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Teaching Notes

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Jethro's Advice to an Overwhelmed Spiritual Leader

Exodus 18:1-27

Matthew Henry's Summary

I. The Visit of Jethro, Moses' Father-in-law (vs. 1-6)

vs. 1-6 Now Jethro, the priest of Midian and father-in-law of Moses, heard of everything God had done for Moses and for his people Israel, and how the LORD had brought Israel out of Egypt. 2 After Moses had sent away his wife Zipporah, his father-in-law Jethro received her 3 and her two sons. One son was named Gershom, for Moses said, "I have become an alien in a foreign land"; 4 and the other was named Eliezer, for he said, "My father's God was my helper; he saved me from the sword of Pharaoh." 5 Jethro, Moses' father-in-law, together with Moses' sons and wife, came to him in the desert, where he was camped near the mountain of God. 6 Jethro had sent word to him, "I, your father-in-law Jethro, am coming to you with your wife and her two sons."

A. To Congratulate and Share in the Happiness of Israel

1. Jethro had knows of Moses' mission before it happened
2. He had heard general reports of the Exodus... but now he wanted to share in the joy of the victory

B. To Bring Moses' Wife and Children to Him

1. Presumably after the conflict over circumcision in Exodus 4, Moses sent Zipporah away
2. Reasoning was that Moses needed to concentrate fully on the mission, and needed to be free from family concerns
3. Now, however, the time was right for Moses to resume his rightful place as husband and father

II. A Godly Pattern for Cordial Family Relationships (vs. 7-12)

vs. 7-12 So Moses went out to meet his father-in-law and bowed down and kissed him. They greeted each other and then went into the tent. 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. 9 Jethro was delighted to hear about all the good

things the LORD had done for Israel in rescuing them from the hand of the Egyptians. 10 He said, "Praise be to the LORD, who rescued you from the hand of the Egyptians and of Pharaoh, and who rescued the people from the hand of the Egyptians. 11 Now I know that the LORD is greater than all other gods, for he did this to those who had treated Israel arrogantly." 12 Then Jethro, Moses' father-in-law, brought a burnt offering and other sacrifices to God, and Aaron came with all the elders of Israel to eat bread with Moses' father-in-law in the presence of God.

A. The Kind and Gracious Greeting Between Moses and Jethro (vs. 7)

1. Being godly and important as a leader does not free you from the requirement to be courteous and socially polished

vs. 7 So Moses went out to meet his father-in-law and bowed down and kissed him. They greeted each other and then went into the tent.

“They greeted each other” =

NAU Exodus 18:7 ... they asked each other of their welfare and went into the tent.

“welfare” = **shalom**, peace... health, prosperity...everything

2. Moses also shows great humility and rightful understanding by bowing down low and greeting his father-in-law with respect

B. Moses' Recounting of God's Great Acts (vs. 8)

1. Genuine fellowship begins now with a retelling of God's mighty acts in Israel's behalf
2. How exciting must it have been for Jethro to hear this report straight from the man of God himself!!

vs. 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.

C. Jethro's Genuine Worship of the Eternal God (vs. 9)

1. Jethro rejoiced

Amazing: Israel had gotten over the wonder of their deliverance and were now grumbling constantly about their trials... Jethro was overwhelmed with joy at what God had accomplished

vs. 9 Jethro was delighted to hear about all the good things the LORD had done for Israel in rescuing them from the hand of the Egyptians.

2. Jethro gave glory to the God of Israel (vs. 10)

vs. 10 He said, "Praise be to the LORD, who rescued you from the hand of the Egyptians and of Pharaoh, and who rescued the people from the hand of the Egyptians.

3. Jethro declared his faith confirmed and strengthened (vs. 11)

vs. 11 Now I know that the LORD is greater than all other gods, for he did this to those who had treated Israel arrogantly."

- a. the matter of his faith: I know that God is greater than all false gods
- b. the confirmation and strengthening of his faith: "Now I know that..."
- c. the ground and reason for his faith: God trounced the deities in their very areas of strength

KJV Exodus 18:11 Now I know that the LORD is greater than all gods: for in the thing wherein they dealt proudly he was above them.

