these dimensions.
- Ask yourself:
 - Q. Have I functionally got an L plate on?
 - Q. Can I really claim the label of "disciple" or am I only existing at that very bare level of "a believer"?

Lord - there is a daily spiritual battle I have to face and I take up the armour of God crowned by irreplaceable dimension of PRAYER.

Lord forgive me when I somehow think that I can prevail through my own efforts.

Lord forgive me too when I somehow believe that I can be a lone ranger Christian working in isolation of my brothers and sisters.

Lord forgive me when I don't want to be up the mountain AND I equally don't want to be down in the valley fighting - when I just want to wear a label that you never gave us that of PRESS COVERAGE.

Lord - let me once again re-affix my L plate and once again learn these 2 key lessons: 1) to SIT DOWN in TOTAL DEPENDENCE on you 2) to STAND BACK in FULL INTERDEPENDENCE on one another - for Jesus sake - AMEN