

God-Ordered Priorities

Pastor Chris Baker //02.12.23 // Centralia FBC

Introduction

Good morning, church! As our kids in Kindergarten through the third grade head out to children's church I want to invite you to join me in Exodus chapter 18.

We have a long chapter this morning, so I'm going to read it in three chunks during our sermon. We'll start with verses 1-7, then we'll pray, and we'll read the rest of the chapter as we go.

Exodus 18, beginning in verse 1:

Read 18:1-7

Pray

Introduction

If you're part of the First Baptist family, you spend a significant portion of your life listening to me talk, so we're going to start our time today with you talking. Turn to the person sitting next to you and take a stab at answering this question.

How long do you think it takes to climb Mt. Everest?

It's an interesting question and one that is harder to answer than you may expect. You don't just set out from your house one day to climb the highest mountain in the world.

It takes around 40 days to climb Everest once you reach base camp, but all told an attempt to summit Everest takes up to three months depending on weather and travel arrangements.

Because it's a quite an adventure just to get to Everest. Climbers typically fly into Katmandu, Nepal and unless you take an extremely expensive and dangerous helicopter ride, it takes about eight days to hike from Katmandu to Everest base camp.

One man who climbed the mountain wrote this:

"Everest Base Camp, where you actually begin to climb the mountain at 17,600 feet, is higher than all but two points in the United States. . . you are huffing and puffing by the time you get there, and you wonder when you finally arrive, exhausted, just how in the world you're ever going to survive."

(Beck Weathers, *Left for Dead: My Journey Home from Everest*)

From base camp, you're still over 11 miles of hiking and 10,000-plus vertical feet below the summit. It takes weeks for your body to get used to the altitude before you can even attempt to get to the top.

I tell you that because we've arrived at base camp, so-to-speak, for God's people in Exodus. Since we left Egypt we have gone through one crisis after another. We've been in danger from armies, in danger from hunger, we've feared we're going to thirst to death.

And while there's no movement of the people in chapter 18, we find out in the very first verse of chapter 19 that we have arrived in the wilderness of Sinai. We're at base camp. The foot of the mountain.

The entire pace of the Bible shifts in these chapters. Time dilates, things slow down, we are less frenzied but somehow just as intense.

If you're a young Earth creationist like I am, then the first 67 chapters of the Bible (Genesis 1-Exodus 17) take place over the course of about 2600 years. The next 59 chapters, Exodus 18-Numbers 20, all take place over the course of 11 months.

God is doing something big in the hearts of Israel and He gives us great detail about what happens. Incidentally, if you've been here the past few weeks you'd probably find Numbers 20 interesting. When Israel first leaves Sinai, what happens? The wander in the wilderness, they can't find water, and Moses provides water from a rock—but it goes very differently than it did back in Exodus 17. Alas, that's a whole other sermon.

What we see here is God settling the Israelites in at base camp. They've worked hard to get there. They've been through a lot, and they have much more to go through, but in some ways chapter 18 is a buffer. There is no crisis. There is no emergency. There's some celebration and frustration, but no one dies. That's where we live most of our lives, isn't it?

We tend to remember the hike up the mountain. We remember the highs and the lows. . .but most our life is lived in the relative normalcy of the basecamp between the peaks and valleys.

It's there, in Exodus 18, that I believe we see a pattern for what I'll call the God-Ordered life. The second act of Exodus, where we're firmly planted now, is all about God teaching His people what it means to live now that they're free. How do they worship God as a free people? It's about sanctification. Becoming the people God has already appointed them to be.

So, what does it look like when God is ordering the priorities of our life?

The opposite is a self-ordered life. And I'll contrast those two things as we go a little bit. But there are three encouragements we find in this passage about living a life ordered by God Himself.

We've already read the first one. We're to glorify God in our circle, our 'people' for lack of a better word.

The God-Ordered Life

I. Glorifying God in Our Circle

I started writing this a while back with the word family as the header for this point. That's certainly in view in the text. Moses ordered His family according to God's priorities for Him. He named his sons to tell God's story. Their names told of God's rescue, they're right there in verse 3-4.