D. Godly Fellowship, Feasting, and Corporate Worship (vs. 12)

vs. 12 Then Jethro, Moses' father-in-law, brought a burnt offering and other sacrifices to God, and Aaron came with all the elders of Israel to eat bread with Moses' father-in-law in the presence of God.

- 1. They joined in a sacrifice of thanksgiving: Jethro was a priest!!
- 2. They joined in a feast of rejoicing based upon the sacrifice
- 3. They ate manna together before God

III. Moses' Life as a Magistrate (vs. 13-27)

A. Moses' Great Zeal and Industry as a Magistrate

- 1. Here is Moses a *type* of Christ: prophet, priest and king
 - a. how blessed are they to have such a godly mouthpiece of wisdom by which to settle their disputes!!
 - b. note how they originally opposed him with the words, "Who made you a lawgiver and judge among us?"... now that is precisely what he was! Stephen noted this:

Exodus 2:13-14 The next day he went out and saw two Hebrews fighting. He asked the one in the wrong, "Why are you hitting your fellow Hebrew?" 14 The man said, "Who made you ruler and judge over us? Are you thinking of killing me as you killed the Egyptian?"

Acts 7:35 "This is the same Moses whom they had rejected with the words, 'Who made you ruler and judge?' He was sent to be their ruler and deliverer by God himself, through the angel who appeared to him in the bush.

Now they were so humble and glad to submit to his rulings!!

- c. Moses merely a servant in God's house... delivering God's verdicts as God's mouthpiece

Hebrews 3:5 Moses was faithful as a servant in all God's house, testifying to what would be said in the future.

- d. the true lawgiver, king and judge was the Lord... ultimately Christ

Isaiah 33:22 For the LORD is our judge, the LORD is our lawgiver, the LORD is our king; it is he who will save us.

John 5:22-23 Moreover, the Father judges no one, but has entrusted all judgment to the Son, that all may honor the Son just as they honor the Father.

2. Moses was a hardworking, loving magistrate, with a great servant's heart
 - a. he *sat* to judge (vs. 13), "composed and sedate"
 - b. great meekness and condescension to the people, who stood nearby him... he was very accessible, even to the lowest Israelite
 - c. zeal and diligence, wearing himself out to keep the peace, from morning till evening
 - d. taking no break or vacation because of Jethro's visit
3. Moses was very humble, not delegating this task to others... also realize this was the very people who had been recently ready to stone him!! (17:4)

Exodus 17:4 Then Moses cried out to the LORD, "What am I to do with these people? They are almost ready to stone me."

4. Remember that Moses was an old man... this could have worn him out to death; however, he kept at it hour after hour, morning to night, day after day

B. Jethro's Counsel

1. His disliked Moses' methods
 - a. and was free to tell him so three times

- vs. 14 *When his father-in-law saw all that Moses was doing for the people, he said, "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?"*
- vs. 17-18 *Moses' father-in-law replied, "What you are doing is not good. You and these people who come to you will only wear yourselves out. The work is too heavy for you; you cannot handle it alone.*
- b. sometimes our zeal overwhelms our common sense
 - c. especially true of loving, conscientious people
2. Jethro advised Moses concerning a better model of government
- a. reserve to himself all direct communication with God
- vs. 19 *Listen now to me and I will give you some advice, and may God be with you. You must be the people's representative before God and bring their disputes to him.*

This was a unique honor for Moses alone:

- Numbers 12:6-8 he said, "Listen to my words: "When a prophet of the LORD is among you, I reveal myself to him in visions, I speak to him in dreams. 7 But this is not true of my servant Moses; he is faithful in all my house. 8 With him I speak face to face, clearly and not in riddles; he sees the form of the LORD. Why then were you not afraid to speak against my servant Moses?"*
- b. teach the people the laws and precepts of God
- vs. 20 *Teach them the decrees and laws, and show them the way to live and the duties they are to perform.*
- c. appoint judges from the various tribes and families
- vs. 21 *But select capable men from all the people-- men who fear God, trustworthy men who hate dishonest gain-- and appoint them as officials over thousands, hundreds, fifties and tens. 22 Have them serve as judges for the people at all times,*
- d. reserve the hardest cases for himself

but have them bring every difficult case to you; the simple cases they can decide themselves. That will make your load lighter, because they will share it with you.

