

FEBRUARY 3

Exodus 17:8-19:15

Exodus 17:8-16

This story has launched a thousand sermons. The question is, “Why did Moses have to raise his hands?” God is obviously teaching Moses, and the people, and us, a lesson. It might be that it fits well with the following story.

Note that Joshua is mentioned here for the first time and he is honored with the victory. That the memorial is recited to Joshua might be a prophetic hint of his future role in leading Israel to victory in the land.

The Amalekites will be a pain in the neck for Israel for a long time; in fact, led by Joshua, they will fight them again in 40 years. They were present when Abraham moved to Canaan (Gen. 14:7).

Exodus 18

Vs. 1-12 Notice that Jethro was *the priest of Midian*, and that he had some knowledge of God. I don't think the knowledge of God was as lost back then as it is today. We've already met Melchizedek, and soon we'll meet Balaam, both of whom not only knew God, but served Him. In Jethro's case, it is safe to say that he didn't consider Yahweh to be the only God. Just like Pharaoh and his magicians, they knew there were other “entities” out there, and there was power they could draw on. In 1 Corinthians 10, Paul says that there are no other gods; but what pagans sacrifice, they offer to demons. Satan is not stupid. If you can't dissuade people from believing in God, just convince them that He is just one of many. It accomplishes the same purpose. These people were very religious, and thinking that Yahweh was only one of many gods was successful in leading them in the wrong direction.

During the months of conflict in Egypt, Moses had sent his wife and sons back to Midian. Now that it was safe, Jethro was bringing them back to Moses.

Vs. 10-12 What God did in Egypt had done something in Jethro's heart and understanding. Actually, the entire known world was moved by what happened to Egypt. We'll get a taste of this when Joshua reaches Jericho. It would be the same today if something happened to a major nation or superpower. News back then didn't travel as fast, but via trade and travel, word got around. Remember, too, that one of the wonders of the world was in Egypt. Anyway, it's hard for me to say that Jethro became a believer since he mentions other gods. Compare this to the testimony of Naaman the Syrian in 2 Kings 5:15. I'm confident we'll see Naaman at the table, but I don't know about Jethro, or Nebuchadnezzar for that matter. But it is safe to say that Jethro was growing in his conviction and knowledge of God.

Vs. 13-27 This portion of Scripture has not only launched a thousand sermons, but also a thousand leadership books and illustrations. Ok, this is a great principle, no doubt, but do you see any common thread between this story and the one above about the battle and Moses' arms? What is God teaching Moses and the disciple of Jesus, working in the harvest, making disciples?

One thing this story shows me was that Moses was humble and ready to receive godly help. At this point, Moses is probably the most powerful man in the world. He might have been a chicken, but with God he was super chicken. Yet He was humble and open. Also, rather than making a monument to organizational leadership, I think that it is noteworthy that Moses saw Jethro as sent from God to help him. It shows that there is help for those of us who are not natural stellar organizers, if we are willing to hear from the Lord.

Exodus 19:1-15

A few things to note here:

Vs. 1-6 God began getting Moses ready for His meeting with the people. Time is mentioned. *The third new moon* meant that three months had passed since the Exodus. Israel will be here for another year being organized to worship and follow God.

What is coming is a major covenant with Israel as a nation. God already has a responsibility to them by virtue of the covenant He made with Abraham. That covenant was without condition since Abraham was entranced, watching God walk alone through the animals that had been sacrificed. The covenant about to be made with Israel was a conditional covenant based on their obedience. They had to pledge to do their part or the agreement would be void. It is a good thing the covenant with Abraham superseded this. We already know the story. They won't obey and the covenant will become void. A new covenant will be needed. Still, and you can't forget this, the promise to use Israel is prefaced on the promise to Abraham, and God will see that Israel fulfills its destiny to direct the nations to God.

V. 4 What God was/is doing with Israel is for them and for all of mankind to see. God will use them to show the truth of the heart of mankind, the power of sin, and the inability for man to become righteous before God by doing good, religious stuff. Although they failed, God will still honor the promise He made to Abraham to guide Israel as a nation. God will reward them for this service to mankind. And, as we're reading in Matthew, God will make a new covenant, not only with Israel, but with all men through the blood of His Son.

Vs. 5-6 Notice that God was going to make them *a kingdom of priests*; that is, Israel would represent Him before a lost world, bringing the nations to God. That this is also said of the church doesn't mean we have taken Israel's place. Israel will yet fulfill this. But it does show something about God. All those led into the harvest are given this description.

Vs. 7-15 God was getting the people ready to "meet Him." He is going to begin giving the people lessons in being set apart and holy. The dramatics of staying away from the mountain are part of this.

V. 15 Why couldn't the men *go near a woman*? I would suppose that was a sign of consecration and seriousness before this great event. On the other hand, every boy growing up in Milwaukee knew that girls had cooties and just the mere touch could transfer gazillions of these scary little...well, oh, forget it. Better to go with the first suggestion.

Matthew 22:34-23:12

Matthew 22:34-66

Vs. 34-40 So now the Pharisees go after Jesus, and Jesus gives them a perfect answer, to which they have no response. According to Mark 12:28-34, it seems that a dispute began and another scribe came and heard Jesus' response to the questions. So then this scribe asked a clarifying question regarding not the greatest commandment, but the first commandment. Jesus then gave a more detailed response. This scribe attested to Jesus' accuracy and complimented Him. Jesus acknowledged the scribe's sincerity, saying he was close to the kingdom. Through this exchange, the other Pharisees and their lawyer were put to shame.