It seems that at some point between the Red Sea and Rephidim, Moses sent his wife and sons to visit her father. Jethro is identified as the priest of Midian and Rephidim is nearby—so it makes sense that Moses would send them off for a visit.

That's probably how Jethro heard, according to verse 1, about everything God had done. Then, when Jethro shows up Moses rejoices to see him. He goes out to meet him, shows him respect, and has a family reunion right there on the outer edge of the Israelite camp.

This isn't the primary point of the passage, so I don't want to spend a ton of our time here, but we get this more intimate look at Moses the leader of a family in these few verses. We see a lot of Moses the leader of Israel. We don't see much of Moses the dad and husband.

What we see uniquely in this chapter is Moses glorifying God in how he leads and lives with those closest to him. He named his sons in such a way that God's glory was declared. His family told the story of God's glory. He even has a God glorifying interaction with his in-laws.

The takeaway from these seven verses is this: how are you glorifying God among the people you interact with most? Family is in view here like I said, but for some of us those closest to us aren't our family—at least not by blood. One of the things I love about the people of God here at FBC Centralia is that a lot of you have become family for one another.

We are growing in that way—and we need to grow in such a way that there is no room for loneliness within the family of God. Some of you have incredible families. Maybe you need to invite some others in. Some of you are here and you are genuinely looking for your 'people.' I'm reminded of the bond between Naomi and Ruth. Naomi was Ruth's mother-in-law. When Ruth's husband, Naomi's son, passed away the custom would have been for Ruth to return to her people. But she didn't. It made no financial sense, no societal sense, but Ruth clung to Naomi and God used that relationship in a mighty way.

Church, let's be family for one another. And whatever your 'circle' is, whoever you identify as your people—are you leading those relationships to glorify God? Do you, like Moses, use those relationships to tell the story of God's glory in a powerful way?

Husbands, when you love your wife as Christ loved the church by sacrificially caring for her—but putting her needs ahead of yours—you're declaring God's glory in your marriage. Wives, when you serve your husband and when you follow your husband's good leadership—you're declaring God's glory in your marriage. Kids, when you honor your parents by obeying their authority—even when it's in an area where you're pretty sure they're never going to find out—you're declaring God's glory in your life.

How are you using those relationships closest to you to tell God's story? Do you serve together? Do you pray specifically for those people? Spiritually, sometimes it's easy to miss those folks who are right in

front of you. It's clear that Moses the father and husband prioritized ordering His family around God's glory. The story of Moses's family was God's story. What's the story of your family? Is it God's glory? Is it a sport? Is it academic success? Is it achievement? Our farm? Our team? Our town? Your family only gets one story. Glorify God in your circle, whatever that circle is?

That's a piece of our next point, which is the larger point of the first half of this chapter. That's glorifying God in our witness.

II. Glorifying God in our Witness

Read 18:8-12

Jethro requires some explanation. We've all had an in-law that requires a little explaining, haven't we?

Jethro is pretty unique. He's identified as the priest of Midian and I can tell you that scholars debate a bit about what that means. Was he a priest of the God of Israel who lived in Midian? Midian is a descendant of Abraham from his second wife Keturah. So there is some evidence that the Midianites may have worshipped the God of Abraham.

But there's just as much evidence the people who lived around this place during this time would have worshipped Pagan gods. The Bible doesn't give us clarity on what Jethro believed before Exodus 18, but I think we have clarity after this passage.

Moses and Jethro go way back. After Moses committed murder in Egypt, he fled to Midian. At a well there, he saved a group of girls from being mistreated by a bunch of shepherds who were harassing them. Moses ended up marrying one of the girls who was Jethro's daughter. Moses began working with Jethro as a shepherd and he did so for 40 years.