C. Two Qualifications to the Counsel

1. Great care should be taken in the selection of the judges

- a. they must be *capable men*

vs. 21 *But select capable men*

Matthew Henry: “For judgment and resolution—able men, of good sense, that understood business, and bold men, that would not be daunted by frowns or clamours. Clear heads and stout hearts make good judges.”

- b. for *piety and faith*

vs. 21 *...men who fear God*

Who know there is a God above them who will someday be their judge, and who sees all they do; who fear God more than man so they will execute the proper judgment, no more or less severe than the law requires

- c. men of *integrity and truth*

vs. 21 *trustworthy men who hate dishonest gain*

Nothing corrupts the system of justice more than the giving and receiving of bribes

Exodus 23:8 "Do not accept a bribe, for a bribe blinds those who see and twists the words of the righteous.

- 2. Jethro submitted his recommendations to God’s final authority

vs. 23 *If you do this and God so commands, you will be able to stand the strain, and all these people will go home satisfied.*

D. Moses Humbly Takes the Advice

vs. 24-26 *Moses listened to his father-in-law and did everything he said. He chose capable men from all Israel and made them leaders of the people, officials over thousands, hundreds, fifties and tens. 26 They served as judges for the people at all times. The difficult cases they brought to Moses, but the simple ones they decided themselves.*

- 1. It’s easy for a powerful and successful leader like Moses to become arrogant and to stop taking advice

John 9:26-34 Then they asked him, "What did he do to you? How did he open your eyes?" 27 He answered, "I have told you already and you did not listen. Why do you want to hear it again? Do you want to become his disciples, too?" 28 Then they hurled insults at him and said, "You are this fellow's disciple! We are disciples of Moses! 29 We know that God spoke to Moses, but as for this fellow, we don't even know where he comes from." 30 The man answered, "Now that is remarkable! You don't know where he comes from, yet he opened my eyes. 31 We know that God

does not listen to sinners. He listens to the godly man who does his will. 32 Nobody has ever heard of opening the eyes of a man born blind. 33 If this man were not from God, he could do nothing." 34 To this they replied, "You were steeped in sin at birth; how dare you lecture us!" And they threw him out.

2. The moment you stop taking correction and advice, you become what the book of Proverbs calls "a fool"

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

Proverbs 13:10 Pride only breeds quarrels, but wisdom is found in those who take advice.

Proverbs 19:20 Listen to advice and accept instruction, and in the end you will be wise.

Proverbs 20:18 Make plans by seeking advice; if you wage war, obtain guidance.

E. Jethro Goes Home

vs. 27 Then Moses sent his father-in-law on his way, and Jethro returned to his own country.

1. Jethro left in peace
2. having grown in his faith and
3. having enjoyed a wonderful time of fellowship and worship of the Almighty God,
4. and having greatly assisted Moses in his life

Time well spent!!!

IV. Lessons and Applications

A. The Overwhelming Burdens of Spiritual Leadership

1. Statistics of Pastoral "Burn-out"
2. Required of Pastors: Spiritual and Physical Oversight
3. Sound Advice in this Text
4. Images of the Body of Christ

B. An Insight into Moses' Family Life

1. Relationship with his wife
2. Relationship with his children
3. Relationship with his father-in-law
4. Proper relating
 - a. humble and gentle greetings
 - b. mutual concern for each other's health and well-being
 - c. time spent recounting God's mighty deeds... not talking about current events or the weather
 - d. time spent in corporate worship
 - e. time spent breaking bread with each other "before God"
 - f. loving advice given and humbly received

C. God's Reputation and Jethro's Worship

1. God's fame in His mighty deeds is the basis of faith all over the world
2. The better we know God's name, the more we will trust in Him

Psalm 9:10 Those who know your name will trust in you, for you, LORD, have never forsaken those who seek you.