Vs. 41-46 So, as the Germans would say, Jesus "rotates the spear" and points it at them. The question about the Son of David did two things. First, it exposed their superficial understanding of Scripture. Second, it showed that the Son of David was actually revered by David as Lord (Yahweh). Obviously, they should have been revering Jesus. In Jesus showing the shallowness of the teachers, Jesus goes on to warn the people. Third, and most importantly, it says that the Son of David will be commanded, for a time, to sit next to the Father. During that time the enemies and opposition to the King will be done away with. It meant that the Christ would have to enter

heaven and then be enthroned. It meant there would be a period of time between His glorification and the full establishment of His rule.

It is interesting to note that at Jesus' trial before His death, the issue of His identity as the Son of God/ Son of Man/ Son of David is the focus. It is ironic that as Jesus told them He was a King and the Son of God, they killed Him.

Notice that everyone who came to Jesus, appealing to Him as the Son of David, demonstrated amazing faith.

Matthew 23:1-12

This warning is to the disciples and people, and it has a couple of aspects.

Vs. 1-8 First, Jesus warns them not to be hypocrites like the Pharisees. Jesus is not saying *all* the burdens were wrong, but the Pharisees didn't do what they were telling the people to do. This is a good warning for disciples today. It is very easy to tell people what they need to do, but the disciple has to be doing it himself. Reach the lost? Then the pastor and elders have to lead the charge. Make disciples, who make disciples? They need to be engaged every week in groups. Otherwise, they will be laying something on people, which they themselves do not do.

All of the moral stuff, honesty, and integrity goes without saying. We are all to be in the Word and honoring God every day.

Vs. 9-10 Second, Jesus steers them away from "revering" any person too much: God? yes. Man? no. I remember reading for the first time, "Call no man, Father." I was a Catholic, and we called all the priests, "Father." And what Jesus said here made a lot of sense, because some of them were very frail, faulted men; but we had been led to think they were right up there with God.

In the church, the same holds true. By nature, we are attracted to the latest big name. God says not to give people titles that project a kind of super authority. That's not good for them or us.

Notice that in what Jesus says here, He is referring to the entire Trinity - Father, Son and Holy Spirit. They don't know it yet, but it is the Spirit who is their, and our, teacher. John 14:26 - *But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you.*

Vs. 11-12 Third, for emphasis, the disciple is to be a humble servant of all. A disciple of Jesus in the harvest is to be known by his/her love for Christ and their working together with other disciples to show that love by reaching out and making disciples. A true disciple doesn't need a title to be fruitful, but it is hard for a fruitful disciple to be hidden. Their humility and servant's heart will help them make disciples, who will make disciples with that same heart.

Psalm 27:7-14

Somehow I identify a lot with this psalm.

Vs. 7-9 Look back at v. 6 from yesterday. Do you see what connects vs. 6 and 7? It has to do with David's testimony to the Lord and now his crying out to the Lord.

Now David is crying out because of the present nearness of danger. He has responded to the Lord, but needs God to respond to him. How desperately do you need to "see God's face?"

V. 10 David knew that everyone around him was capable of forsaking him, but God was steadfast and faithful.

Vs. 11-12 And David was teachable. He didn't just want deliverance; he wanted to know and follow the Lord. That was the way for him to remain safe in God's care.

Vs. 13-14 Look at the note regarding v. 13 and *believe*. I think the reading is better that says that if David had not believed God would save him in this life, he would have despaired.

V. 14 Actually, I prefer the KJV's rendering, *Wait on the LORD: be of good courage, and he shall strengthen thine heart: wait, I say, on the LORD.* You can see there is a difference in the sense of the verse.

This is a precious and important truth. To understand how important “waiting” is in praying, do a word search on “waiting” and “wait” in the Psalms and Isaiah. It might transform your prayer life.

Notice that there is the command here to *take courage*. That courage is only possible if the Lord is our strength. This sounds like what will be said to Joshua several times as he becomes the leader of Israel.

Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be frightened, and do not be dismayed, for the LORD your God is with you wherever you go. (Joshua 1:9)

God is not commanding us to do something impossible. We can only be this strong and courageous in the One who can do the impossible. And we have the knowledge of His love in our Lord.

Proverbs 6:27-35

Vs. 27-33 I can understand why the Spirit emphasizes this truth, but I wonder what personal experience urged Solomon on to share this with his son. Here, it is good to remember that Bathsheba was Solomon's mother. I wonder, again, if it wasn't because of the way David damaged himself and his family. How did David imagine he'd get away with it? It was utterly irrational. David knew Bathsheba; in fact, he probably knew where to look from his roof. David knew Uriah, knew her father, and knew her grandfather. They probably all sat at his table every night. What did David think would happen? David's act destroyed his own family and that family. And to think, David also knew God.

The point here is that if you stray too close to lust, you'll get burned. To think you can do this without effect is only to fool yourself.

Seasoned servants of God have built protective measures around themselves to keep from flirting with danger, to keep themselves accountable, to make sure they don't linger around the fire. As disciples, we are no better and need to heed the warning the Spirit is giving us here.

It is interesting that in every election year in America, some of the top candidates are often destroyed by their past sexual behavior. Even in the heart of an unbeliever, unfaithfulness and adultery create a dark opinion of someone.

Vs. 34-35 Some things that God has built into us just cannot be denied.