Moses and Jethro were partners in their labor and in-laws for 40 years before God appeared to Moses in the burning bush. These guys were close—but based on this text I don't think Jethro had placed his faith in the God of Israel. It's my personal belief that Jethro was a pagan priest, feel free to disagree.

Either way, verse 8 tells us what Moses did. He shared the good news. Gospel is a New Testament word and it means good news, but that is very much what Moses did. He told Jethro of all the good things the God of Israel had done for His people.

This is one of the clearest examples of personal evangelism we have in the whole Bible. Evangelism is telling others the good news about what God has done to save His people. That's what Moses does here. That's part of the Great Commission of Jesus Christ from Matthew 28 that Dr. Matz preached last week. In case you weren't here, Jesus told His followers to Go. . . *make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe everything I have commanded you.*

Making disciples doesn't happen with evangelism. Disciples are followers of Jesus and you can't follow Jesus until someone tells you about Him.

The scene in Exodus 18 predates Jesus by a few hundred years, but the elements of an evangelistic relationship are there.

Evangelism isn't a program of the church—though many of our programmed ministries can provide opportunity for evangelism to happen. Evangelism isn't an event, even though events can draw folks into evangelistic conversations. Evangelism isn't sharing your testimony, though sharing your testimony can be used in evangelism.

That's what Moses does here. He tells Jethro everything God has done for him. He recounted how good God had been to Moses and to the people of Israel despite their rebellion and their mistrust. Moses tells a great story of God's blessing.

All of us interact regularly with people who we believe to be lost and destined for an eternity of suffering in hell. Moses knew Jethro to be a follower of other gods. Moses had a relationship with Jethro and he cared more about his soul than he did about awkwardness or being mildly offensive. Those are two of the primary excuses we give for not evangelizing. I don't want to make it weird, or for them to think I'm some religious nut. Or I don't want to offend anyone.

Moses ran those risks. Or what about this one—they know how I used to live. They know me at my worst, how can I ever share the gospel with the? Church, Moses came to Jethro not as Moses the leader of Israel, but Moses the murderer. Moses the fugitive from justice in Egypt. Jethro saw Moses at his lowest point, and he interacted with him for 40 years.

Every excuse we cook up, Moses had it. And he declared the good news to Jethro in such a way that he responded. 'He glorified God—blessed be the Lord who rescued you. No I know the Lord (the God of Israel) is greater than all gods.' Then he goes off and worships. He brought an offering to God.

This priest changed teams. God worked in Jethro's heart through Moses and He became a worshipper of the one true God instead of all the false gods he served before. Church, if God can save Jethro, he can save your neighbor. He can save that guy at work. He can save that girl on your team or that guy who sits next to you.

He can save you, too. One of the blessings we have here at FBC is that there are new folks visiting our gathering all the time and I know that some of you aren't saved. You haven't repented of your sins and trusted in Jesus Christ to be your savior.

The same good news Moses told to Jethro is still good news today, though we have the whole Bible to reveal it to us even more clearly. You can understand how God saves people today better than Moses, because Moses didn't yet know the story of Jesus.

You see, here's the gospel. God is good, He is perfectly holy. He is without fault, without sin, there is no wrong in God. And God created the world good. The pinnacle of all He created from Mt. Everest to the deepest point in the ocean, the most glorious expression of His creation in humanity.

Man and woman were created in God's image to reflect His glory back to the world. Yet, instead of doing that, mankind rejected God. Adam and Eve did so in the garden and just like you look at a baby and see in them the reflection of their parents, you and I are reflections of our first parents Adam and Eve. We sin just like they did. We're selfish, we're dishonest, we're impatient, and a litany of other sins. Our sin harms others, it harms ourselves, and it offends God.

The problem with that is God is too holy to allow sin to go unpunished. Our sin earns death, we read in Scripture. But instead of condemning humanity to death and hell like we deserve, God sent His own Son Jesus Christ to earth as both fully God and fully man to live a sinless human life. He never earned death, yet He died. He died as a substitute. He stood in the place of God's people and His death counted for theirs. His died for the sins of all who will ever call on the name of the Lord for salvation.