3. This is the whole point of the Exodus!!!!

Exodus 9:16 But I have raised you up for this very purpose, that I might show you my power and that my name might be proclaimed in all the earth.

Rahab will be saved this way

Joshua 2:12-13 We have heard how the LORD dried up the water of the Red Sea for you when you came out of Egypt, and what you did to Sihon and Og, the two kings of the Amorites east of the Jordan, whom you completely destroyed. 11 When we heard of it, our hearts melted and everyone's courage failed because of you, for the LORD your God is God in heaven above and on the earth below.

So also the Gibeonites

Joshua 9:9 They answered: "Your servants have come from a very distant country because of the fame of the LORD your God. For we have heard reports of him: all that he did in Egypt,

Jethro's worship is a type of the worldwide worship that will come to Christ from every tribe and language and people and nation

D. Hierarchical Structures and God's Passion for Order

1. Such organization is decried these days, because we hate to submit to authority
2. BUT this is exactly the way heaven is organized

"Archangels" are ruler angels... heaven is arranged in a certain order, with the throne of God and of the Lamb at the center

3. This is what the Roman centurion saw

Matthew 8:9 For I myself am a man under authority, with soldiers under me. I tell this one, 'Go,' and he goes; and that one, 'Come,' and he comes. I say to my servant, 'Do this,' and he does it."

4. God is a God of good order

- a. tents of Israel arranged in a specific order by the word of the Lord (see Numbers

Numbers 2:17 Then the Tent of Meeting and the camp of the Levites will set out in the middle of the camps. They will set out in the same order as they encamp, each in his own place under his standard.

1 Corinthians 14:40 But everything should be done in a fitting and orderly way.

Colossians 2:5 For though I am absent from you in body, I am present with you in spirit and delight to see how orderly you are and how firm your faith in Christ is.

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out to meet his father-in-law and bowed down and kissed him. They greeted each other and then went into the tent. 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. 9 Jethro was delighted to hear about all the good things the LORD had done for Israel in rescuing them from the hand of the Egyptians. 10 He said, "Praise be to the LORD, who rescued you from the hand of the Egyptians and of Pharaoh, and who rescued the people from the hand of the Egyptians. 11 Now I know that the LORD is greater than all other gods, for he did this to those who had treated Israel arrogantly." 12 Then Jethro, Moses' father-in-law, brought a burnt offering and other sacrifices to God, and Aaron came with all the elders of Israel to eat bread with Moses' father-in-law in the presence of God. 13 The next day Moses took his seat to serve as judge for the people, and they stood around him from morning till evening. 14 When his father-in-law saw all that Moses was doing for the people, he said, "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?" 15 Moses answered him, "Because the people come to me to seek God's will. 16 Whenever they have a dispute, it is brought to me, and I decide between the parties and inform them of God's decrees and laws." 17 Moses' father-in-law replied, "What you are doing is not good. 18 You and these people who come to you will only wear yourselves out. The work is too heavy for you; you cannot handle it alone. 19 Listen now to me and I will give you some advice, and may God be with you. You must be the people's representative before God and bring their disputes to him. 20 Teach them the decrees and laws, and show them the way to live and the duties they are to perform. 21 But select capable men from all the people-- men who fear God, trustworthy men who hate dishonest gain-- and appoint them as officials over thousands, hundreds, fifties and tens. 22 Have them serve as judges for the people at all times, but have them bring every difficult case to you; the simple cases they can decide themselves. That will make your load lighter, because they will share it with you. 23 If you do this and God so commands, you will be able to stand the strain, and all these people will go home satisfied." 24 Moses listened to his father-in-law and did everything he said. 25 He chose capable men from all Israel and made them leaders of the people, officials over thousands, hundreds, fifties and tens. 26 They served as judges for the people at all times. The difficult cases they brought to Moses, but the simple ones they decided themselves. 27 Then Moses sent his father-in-law on his way, and Jethro returned to his own country.