

DEVELOPING A HEALTHY FAITH COMMUNITY

The Life of Moses: Deliverance Through Faith

Exodus 17:8-18:27

Chadron Berean Church

So last week we talked a little bit about our church's vision of being like a healthy, fruit-bearing tree. How we want to be rooted in God's Word and who God is. Here at CBC, we strive to see the lives of every individual rooted in these things and spiritually healthy. But you know there's another aspect that is incredibly important to our growth and that is to *grow together* as a community of believers in Christ centered around God's Word. We live a very individualistic society—to a fault—but we weren't made to do life alone. We were made to be in relationship with God and with others. Being rooted in a community that is centered around Jesus and the Word will help us grow spiritually and become better followers of Jesus. That's sort of what we're going to talk about this morning as we continue our study on the life of Moses. The next couple of weeks we plan to take a break from Moses to focus on Easter and advance this year's theme "created to worship".

At this point, Moses has led Israel out of Egypt and they are on their way to Mt. Sinai, facing a series of tests along the way to develop the nation as a people of faith. God is shaping them into a people of faith that will be a light to the nations around them. Previously, we saw them deal with an enemy within as they fought the sin of grumbling and unbelief in their own hearts. Today we start out by seeing them fight an enemy from the outside now, the Amalekites.

I. **ISRAEL WARS AGAINST AMALEK. (17:8-16)**

8 Then Amalek came and fought against Israel at Rephidim. 9 So Moses said to Joshua, "Choose men for us and go out, fight against Amalek. Tomorrow I will take my stand on the top of the hill with the staff of God in my hand." 10 And Joshua did as Moses told him, to fight against Amalek; and Moses, Aaron, and Hur went up to the top of the hill. 11 So it happened when Moses raised his hand up, that Israel prevailed, and when he let his hand down, Amalek prevailed. 12 But Moses' hands were heavy. Then they took a stone and put it under him, and he sat on it; and Aaron and Hur supported his hands, one on one side and one on the other. Thus his hands were steady until the sun set. 13 So Joshua overwhelmed Amalek and his people with the edge of the sword. 14 Then Yahweh [the LORD] said to Moses, "Write this in a book as a memorial and recite it in Joshua's hearing, that I will utterly blot out the memory of Amalek from under heaven." 15 And Moses built an altar and named it Yahweh is My Banner; 16 and he said, "Because He has sworn with a hand upon the throne of Yah, Yahweh will have war against Amalek from generation to generation."[Legacy Standard Bible]

So on their way to Mt. Sinai, Israel runs into the **Amalekites** who live in that area and probably want to protect their territory and resources. Like cowards, Deuteronomy 25:17-18 tells us they ambushed the weary, the old, and the sick. So Moses appoints **Joshua**, his future successor, to lead the Israel into battle while he stands on a hilltop from a distance with the **staff of God** raised up in his hands. Through the Exodus plagues, his staff has become a sign of God's power and

presence. **Lifting it up in his hands** is a sign of his **prayerful dependence upon God** (Ps. 63:4; 141:2; 1 Tim. 2:8). He was engaging in intercessory prayer above, while Joshua actively engaged the enemy in the field below.¹ And the text says that as long as his hands were lifted up, they would overwhelm the Amalekites. When his hands **grew heavy** and started to drop, the Amalekites started to prevail. So **Aaron** and a man named **Hur** (the historian Josephus claims he was the husband of Moses' sister, Miriam) grab him a seat and **help support** his hands on both sides of him until sunset—and they win the battle together! So the point is made that Moses could not win this battle on his own. He needed help from others who together with him, mutually depend upon God's power. The battle is fought in an active way with boots on the ground, but prayer supports them. Without prayer, their activity was ineffective.²

Last week, we saw a people quarreling with each other because they did not trust God to provide. This week we see a people united, together depending upon God. It's a beautiful picture of a faith community. They **record** the moment for future generations and memorialize it with an **altar**, naming the altar **Yahweh-nissi**, or **the LORD is my banner**. Basically, Yahweh's name was on their army's flag. They fought in His name and strength and power, giving glory to Him.

Now we're going to fast forward a smidgen to Exodus 18:13. Moses and the Israelites arrive at or near Mt. Sinai. Moses is reunited with his family and they share a meal together, celebrating the Lord's deliverance. Apparently after the incident on the way to Egypt, his wife, **Zipporah**, and the boys returned to Moses father-in-law, **Jethro**, in Midian.