That salvation is offered to anyone who responds to the good news of the gospel. After Peter delivered the first sermon preached about Jesus's death and resurrection, the crowd responded excitedly—what must we do to be saved? Peter said in Acts 2 repent and be baptized. Repent of your sins, meaning turn away from your evil and turn to God. Baptism is the public declaration of that private repentance. John writes that **9 If we confess our sins, he is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.** (1 Jn 1:9)

That's the story our life should tell. That church, is how we glorify God in our witness. Would you join me in a bold prayer this week? If you're here and you don't belong to Jesus, pray for salvation. God promises He will respond to that prayer. But if you're here and you already belong to Jesus, would you just join me in simply praying that God will give you an opportunity to be a witness? And opportunity to share the gospel of Jesus Christ with someone and ask them to respond to it? Ask Him everyday and just see what He does.

Moses models it for us perfectly. You know somebody who needs to respond to the gospel. Don't assume they know it. Be the one who shares it. We glorify God as we allow Him to order our life. He orders our circle, those closest to us. He orders our witness, telling others about Him. And He orders our life together. Look at verse 13:

III. Glorifying God in our Life Together

Read 18:13-27

I'd love to spend so much more time on this passage than we have here. This is such an interesting passage where we see infant Israel—remember, this is a people learning to be a people. They're just learning to walk, learning to govern, learning to live life together.

And the closest parallel for Israel in the Old Testament is not America or any other nation for that matter. It's the church. We're talking theology and ecclesiology here, not nationality and geopolitics.

God isn't instituting a national government. He's teaching His people how to live out the one another passages of the New Testament hundreds of years before the New Testament is ever written.

And I'd love to spend another 30 minutes digging into all the ways this passage parallels the New Testament church and even the ways these mechanisms are present in the way we govern ourselves in this church. But for the sake of time let's just grab onto one big-picture truth here.

Even Moses can't do it alone, church. Moses had a massive job description . He served as teacher, counselor, judge, and in many ways he acted as a tribal king without ever holding anything close to that title.

He spoke the words God directly told him to speak. That was his role as prophet. But he did so much more. He helped them apply the truths God spoke to everyday life. That's where his work as judge came in, and it became overwhelming.

It was overwhelming to the point that there's a sense in the text it would have been sinful to continue. What you are doing is not good, Jethro says in verse 17.

Church, we have a problem when we take on burdens God didn't intend us to bear, or try to bear burdens alone that God designed to be carried by a multitude and not a single person.

If Moses needed help, so do you. That's why God's people have always been God's people in relationship with one another. Jesus established the church and very early on in Acts after Jesus ascended back to the Father, we see the church begin to function to bear one another's burdens and care for one another on a level that no other institution can do.

God never intends for us to do all the work ourselves. God places us into a local body of believers and the idea that there is a follower of God floating around out there somewhere with no connection to these believers—just I'm on my own, it's me and God and I'm good—that idea is foreign to the Bible.

Walking with God is not a one-man (or one-woman) show. You need people. Moses was overwhelmed by the responsibility and it showed.

Verse 14 said Moses was as efficient as the DMV. People stood around waiting on him all day long. Church, when we try to do it alone, things don't go well.

That's why our membership covenant starts off this way. This is the first promise we make to each other when we join this church: ***We will walk together with brotherly love, exercising Christian care and watchfulness over each other, participating in each other's joys and bearing one another's burdens and sorrows with tender sympathy.***

Jethro instructed Moses to enlist God-fearing, trustworthy, benevolent men to come alongside him in living for the Lord. Church, Exodus 18 shows us how God works through His people in the ordinary days of our lives. The days where the crisis is behind us, yes maybe the mountain still lies ahead of us. But God is Lord over our circle, those people we hold closest. Those relationships tell the story of God's glory. We tell the story of God's glory verbally as we seek to see the lost in our lives come to know the

Lord and then we lock arms with those people to live out God's glory in our local church and our community. Let's pray.