

Place: Lurgan Baptist 7:3:2006

Reading: Exodus 18:13-27

FROM EGYPT TO CANAAN

11. WHEN THE LOAD IS TOO HEAVY !

Several years ago a pastor friend of mine was leaving his wife and children down to a Co. Down holiday park resort. He got them settled into the caravan and then he himself got ready to return home. One of his children wondered what was really happening, and so she said to her mother. “*Where’s Daddy going ?*” The mother responded, “*he has to go back home again.*” The little one said, “*Why ? Has he got a job ?*” Many Christian believers feel that way about the pastorate. They feel that its an easy touch, with plenty of free time, and lots of folk who love them ! Many have got romantic notions of the ministry. *I suppose one look at our Association of Baptist Churches, with 30-40 churches vacant, might suggest that the pastorate is anything but easy.* In the southern states of the U.S.A. the length of the average pastorate is about eighteen months, with pastors resigning from their charge on a regular basis. In a book entitled “*Pastors at Risk,*” some interesting statistics are revealed. The authors tell us that 90% of pastors work more than 46 hours a week, 80% believe that their pastoral ministry has affected their family negatively. 33% said that being in the ministry was an outright hazard to their families. 75% reported a significant stress related crisis at least once in their ministry. 50% felt unable to meet the needs of the job, 90% felt they were inadequately trained to cope with ministry, and 40% reported a serious confrontation with a member at least once a month. There is a term which is employed in Christian circles today, that has become widespread among evangelicals. ***The term is burnout !*** Burnout frequently happens to Christian leaders, who strive to meet impossible expectations and demands, the achievement of which will show him to be both spiritual and successful. Failure to accomplish these expectations and demands is believed to prove one a sluggard, unspiritually minded, or a failure. Burnout occurs, when in sheer exhaustion and frustration, one loses all hope of meeting the standard which is imposed on them, either by one’s self, others, or both. ***Burnout often leads to a cessation of ministry !***

Now Moses was dangerously close to burning himself out when his father-in-law came to his rescue. What appears on the surface to be the insignificant visit of a relative is really a divine provision to deliver Moses not from the wrath of Pharaoh, nor from the attack of the Egyptian army, but from himself. As Jethro himself put it, Moses was wearing himself and the Israelites out.

(18:18) Thanks, to the common sense of a wise father-in-law, Moses was delivered from his own destruction, the burnout which resulted from a distorted perception and a too-demanding ministry. Now Moses illustrates and typifies a problem which has become widespread in evangelical circles in the Western World, namely burn out. But perhaps for some this *your problem is not burnout, not burning your candle at both ends, but not having ever been lit.* There are many overworked Christians who need to learn, the lesson which Jethro taught Moses, but the

reason why some believers are overtaxed is because others are lazy and inactive. My if you are uncommitted, uninvolved, and lazy in your Christian service, don't use this passage for your inaction. If you are of the lazy disposition, I encourage you to turn to the wisdom which the Book of Proverbs has for you, which speaks of our need for commitment.

Now the structure of this chapter is simple and straightforward. The text divides evenly into two portions. In (18:1-12) we have "*Jethro's Arrival*," in (18:13-27) we have "*Jethro's Advice*." I have divided our outline into three sections.

(1) A PROBLEM WE NEED TO RECOGNISE

And the problem simply stated is this ! *One man cannot do it all !* Now do you believe that ? I have been associated with Baptist churches most of my life, and I hear folk talking about "*the priesthood of all believers*," that is, all believers exercising a ministry. Now do they plenty of talking, but is it not true that the mentality that is found among us is simply this. We pay the pastor, he does the work ! What we fail to see, is that there are limits which should be sensed in the work of God. Someone once asked, *which is the greater man, the man who can do the work of ten men, or the man who can get ten men to do the work*. The problem with the man who can do the work of ten men is that when he goes, the work may collapse. However, the man who can get ten men to do the work may ensure thereby that the work goes on. Now Moses faced this problem for think of,