II. **JETHRO COUNSELS MOSES. (18:13-27)**

"13 Now it happened the next day that Moses sat to judge the people, and the people stood about Moses from the morning until the evening. 14 And Moses' father-in-law saw all that he was doing for the people, so he said, "What is this thing that you are doing for the people? Why do you alone sit as judge and all the people stand about you from morning until evening?""

So Jethro, with fresh eyes and some experiential wisdom as a leader himself, realizes that Moses is doing all the work in leading the people. He's the sole leader and judge of this great people. And he can probably see weariness in Moses' face and in the people who are waiting in line all day to meet with him. Jethro asks, *"Why are you doing this? And doing it all alone?"* Verse 15:

"And Moses said to his father-in-law, "Because the people come to me to inquire of God. 16 When they have a matter, it comes to me, and I judge between a man and his neighbor and make known the statutes of God and His laws.""

So, remember when Moses struck that Egyptian and someone said, *"Who made you ruler and judge over us?"* (2:14). Well, that's somewhat comical now, isn't it? Ironically, Moses has become their ruler and judge. Since today is Palm Sunday, we could note that Moses is only a foreshadowing of Christ who would be the true Prophet, Priest and King. But in response to Jethro's question, Moses doesn't appear to be defensive. He was honest. People looked to him as God's man. He's the head of the complaints department. And I don't know if Moses was expecting a positive response from Jethro like, *"Wow, you work hard. Keep up the good work!"* If it is, that certainly isn't what he hears. Verse 17:

“And Moses’ father-in-law said to him, “The thing that you are doing is not good. 18 You will surely wear out, both yourself and these people who are with you, for the task is too heavy for you; you cannot do it alone [at this point, I wonder if he’s having flashbacks to the battle with the Amalekites]. 19 Now listen to my voice: I will give you counsel, and God be with you. You be the people’s representative before God, and you bring the matters to God; 20 then warn them about the statutes and the laws, and make known to them the way in which they shall go and the work they shall do.””

So Jethro basically says, *“Moses you’re busy doing so much that it’s harmful not only to you, but to the people you lead as well. When try to do too much, you end up doing nothing much.”* See, Moses was trying to be the judge, the jury, the police, the counselor, and the pastor all in one.³ And Jethro wasn’t saying that he shouldn’t work hard, but that he should focus on what’s *essential* and share the load of what’s *additional*. Rather than overseeing every little discrepancy the people have, his time would be better spent in **prayer**, taking the people to God and in **teaching**, taking the Word of God to the people. If he prayerfully taught God’s Word to the people, there might not be so many disputes and complaints in the first place.

But we should note that what Moses was doing was **normal** in the world of ancient monarchies. A king’s leadership was often direct and personal. In his commentary on Exodus, Duane Garrett wrote, *“Judicial, priestly, and diplomatic tasks fell directly to the king.”*⁴ In Egypt, the pharaoh personally directed important activities so it’s not surprising that Moses felt compelled to manage even the most minute affairs personally. But Jethro was wise enough to recognize that this level of personal involvement was unsustainable and unhealthy for everyone. So Jethro’s next suggestion, we can say, breaks the norm. It’s countercultural. Verse 21:

“But you shall select excellent men out of all the people, those who fear God, men of truth, those who hate greedy gain; and you shall place these men over them as leaders of thousands, of hundreds, of fifties, and of tens. 22 And they will judge the people at all times. And it will be that every major matter they will bring to you, but every minor matter they themselves will judge. So it will be easier for you, and they will bear the burden with you. 23 If you do this thing and God so commands you, then you will be able to endure, and all these people also will go to their place in peace.”

I like how he adds at the end there, *“If God so commands you.”* It’s kind of like saying, *“Here’s my two cents. Take it or leave it. God’s will be done.”* And his two cents are that Moses **delegate** some of his responsibility to others. This will make it **easier** on him and be **better** for the people. That’s rare advice, isn’t it? In the business world and in some churches (that sometimes unfortunately operate like businesses), people want to get the most out of their money. They think if the leader they hired isn’t doing it all, then they aren’t doing their job well. But on the contrary, wisdom understands that a good leader will delegate properly. Delegation makes the organization more efficient, more effective—healthier. The leader does a better job when they’re not exhausted all the time. So as the workload increases, the wise leader or manager doesn’t always get busier, he gets smarter. Please don’t misunderstand. Every calling has its seasons. Like most jobs, even ministry has seasons that require longer hours than normal. But it shouldn’t always be that way. As a farmer, I remember working double-time during harvest and my wife

being a “harvest widow” for the first time. But there’s no way anyone could or should keep up the harvest pace year-round. It’s untenable.

