

Midweek Meditation - May 5, 2022

Exodus 18

As you may remember from last week, the passage we shared was about a clash that the Israelite people had with the Amalekites. The Amalekites were descendants of Abraham, but not among God's chosen people because they were from the line of Esau rather than Jacob. And so they considered themselves enemies of the nation of God's chosen people. For that reason, when they encountered the Israelites in the wilderness, they attacked them pretty viciously. As a response, Moses told Joshua to gather an army and prepare for battle.

Moses went up to a hill where he could observe the battle, and he held his arms in the air. When his arms were in the air, the battle would favor the Israelites, and when Moses tired, and his arms went down, the battle would favor the Amalekites. In the end, Moses received help and support from Aaron and Hur. They held his arms up and they gave him a rock to sit on. And in the end, the Israelites prevailed.

This sets the stage for the lesson that we have shared today. In order to completely understand this passage, we have to go all the way back the very beginning of Moses' journey with the Lord. You will remember that Moses tried to advocate for some of the Israelites that were being mistreated by the Hebrew slave keepers, and in that attempt Moses ended up killing an Egyptian slave keeper. This got him in trouble with Pharaoh and it also turned some of the Israelite people against him. So he was chased out of Egypt under the threat of death.

Being discouraged he settled in the land of the Midianites. He got married and had children and spent forty years as a Midianite. He had done a masterful job of running away from the purpose that God had in store for him until one day Moses was on the border of the land of the Midianites, on God's Holy Mountain - the same place where they are now in this chapter 18.

God's Holy Mountain is where Moses saw the burning Bush. God's Holy Mountain is where God called Moses to devote the rest of his life to freeing the Israelite people from their bondage. In this passage from chapter 18, the whole nation of God's chosen people is standing at the base of, you guessed it, God's Holy Mountain. This is where we pick up Chapter 18.

The priest of Midian who is Jethro, Moses' father-in-law, brings Moses' family to him. Presumably Moses had been separated from his family since the time of the burning bush. They are reunited here. His wife is Zipporah, and his two sons are Gershom and Eliezer are brought together in this place at the foot of Sinai. Eliezer means "the Help of my Son." Gershom means "stranger there." Both of those names have significance for where Moses was in his journey at those times when his sons were born, and perhaps a hint as to what God's plan might be for the members of Moses' family.

Anyway, Moses is reunited with his family in this passage. Jethro is a person who Moses worked for as a shepherd for 40 years while he was basically dodging the plan that God had in store for him. And so it is not surprising that Jethro feels comfortable advising Moses, and that Moses is willing to accept advise from Jethro. And, as you see from the language in the scripture, Jethro is God's servant too. He is the priest of Midian.

Jethro sees Moses busy carrying out his Job. And, he says, “just a minute here. Hold the phone. This is insane. You cannot take on all of these tasks. This is way more work than one person can do. The scripture says that Jethro is delighted to hear about all the ways that God had worked through Moses. Jethro went to great lengths to give thanks for God’s servant Moses. He even offered an offering of praise for the way that God had blessed the nation Israel and the way that God had worked through His servant, Moses.

Then, the next day, Moses started fulfilling his role as judge for the people. This was the role that he had grown accustomed to fulfilling. Now this is the point where Jethro stops Moses and says to him, “What is this that you are doing?” You are the people’s representative before God. That is the role that God has ordained you to fulfill. Why are you acting as judge for all of the disputes between the people? Jethro says, “Let me give you some advice. You must represent the people before God. That is your role. You must appoint people who are honest and of good character, people who you have taught, to serve as the people’s judge.”

Moses welcomed Jethro’s advice and did exactly what he said. Jethro could see what Moses could not. Moses was trying to do it all by himself, just as he had always done. But the job was getting too big. And in the end, just like he could not hold his arms up in the air long enough for the Israelite nation to win the battle against the Amalekites, Moses could not solve every dispute that arose between the 2,000,000 or so people that were making their way through the wilderness.

There is a beautiful lesson in this passage for us to learn. We are God’s servants, and we have an important role in God’s plan. But there are other people around us who are God’s servants too. And we have to be perceptive of how our servanthood interacts with others who are called by God. That is true for a couple of reasons that are illustrated in this passage. First, if Moses had continued to try to do it all, none of it would have gotten done well. Second, if Moses tried to hold onto all the jobs he was doing, he would be maintaining that God’s power could only be expressed through one servant. God can work through anyone he wants to.

Moses then would start to look like Peter who said, “You will never wash my feet.” Or, “I will never betray you, even if I must die with you.” That is Peter thinking he knew better than God. That is Peter not listening to God’s purpose which was that Jesus must die, because it sounds scary, or it sounds illogical, or it sounds impossible.

This message is for you. You don’t have to do it all yourself. God’s light shines brighter through many loving hearts. There is no shame in the truth that someone may be able to do a job just as good, or perhaps even better than you. It is God’s light, and it is a blessing no matter where it shines. Let us Pray