

HELPING HANDS: Part II - Exodus 18:1-27

Introduction:

Last week we began a consideration in this portion of Exodus on **'help'**. We saw, at the end of chapter 17, the necessity of **'help'**, for even the strongest of people needed 'help'. Even God's chosen people, freed by the power of Almighty God, soon needed **'help'** again, for shortly after their deliverance they were under attack by Amalek. Even the strongest, like the young military leader, Joshua, newly introduced, and who will become prominent in the conquest, needed a company of men to **'help'** him. Even the strongest of leaders, like Moses, the man of God, needed Aaron and Hur to **'help'** him. That event in the history of Israel was 'instructive', demonstrating that we all need **'help'**. Contrary to our inner feelings, none of us are strong enough, tough enough, or independent enough. Every single one of us, from ancient Israel to the present church, is in need.

Let us be clear about the Biblical notion of **'help'**. We did not 'will' ourselves into being, nor did we birth ourselves. No. We were made. You 'needed' someone to make you. You did not raise yourself as a helpless infant. No. You cried, and you were 'helped'. You needed someone to help clothe you, teach you, pay you. You need help on the family problems, to fix the car, to pay the bills, to make decisions. You are not able to make the body function correctly, you cannot stop sickness, you cannot stop the body from breaking down, you cannot stop death. You need **'help'**. We all do. Yet like all truth, this can be denied. All truth can be suppressed in unrighteousness. But suppressing truth does not make the reality of it go away, or make it less true. In fact, suppression of truth only amplifies your need for someone outside of yourself. As you are struggling along, like a renegade, thinking you can handle everything yourself, that is serving as a beacon in your life; demonstrating the very fact that you are in need of **'help'** even while you deny it.

The most mighty in ancient times, God's people, are in need of **'help'**. But **'help'** is not just practical reality, not just 'being there', not just physical reality, grabbing more hands, it is not just lending a hand. 'Help' is not just a Joshua, or an Aaron or Hur. 'Help' is that, and contains that, in part; it is, indeed, a practical help, and 'helping' one another is a good thing, but 'true help' is so much more than just physical help. 'Help' is not just recognizing more 'earthly' hands. Though it is true that we need 'help', and the help of helping hands, we also need the 'true help' of 'the One Heavenly Hand'. **WE NEED THE HAND OF GOD.** We need the **'help of God'** in our lives.

This **'help of God'** will be seen, will be presented, in two ways today:

1. Help for Those Outside of the Family of God. This is for those who are not God's, who are outside of having eternal life in Him. You cannot be a child of God, saved in Him and secure in Him, if you don't 'confess' that God has 'helped' you. We will see salvation from the most unlikely.
2. Help for Those Inside of the Family of God. These are those who are 'inheriting' eternal life, those who are in God's family, recognizing the importance of the Word of God. But being in Christ does not make one immune from 'cowboy' Christianity. We struggle with this need for 'help'. It is called pride, and it is worked through by attempting to shoulder it ourselves; 'I am fine.' 'I don't need any help.'

These two points, Help Outside, and Help Inside, are addressed in today's passage.

I. HELP FOR THOSE OUTSIDE: (vv 1-12)

Exodus 18:1-7

"Jethro, the priest of Midian, Moses' father-in-law, heard of all that God had done for Moses and for Israel His people, how the LORD had brought Israel out of Egypt. Now Jethro, Moses' father-in-law, had taken Zipporah, Moses' wife, after he had sent her home, along with her two sons. The name of the one was Gershom (for he said, 'I have been a sojourner in a foreign land'), and the name of the other, Eliezer (for he said, 'The God of my father was my help, and delivered me from the sword of Pharaoh'). Jethro, Moses' father-in-law, came with his sons and his wife to Moses in the wilderness where he was encamped at the mountain of God. And when he sent word to Moses, 'I your father-in-law Jethro, am coming to you with your wife and her two sons with her,' Moses went out to meet his father-in-law and bowed down and kissed him. And they asked each other of their welfare and went into the tent."

We are immediately re-introduced to Moses' father-in-law as we begin the passage. Who is his father-in-law? Moses' father-in-law is "Jethro, the priest of Midian," (vs 1). We met him earlier, in chapter 2, when Moses fled to the wilderness from Egypt. The daughters of Jethro are rescued by Moses, and Moses is invited to Jethro's home, and Jethro gives Zipporah to Moses as a wife.

Exodus 2:21

"And Moses was content to dwell with the man, and he gave Moses his daughter Zipporah."

Hence, Jethro is no longer a foreigner to Moses. No. Jethro is a father-in-law to Moses, and it appears from the text that they have a positive relationship with one another.

We stop here to note some important 'family' details.