(a) *THE SIZE OF THE MINISTRY:*

If we take the pastoral burdens of a large congregation and multiply them by a thousand or more, we will get some idea of the challenges that Moses faced in leading Israel. Indeed this very passage brings before us the daily routine of the man of God. The people who sought to know God's will from Moses began to line up at the designated place, perhaps just outside Moses' tent. With a nation composed of around two and a half million people (12:37) once can imagine that the line was longer than the one that you see outside Moira surgery. Now the work Moses was doing needed to be done. The prophet was helping the Israelites solve their problems, Like most people, they wanted to know God's will. They also wanted help resolving their disputes. So they brought all their troubles to Moses, looking to him for guidance. And Moses did two things to help them, he *declared the Word of God and he discerned the Will of God*. (18:16) The prophet was simply trying to be faithful to his calling. The people had spiritual needs, and he was graciously trying to meet them. Yet for all his willingness to serve, it was clear that Moses had taken on a burden that was too great for him to bear alone. To look after so many people was a gigantic undertaking, far too great for one man alone. My do we not have a similar situation in the church of Jesus Christ ? If the church is really doing its job, its workload is massive. We must seek the lost, comfort the despondent, encourage the defeated, instruct the children, shepherd the flock, visit the sick, console the bereaved, guide the bewildered, pray for the needy, conduct the services, prepare the Word, bury the dead, marry the living.

Do you remember the words of Winston Churchill about the battle of Britain ? They are not only

true of that battle, but also of the spiritual battle we are called to fight. “ *Never was so much owed by so many to so few.* ” We could alter that slightly, “ *Never was so much left by so many to so few.* ” Moses was taking on more work than he could handle, and it was big mistake. (a)

(b) *THE SERVANT IN THE MINISTRY:*

Moses thought he knew what he was doing but old Jethro was not impressed ! Indeed he says in (18:17)

“ *the thing that thou doest is not good.* ” In the Hebrew these words express strong disapproval. You see, Jethro was able to quickly identify the problem to which, it seems, Moses was oblivious. Perhaps around the dinner table that evening, Jethro began to inquire about Moses rational for judging as he was doing. It’s every apparent from Jethro’s questioning that he did not agree with the way Moses was handling things. Even from the way his questions are phrased, you can imagine the tone of voice with which he asked. Fathers-in-law, can do this better than others. It all starts with a question, “ *Why are you good enough to be my daughter’s husband.* ” You see, Moses was so taken up by his work, so desperately trying to keep his head above water, that he didn’t have time to reflect on what he was doing ! Is that not the experience of so many who are involved in ministry ?

I know there are lazy pastors as are there are lazy missionaries, and evangelists, but what are the ones who are seeking to go the extra mile ? Moses was willing to serve, but the burden was too great for him to bear alone.

1. What about his *TIME* ?

Did you notice (18:14) ? The task of administering justice remained unfinished because it was so vast. It’s a simple fact that there is a limit to what one person with one pair of hands can do ! There was always a long line of people waiting to see Moses. Today, people often face the same problem in the church. How can get church members get the pastoral care they need ? Who will cover the vast area of visitation ? The hospitals, the sick at home, the needy, the new-comer ? One thing is sure, one man cannot do it all ! A church the size of Lurgan, in the U.S.A. would probably have anything from three to six persons who would be all full time staff.

2. What about his *STRENGTH:*

Do you see what Jethro said in (18:18) ? The emotional, mental, and physical toll would be unbearable for any single individual. Moses was like a candle that was burning others at one end and himself on the other. Neil Rudenstine was 59 years of age when he was President of Harvard University in the mid 1990’s. For three years since he became the school’s President, he methodically raised a 1\$ million a day, for a school that was already flushed with a \$ 4 million endowment, the largest of any private university in the U.S.A. Rudenstine was passionate about big and small things. Besides spending twelve hours a day on a demanding job, he was immersed in many other projects. One morning in November, he overslept, could not go to work and was diagnosed with severe fatigue and exhaustion. The directors insisted that he took an indefinite

leave of absence to recover from severe weariness from exertion. The university President did not return not only the next seven days, or the next seven weeks, but the next seven months. He revealed that he recuperated by listening to music, reading books and sunning himself in the Caribbean. I wonder how many servants of God are in ill health today because of the pressures of pastoral ministry ? 1.2.

