

Place: Lurgan Baptist 8:12:2013

MOSES, THE SERVANT OF THE LORD

Reading: Exodus 18:13-27

15. THE MINISTRY OF MOSES

A mother had watched her son through the week begin to drain in energy. And by the end of the week he had simply lost the desire to get up and get on with his day. She heard the alarm go off through the door. She listened as nine passed and the alarm went off again. Apparently he just kept punching the little snooze button at the top of the alarm. Finally, after three or four extra rings she decided to take charge so walked into his bedroom and said, “*Son its time to get up. You’ve got to get up.*” He peeked out from under the covers and said, “*can you give me three good reasons why I should get up ?*” The mother said, “*Well yes. First of all it’s Sunday and you need to get dressed for church. Second you are forty three years old and you know better than to lie here. Third, you’re the pastor of the church and they expect you to be there.*”

John Haggai who wrote the book, “*How to Win over Worry,*” said that one of the reasons that held him back from entering the ministry was that he met so many folk who looked like ministers. He said that a minister has that kind of slumped over, sad, down in the mouth, judgmental, you know that look. A girl saw a fellow in a line. He was rather straight-faced and serious and she said,

“*Excuse me, are you a minister ?*” He said, “*No ma’am but I have been sick for about three weeks.*” Someone said, “*My pastor is a lot like the Lord, I don’t see him all week and I don’t understand him on Sunday.*” Pastors do get a bad press at times. It might interest you to know that 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 “*Pastor’s 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 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. Some think that Jethro’s suggestions were of the flesh. But Jethro did not command Moses to follow his instructions. He urged Moses to talk to the Lord about the problem and obey whatever God said. (18:23) Since Moses did adopt his father in law’s suggestion, he must

have consulted the Lord and gotten God's approval. Now I want to talk to you about "**The Ministry of Moses,**" and I want you to notice here firstly,

(1) THE PROBLEM IN MINISTRATION

The problem in ministry. And that problem is highlighted by one word that appears more than once? Do you know what the word is? "*Alone.*" (18:14, 18) You see, the problem simply stated is this. ***One man cannot do it all by himself.*** Now do you believe that? We often speak of "*the priesthood of all believers,*" that is, all believers exercising a ministry. We can talk as much as want yet 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) HOW BIG THIS MINISTRY WAS:

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.

(b) HOW BURDENSOME THIS MINISTRY WAS:

I mean no-one could minister personally to 2 million people and last very long. Even after the new arrangement had been established Moses had to confess that the work was too much for him. Do you recall what he said? “*I am not able to bear this people alone because it is too heavy for me.*” (Num 11:14) So what must it have been like under the old system? Jethro says (18:17) “*the thing that thou doest is not good.*” 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)? 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 believers in a local church 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 HEALTH ?

Do you see what Jethro said in (18:18)? The phrase “*wear away,*” comes from a Hebrew term that means “*To be withered with exhaustion,*” or “*to sink or drop down, languish, wither and fall.*” Isn’t that vivid? “*Moses if you keep this up, you are going to fade away. If you don’t make a change you’re going to have trouble down the line. Don’t forget young man, you’re more than eighty years of age.*” My just because you’re a servant of the Lord, does not mean that you won’t get an ulcer or crack up if you refuse to delegate. You cut the corners of good health and you pay the penalties just like the rest of humanity. This body needs so much work, so much rest, so much relief and can handle only so much strain. Disregard that and something snaps. An old Greek motto says, “*You will break the bow if you keep it always bent.*” 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 sent 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.” Could this explain why so many children of pastors and “ great Christian workers,” lose their way ? Charles Swindoll tells of two boys the sons of a pastor, who did the most insulting thing imaginable to their father’s grave. While he was alive, this famous Dad could not give his sons the time of day. They grew up hating the gospel their Dad spent his life preaching. 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.*” Fellow worker, are you spending time with your family ? Now can you see this problem ? Moses could not handle it all, and neither can I. (1)

(2) THE PRINCIPLE 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. But Moses had to establish priorities. 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. J. Oswald Sanders in his book on Spiritual Leadership says this,

The principle is that God assumes responsibility for enabling His man to fulfil every task to which He has appointed him. Now there are some self imposed tasks which others can do better than we, and we should relinquish them. But even should they do them worse we should still relinquish them, a severe test for the perfectionist.

I wonder do you need to establish priorities ? Do you need to separate the essential from the additional ? Do you need to distinguish between what is God appointed and what is man appointed ?

2. The Matter of PERSONNEL:

In 1789 an uncertain George Washington was urged to seek the presidency by Governor Morris, a Pennsylvania delegate to the Constitutional Convention. Morris wrote to Washington, “ *No constitution is the same on paper and in life. The exercise of authority depends on personal*

character.” Was this not what Jethro recognised ? Do you see what he says in (18:21) ? 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 found it difficult to delegate.

Do you ? Do you think you are indispensable? Have you lost sight of your unique gifts and calling ? Moses task was to select reverent, respectable, and reliable leaders with a good devotional life, a good relational life, and a good moral life, and to appoint them as rulers over thousands, fifties and tens. I wonder at times, is church growth in our land down to the fact that churches expect their pastor to be a Jack of all trades and a master of 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. Now watch, the apostles put forward a proposal. (6:2-4) 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 gave 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 be gave me the time. That means there will be times I am not available, because it’s 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 this what we pastors and elders are doing ? Or 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,* ” 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) THE PROGRESS THROUGH COOPERATION

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 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.*” Sometimes one asks, “*is it necessary ?*” No doubt from a divine perspective the answer is “*Yes.*” But what about the human perspective ? You see, believers need to ask themselves the question. Am I adding to the burden or am I 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. Jethro says, “*So shall it be easier for thyself,*” (18:22) The Hebrew word means “*to take cargo from a ship.*” In other words Jethro said, “*By delegating the job Moses, it will be easier for you and they will bear the burden with you.*” Thus the outcome of sharing work was help, health, and harmony. For developing others for ministry is gain for everyone. Do you know what happened in the early church when they resolved that problem ? The Bible says, “*And the Word of God increased and the number of the disciples*

multiplied in Jerusalem greatly.” (Acts 6:7) God’s Word spread. The number of disciples increased. Priests believed. Now do you see why the ministry was enhanced ? Because the organization of the church at this time, freed the apostles to devote themselves to prayer and the ministry of the Word. My the Word of God will increase in this church, and your church, when those churches learn to free their pastors and elders from the 1001 things which others can do, and those pastors and elders accept that freedom in order to gave themselves to the things they ought to be doing. And what are the things we ought to be doing ? “*But we will give ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the Word.*” (Acts 6:4)

Well, there you have it. **The Ministry of Moses.** One man can’t do it all, for 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.