Moses and Zipporah have a son, 'Gershom'.

Exodus 2:22

"She gave birth to a son, and he called his name Gershom, for he said, 'I have been a sojourner in a foreign land.'"

The name 'Gershom' is significant. Names point to things in God's people. Moses has been an alien in Midian, an outcast from Egypt, and has been living in a foreign land. This is a statement of fact. Moses was, indeed, a foreigner living among those who 'were not God's people'. The name 'Gershom' therefore, as names often do in Scripture, marks out a specific time in Moses' life.

A second son was born to Moses and Zipporah, a boy they named 'Eliezer'.

Exodus 18:4

"... and the name of the other, Eliezer (for he said, 'The God of my father was my help, and delivered me from the sword of Pharaoh'.)"

The name 'Eliezer', meaning, ('The God of my father was my help') in its simplest form, "My God is Helper". Learning about this son here, at this time in Scripture is no accident; there is divine purpose in knowing this. That Moses has noted that the God of his father has been his 'Helper' is no surprise. The '**help**' we've witnessed already in chapter 17, through men, and the '**help**' and deliverance we've seen, in the chapters prior, by the 'hand of God', assures us that GOD ALONE does not stop 'helping' even after deliverance.

Now, who does God '**help**' next? The return of the daughter Zipporah, and the grandsons, Gershom and Eliezer, to Moses by Jethro, sets up the next scene of '**help**'.

Jethro is from Midian, not Israel. Jethro is not one of God's chosen people; he is not even a foreign refugee attached to Israel. No. Jethro is a 'priest' of Midian, a person of influence in Midian. He would 'seem' to be an 'unlikely' candidate for God's '**help**', being on the 'outside' of God's people.

Indeed, the Midianites were not God's people. They had proven friendly to Moses, the Hebrew, and had shown Moses hospitality even, but the Midianites were not God's people, and were actually against God's people. It was Midianite traders who sold Joseph to Potiphar back in Genesis, for example.

Genesis 37:28,36

"Then Midianite traders passed by. And they (the brothers) drew Joseph up and lifted him out of the pit, and sold him to the Ishmaelites for twenty shekels of silver. They took Joseph to Egypt."

"Meanwhile the Midianites had sold him in Egypt to Potiphar, an officer of Pharaoh, the captain of the guard."

In later years, we read in the book of Numbers how the Midianite elders join with the Moabites to tempt and lure Balaam to curse Israel.

Numbers 22:4-7

"And Moab ('in great dread of the people of Israel', vs3) said to the elders of Midian, 'This horde (speaking of Israel) will now lick up all that is around us, as the ox licks up the grass of the field.' So Balak the son of Zippor, who was king of Moab at that time, sent messengers to Balaam... saying, 'Behold a people has come out of Egypt. They cover the face of the earth, and they are dwelling opposite me. Come now, curse this people for me, since they are too mighty for me. Perhaps I shall be able to defeat them and drive them from the land, for I know that he whom you bless is blessed, and he whom you curse is cursed. So the elders of Moab and the elders of Midian departed with the fees for divination in their hand. And they came to Balaam and gave him Balak's message."

And during the conquest of the promised land, Israel defeated Midian chiefs of their land, creating antagonism among the peoples.

Joshua 13:21

"... that is, all the cities of the tableland, and all the kingdom of Sihon king of the Amorites, who reigned in Hesbon, whom Moses defeated with the leaders of Midian, Evi and Rekem and Zur and Hur and Reba, the princes of Sihon, who lived in the land."

And most well known, is the story in Judges 6-7, of Gideon, who was raised up by God to defeat the Midianites who were oppressing Israel.

Judges 6:2a,6,12,14,7:9

"And the hand of Midian overpowered Israel... And Israel was brought very low because of Midian. And the people of Israel cried out for help to the LORD... And the angel of the LORD appeared to him (Gideon) and said to him, 'The LORD is with you, O mighty man of valor'.... And the LORD turned to him and said, 'Go in this might of yours and save Israel from the hand of Midian; do not I send you?' ...That same night the LORD said to him, 'Arise, go down against the camp, for I have given it into your hand.'"

So we note that though Jethro and Moses have a relationship, the Midianites are 'outside' of God's covenant and family, yet still Jethro 'hears' about God, hears about the events of Egypt.

Exodus 18:1

"Jethro, the priest of Midian, Moses' father-in-law, heard of all that God had done for Moses and for Israel his people, how the LORD had brought Israel out of Egypt."