But sometimes I think we get the idea, in Christian ministry in particular, that it's a sign of spirituality to work 10 to 16 hour days and walk around hunched over like we're carrying a pickaxe out of the salt mine. But to be honest, the people who minister to me the most don't walk around like that. They're people who live balanced lives. They work hard, but they rest well. They enjoy life. They take time to refresh. They don't work so hard that they neglect their family like Moses is no doubt doing right now. And because they aren't worked to death, and they share the load with others, they really do a better job. They have more time to treat people like people, instead of a number. Leading by example, the people also become healthier themselves. Describing Moses' death, the Bible says his **eyes weren't dim** and his **vigor was not abated** (Dt. 34:7). I can't help but think it's partly because he heeded Jethro's advice. He probably died with more hair and less wrinkles too! Verse 24 continues:

So Moses listened to the voice of his father-in-law and did all that he had said. 25 And Moses chose excellent men out of all Israel and made them heads over the people, leaders of thousands, of hundreds, of fifties, and of tens. 26 And they judged the people at all times; the difficult matter they would bring to Moses, but every minor matter they themselves would judge. 27 Then Moses let his father-in-law depart, and he went his way into his own land.

I like that Moses was humble enough to listen to his father-in-law in this situation and he appoints men of integrity to be elders over the people and over their increasing “small groups.” Moses is a great example for leaders everywhere. But let's take home **two key principles** from these two episodes in Moses' life that make for a healthy faith community among God's people.

1. A healthy community lives by faith in God's power.

Like Moses and the Israelites battling Amalek, we are to rely on God's power, *together*. We have to rely on God's power for everything in the Christian life. Both salvation and sanctification require divine power. We have enemies within and enemies without (the world, the flesh (the sin nature), and the devil) and these opposing forces require us to rely on God's power together to win the battle. We might have to actively get involved sometimes and make wise decisions to war against sin, but most of all the battle is supported by God's power through prayer and the freedom-working power of the Spirit of God. We are in a real spiritual battle. Paul says our struggle is not against flesh and blood but against the spiritual forces of wickedness (Eph. 6:10-20). This is why we need each other and why I think **small groups** are so critical. We grow together. We pray for each other. We hold each other accountable and challenge one another. We do battle in this Christian life together and we become better followers of Jesus because of it. Christians who stay on the outskirts and don't plugged into the church will stunt their growth.

2. A healthy community embraces an every-member ministry.

Moses was a mighty man of God. He was a man of importance. Everybody wanted him as their speaker. But you have to love how **humble** and willing he is to heed Jethro's advice and share the responsibility of ministry. Actually, **Numbers 12:3** tells us he is **meeker than any other**

man living at the time. Meekness could be defined as “*power under control*.” It’s something that Washington D.C. needs desperately. But it shows us that Moses not a power-hungry individual. The position of power or influence that God gives him he wants to use, not to draw attention to himself but to *really help people*. Meekness is required to delegate because leaders can develop a love for the spotlight or a false, self-centered pride thinking they can do things better than others or doing it all to make a name for themselves (3 Jn. 9). If we’re not careful, refusing to delegate can also be an attitude of unbelief—not trusting God to provide the gifted people needed.

There’s two areas of ministry that I want to talk about if a local church like ours is going to be healthy and effective and glorify Christ. The first area is that of **shared leadership**. Whenever you see leadership appointed in the New Testament, be it Jesus and His apostles or Paul and Barnabas planting and organizing churches, there is always a **plurality of leadership** appointed (Acts 14:23). Power is never isolated to one individual. The leadership of the Jerusalem church was clearly apostles, elders, and deacons. While there are no apostles today, that doesn’t mean there aren’t elders and deacons. **Deacons** tend to focus more on practical acts of **service** and **elders** are apt to teach (gifted in teaching). In the nascent days of the church, the apostle were being distracted from their priorities of prayer and teaching to serve tables, so they appointed Spirit-filled deacons to do it (Acts 6). Of course, there was nothing wrong with serving tables, but they understood that God had gifted them in a certain way and to be distracted by additional things—good as they were—was not prioritizing the essential gifts God had given them.