3. What about his FAMILY ?

Why was it that Jethro had to initiate the reunion of Moses and his family ? Why didn't Moses send for his wife and sons, rather than to have Jethro show up with them unexpectedly ? *Did Moses send them back to Jethro because he was so taken up with his work ? Did he have any contact with them ?* That morning when old Jethro watched Moses dealing with the people, did he begin to see the pieces falling into place ? Did he begin to think, *" I know now why Moses sent them back ?* Why Moses did not send for them ! He was consumed with the work of God." My the failure to engage others in service and ministry has had disastrous consequences on many a preacher's family. I recall when Heather was a little girl she asked her Mommy, *" Where is Daddy going again tonight ?"* The reply was, *" He's going out to visit."* When I got home that evening I note was left on the telephone table. It was a child's handwriting. It read, *" Daddy, when will you stay at home and visit me. Love Heather."* My I'm here to tell you this ***" I cannot do it all."***

(2) A PRINCIPLE WE NEED TO EMPHASISE

What is the principle we need to emphasise ? That of delegation. You see, Jethro's practical wisdom was of immense benefit to Moses and Israel, and has been lauded as an example of delegation and management organization by efficiency experts for centuries and still is. Woven into Jethro's advice were statements about God and the virtues of godly men, that cause one to respect this man as having his newfound faith well integrated into his thinking. Indeed, he full recognised that Moses needed divine permission to enact his advice. (18:23) So lets look at,

(a) THE OLD TESTAMENT EXAMPLE:

Here ! You see, Jethro speaks here about

1. The Matter of PRIORITIES:

Look if you will (18:19-22) Do you see what Jethro is saying to Moses ? *" Find out what your main responsibility is and do that."* You see, Jethro was not trying to take his son-in-law away from his calling. Moses would still be the prophet. He would still teach God's law for daily life. By the exposition of God's Word and by the example of his own life, Moses would continue to lead the Israelites on their pilgrimage. None of that would change. Moses was to major in the essentials of the task. The essentials are the things that ought to be done that no one else can do, and that which distinguishes you from others ! What are our priorities ?

What is the priority of the servant of God ? Is it to visit ? Is it to counsel ? Is it to be a problem-solver ? No ! **Priority number one ! To expound the Word of God !** Now do you realise that when you call a pastor that's what you're calling him to do ? Do you recognise that this is his priority ? 1.

2. The Matter of PERSONNEL:

Look at (18:21-22) My Jethro's plan was a good one. It called for the selection of wise spiritual leaders who would help Moses govern the people. These men would answer everyday spiritual questions and adjudicate routine personal disputes. But whenever the elders needed help, they would consult with Moses, who would help with all the tough cases ! In other words, Moses was to engage others and eliminate the exhaustion. Henry Ford one of Time magazine's top twenty builders and titans of the 20th century, gave America affordable cars, introduced high wages, but he was a victim of his success. For Ford was a failure at delegating. Time magazine reported that for 19 years, from 1908-1927, he took over all decision making at Ford Company, ignored calls to diversify, sent spies to catch his managers that dared to make decisions on their own, turned on some of his best and brightest when they launched or designed something other than his beloved Model T, and rebuked customers for wanting a different colour other than black. Ford find it difficult to delegate. Do you ? My do you think that you are indispensable ? Have you lost sight of your unique gifts and calling ? *Moses task was to select reverent, respectable, and reliable leaders, people with a good devotional life, a good relational life, and a good moral life, and to appoint them as rulers over thousands, hundreds, fifties and tens.* I wonder at times, is church growth in our land down to the fact, that churches expect their preacher to be a Jack of all trades and an expert at none ? They want him to do it all, rather than grooming others, and expanding the ministry ! (a)

(b) THE NEW TESTAMENT EXAMPLE:

Look if you will at (Acts 6:1-7) Now there was a problem here. What happened was this. When the other widows received two loaves of bread, the Hellenistic Jews only got one. Discontent began to fester, and wherever " *murmurings,* " occur they cause trouble. My when God sets out to multiply, the Devil sets out to divide, and one method that he uses is murmuring. Now watch, the apostles put forward a proposal. (6:2-4) Now the apostles had the authority to make a decision, but they wisely chose to involve the whole church in the momentous change now about to be made in the way the affairs of the local church were to be run. There is no doubt that the local church is to be ruled by its pastors and elders. (Heb 13:7, 17) ***But at the same time, its not a dictatorship.*** So here we have the first hint of that happy blending of apostolic authority and congregational activity working towards a united decision !

Something which should characterise all local church affairs. Now what was the proposal that the apostles put forward ? In essence, it was to get better organised. Now there are some folk who don't believe in organisation. My a lack of organisation and disorder is carnality. Paul writing to a carnal church said, " let all things be done decently and in order." (1 Cor 14:40) Now this proposal involved two things.

1. The Spiritual Ministry of Feeding the Word:

Look at (6:2) and (6:4) The apostles said in effect,

“ *You serve the tables and we will serve the Word.* ” Now it was not that they thought they were too good to serve tables. As a matter of fact they were probably doing it up until now. It was not that they wanted to be free from work, it was that they wanted to be free for work. “ *But we gave The Word.* ” (6:4) Samuel had the same pattern in his ministry. He said, “ *Moreover as for me, God forbid, that I should sin against the Lord in ceasing to pray for you, but I will teach you the good and right way.* ” (1 Sam 12:23) Daniel had the same pattern in his ministry. (Dan 9:1-4) Christ had the same pattern in his ministry (Mk 1:35-38) Paul had the same pattern in his ministry (Acts 20:18-21 Rom 1:9) So many in the ministry today have moved away from the emphasis on prayer and the ministry of the Word. They are so involved in the administrative details of their church, they have little time for intercession and study. Yet the ministry demands total commitment, everything a man has to give. There is no substitute for hard work and discipline. A young man once said to the gifted Bible teacher, Donald Grey Barnhouse, “ *I’d give the world to be able to teach the Bible like you.* ” Looking him straight in the eye Barnhouse replied, “ *Good, because that’s exactly what it will cost you.* ” Do you know something ? The best thing that I can do for you is to be prepared to preach. And the elders and members of this church will have to release me from a lot of good things if they want me to “ *give myself to prayer and to the ministry of the Word.* ” (Acts 6:4)

I need time to study and pray and this church needs to give me the time. That means there will be times I am not available, because its more important for me to be in the Word with the Lord, than with you. My I know there are churches and pastors who have all kinds of programmes and some of them are doing all kinds of things but is the flock being fed ? It was flight 401 bound for Miami from New York with a load of holiday passengers on board. As the high aircraft approached the Miami airport for its landing, a light that indicates proper deployment of the landing gear failed to come on.

The plane flew a large looping circle over the swamps of the Everglades while the cockpit crew checked the light failure. The question was this. Had the landing gear actually not deployed, or was it the light bulb that was defective. To begin with the engineer fiddled with the bulb. He tried to remove it, but it would not budge. Another member of the crew tried to help out and then another. By and by, if you can believe it, all eyes were on the little light bulb that refused to be dislodged from its socket. No-one noticed that the plane was losing altitude.