Elders are also called **shepherds (pastors)** or **overseers** in Scripture (interchangeable terms). They are the shepherds over a local church and must meet qualifications of integrity such as Jethro mentioned (Acts 20:17; 1 Tim. 3:1-7; Tit. 1:5-9; 1 Pet. 5:1-4). They serve under the chief Shepherd, Jesus (1 Pet. 5:1-4). But if a church is going to be a sound (healthy) community made up of sound individuals, it must have sound doctrine being taught by sound leaders (*sound* is a key word in Titus). A church needs healthy, shared leadership and shared leadership *is* healthy. A plurality of elders is also wise because 1) It protects the elders from too much praise and blame; 2) affords built in accountability for elders in their walk with Christ; 3) helps eliminate blind spots in doctrine and ministry; 4) enables elders to feed on each other’s passion and courage; 5) enables the various leadership gifts and styles of different men to be fully used for the health of the body.⁵ Cults, on the other hand, tend to center around one individual. One of the grossest travesties that crept into churches not long after the apostles died was the development of the monespiscopate—the idea that one man should lead a church or even all the churches.⁶ Or that one local church would be superior to other churches and tell all the other churches what to do. That’s foreign to Scripture. Local churches stand before Jesus individually, based on their faithfulness to Him (Rev. 1-3).

Rarely does Paul in his writings address the local church leaders specifically. He tends to address the whole church. It’s an important detail because it shows us the elders do not do all the ministry. Elders are *equippers*. Their job is to *equip* God’s people to do the work of the ministry. It’s a **shared ministry by all the saints**. If you are in Christ, you are a saint. It means you have been set apart by God—given a holy and heavenly calling. (Eph. 2:8-10; 4:1; 2 Tim. 1:8-11). **Ephesians 4:11-16** says, “*11 And He Himself gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers, 12 for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ, 13 until we all attain to the unity of the*

faith, and of the full knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ, 14 so that we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming, 15 but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all aspects into Him who is the head, that is Christ, 16 from whom the whole body, being joined and held together by what every joint supplies, according to the properly measured working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love.”

So there’s a lot in that. Suffice it to say that each church is like a **human body**. Jesus Christ is the **head**, in ultimate authority. The body, made up of each believer, has many parts. All these parts are **different** but **dependent** upon one another (See **1 Cor. 12:12-26**; 1 Pet. 4:10-11). And when the local church is **healthy** and **mature**, all the parts are operating in their designed function. When the body is unhealthy, it might be because one part is trying to do all the work rather than operating by faith that God has uniquely gifted other individuals to do their part in the body. Healthy churches seek to have an every-member ministry where people are coming to Christ, being lovingly nurtured into maturity and thus equipped for their ministry and life mission resulting in the further building up of the body in love to glory of God.

Speaking of a healthy body, right out of high school I went to school to be a diesel technician. I thought it might help on the farm. But one of the first things my professor said was that diesel technicians typically retired with better backs than auto technicians. This is because the diesel technicians typically work on heavier vehicles like trucks or tractors. They *know* they cannot lift a lot of their parts without assistance. But for some of the smaller auto mechanic stuff, the parts are *just light enough* for a man to lift them on his own, to his own detriment.

So as you look into your heart and you look into your life, maybe surveying the next few months of your life, ask yourself, “*What am I doing with my time? Where do I need to prioritize? What am I doing alone that maybe I don’t need too?*” Maybe reprioritize, separating the *essential* from the *additional*.⁷ *Essentials* involves your calling. It’s “seeking the kingdom of God first” stuff. You reserve as much time as you need for these. *Additional* is stuff we sometimes might like to do, or do more of, but are secondary or tertiary or we need let go of. Getting healthy personally is critical to being a healthy faith community that thrives in a wilderness world.

¹ Thomas Constable, *Notes on Exodus* (2023 edition), 158

² James Montgomery Boice, *The Life of Moses: God’s First Deliverer of Israel* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2018), 124.

³ Tony Merida, *Christ-Centered Exposition Commentary: Exalting Jesus in Exodus* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing, 2014), 114.

⁴ Duane A. Garrett, *A Commentary on Exodus* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 2014), 449.

⁵ Andrew Davis, in *Shepherding God’s Flock: Biblical Leadership in the New Testament and Beyond* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 2014), 317.

⁶ Benjamin L. Merkle, Thomas R. Schreiner, “The Development and Consolidation of the Papacy,” in *Shepherding God’s Flock: Biblical Leadership in the New Testament and Beyond* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 2014).

⁷ Charles R. Swindoll, *Moses: A Man of Selfless Dedication* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 1999), 260.