Finally, it dropped right into a swamp. Many were killed in that plane crash, while an experienced crew who were paid handsomely messed around with an old light bulb worth a few cents. My an entire plane and many of its passengers were lost. The crew momentarily forgot the most basic of all rules of the air. “ ***Don’t forget to fly the plane.*** ”

Do you know something ? Many pastors and preachers are so busy looking at the light bulb that they are forgetting to feed the flock. My is what we pastors and elders are doing ? Are we giving ourselves to the spiritual ministry of feeding the flock ? (a)

(b) The Practical Ministry of Feeding the Widows:

The word for “ *tables*,” in (6:2) is interesting. It can mean (trapeza) “ *a table or counter of a money changer,*” or “ *money matters,*” as well as an eating table. (Matt 21:12 Lk 19:23) You see, the apostles did not want to involve themselves in serving meals or handling money for that would be a distraction. So they proposed the appointment of a seven man body to administer the material and financial affairs of the church. My do you see now why this church grew ? Why this fellowship multiplied ? There was (a) and (b) and everyone did what the Lord called them to do, and it was not that some were inferior or superior but each did what the Lord assigned them to do, and the church began to grow and the murmuring began to stop. Indeed is this not hinted at, away back in the Book of Exodus ?

Come back to (18:23) and notice, not only (1) (2)

(3) A PEACE WE NEED TO REALISE

Do you see what old Jethro says in (18:23) ? Jethro was thinking here of,

(a) The TRAGEDY which would be AVOIDED:

“ *Thou shalt be able to endure,*” (18:23) Isn’t a tragedy this that so many of the Lord’s servants are out of the ministry through ill health ? One of the famous chaplains of World War One was G.A. Studdart-Kennedy, known more familiarly as Woodbine Willie. Do you know how young he was when he died ? Just thirty six. It was said of him, “ *that he was worn out but not worked out.*” Do you the problem with many of us ?

We forget that we are the servants of the Lord, doing His will, not the servants of men, fulfilling their every expectation and desire. My as the Lord’s servants we have only one Master to whom we shall give an account of our stewardship. (1 Cor 3:10-15) You see, the Lord will hold us responsible for how we have used those gifts which He has given us. If we strive to please men, we will most frequently fail to please God, and do those things which He has given us to do. And if we do the things that the Lord has given us to do “ *thou shalt be able to endure.*” (18:23) You see, we need to ask the question as to whether we are adding to the burden, or whether we are under the burden ? (a)

(b) The EFFICIENCY which would be ACHIEVED:

“ *And all this people shall go to their place in peace,*”

(18:23) Not only was Moses adding staff to his team, and multiplying his resources, he was subtracting and dividing his workload and burden. The outcome of sharing work was help, health, and harmony ! For developing others for ministry is gain for everyone.

Sometimes it is easier to criticise the church than to obey its leaders. Pastors and elders are as fallen as anyone else and they have all the failings that are common to humanity. *Yet it is the duty of every church member to honour the Lord by submitting to spiritual authority.* Sadly, too many believers are like the Israelites, they reserve the right to complain if they don’t get their way. Sometimes they even rebel against spiritual authority yet the Word says, “ *Obey them that have*

the rule over you, and submit yourselves, for they watch for your souls, as they that must gave an account, that they might do it with joy, and not with grief, for that is unprofitable for you.” (Heb 13:17) When the Bible says “*obey and submit,*” it means what it says. The Word also commands us to love those who are in authority. Do you recall Paul’s words ? “*And we beseech you brethren, to know them which labour among you, and are over you in the Lord and admonish you. And to esteem them very highly in love for their works sake. And be at peace among yourselves.*” (1 Thes 5:12-13)

Some pastors and elders are hard to love, but we have a responsibility before God to love them. The reason is because of their work. *They are God’s servants.* Therefore we love and obey them, not because we have confidence in them, but because we have confidence in Him. He is the Lord of the church and we are willing to submit to His plan for its government ! Well, there you have it. “***When the Load is too Heavy.***” Is your load too heavy ? Are you so busy that you have crowded out God, your family, and others from your life ? Is there direction in your life, meaning in your work, and reason for your activities ? Have you a Jethro who will challenge you intellectually, relationally, spiritually ? My take time to enjoy your family, to delegate responsibility, and to expand your ministry !