News of God's wonders and signs have reached Midian. By provision of YHWH, Jethro has learned the 'word on the street', so to speak, about what has been going on during his son-in-law's absence. Presumably Jethro remembers why his son-in-law has gone to Egypt, and why his daughter and grandsons are currently with him. So, having a 'general sense' about what has happened, now meets up with Moses, along the way, returning Moses' wife and sons to him. And though Jethro has heard the 'general' story, he now receives a 'special' hearing, directly with and from Moses himself.

Exodus 18:5-6

"Jethro, Moses' father-in-law, came with his sons and his wife to Moses in the wilderness where he was encamped at the mountain of God. And when he sent word to Moses, 'I, your father-in-law Jethro, am coming to you with your wife and her two sons with her.'"

People will come, 'having heard', and what do you say? When they say, 'So, tell me about 'this God' that I am hearing about,' what do you do with this golden opportunity to tell people about your God?

Exodus 18:7-8

"Moses went out to meet his father-in-law and bowed down and kissed him. And they asked each other of their welfare and went into the tent. Then Moses told his father-in-law all that the LORD had done to Pharaoh and to the Egyptians for Israel's sake, all the hardship that had come upon them in the way, and how the LORD had delivered them."

Moses goes out to meet Jethro, and they ensure the welfare of one another, and then enter the tent. Moses wastes no time, we see, asking about the weather in Midian, or how the Midian priesthood was going. No. Moses gets to the point quickly (one can almost feel his excitement to 'tell' the story), and he 'tells' Jethro all that God has done to Pharaoh, and how the LORD had delivered them.

Note the two things that Moses does:

1. He wastes no time.

2. He takes the opportunity; he 'seizes the moment', to tell all that has happened, all that the LORD has done.

This is not about Moses. THIS IS ALL ABOUT GOD, ALL OF IT, and has been all along. The matter was foretold earlier, back in Egypt, when YHWH was explaining to Pharaoh. The same word was used, '**proclaimed**'; the LORD is seeking for His Name to be 'proclaimed' throughout the earth. Proclamation: going forth and 'telling', having evangelistic purpose, '**to tell about God**'.

Exodus 9:16

"But for this purpose I have raised you up, to show you My power, so that My name may be proclaimed in all the earth."

Moses '**tells**' Jethro about all that God has done; he '**proclaims**' the story so that Jethro would know who God is, so Jethro would know who the God of Israel is, would know the power of YHWH. The same purpose behind the '**telling**' to Pharaoh, is the same purpose behind '**telling**' Jethro. Both are 'outside' of those chosen to be God's people, yet both need to understand who God Alone is. However, this is where the two accounts depart, for Jethro responds very differently to the proclamation than Pharaoh did, for Jethro does not have a hard heart. Jethro 'rejoices' in all the good that the LORD has done. He does not rejoice in Moses, or in Moses' return. No. He rejoices in all that the LORD, YHWH, had done.

Exodus 18:9

"And Jethro rejoiced for all the good that the LORD had done to Israel, in that He had delivered them out of the hand of the Egyptians."

Note the focus of Moses' '**telling**', the 'telling words' that he uses: the LORD, His doing, His might, His work, His deliverance. Moses is '**telling**' only that which God has done during this time. This is so instructive for us. Time is essence. Time is short, and running out, yet the harvest is ripe. They do not need to know what you can do with the LORD. No. They need to know what will happen if they do not know the LORD. They need to know what we are like from the inside out, that we are all corrupt by nature and by choice, that we are in a lot of trouble, '**that we need help**', that we are not going to be fine '**without help**'. We need to know only of God and what only YHWH can do.

Christian: '**Tell**' of what God has done. '**Tell**' of His work. '**Tell**' that He sent Christ to do what we cannot do. '**Tell**' of the perfect, flawless GodMan that lived life perfectly, without sin, without stain. '**Tell**' of His laid down life as a sacrifice. '**Tell**' that His sacrifice appeased the wrath of God. '**Tell**' that His life bridged that wrath so that we don't have to bear it. '**Tell**' that if we repent of sin, there is forgiveness. '**Tell**' that we must believe in Christ for '**help**'. Christian: '**Tell**' the good news. Time is short. Be a solution bringer to this world. '**Tell**' the news of God. Focus on the only news that matters. '**Tell**' of what God has done. '**Tell**' of the '**help**' that we all need. '**Tell**' a helpless world that they can have 'true help', the only '**help**' that matters. We need 'help' from the cradle to the grave, but it is '**help**' to get us beyond the grave that truly matters. Eternal life means heaven or hell, and only by Christ's '**help**' can we find heaven.

Moses knew that Jethro was not of God's people, was 'outside' of the promises of God, and needed to hear the news. Jethro, beloved as he may have been, was a foreigner among God's people. Moses knew he must share with Jethro the good news of God. And Jethro was 'willing' to hear, and listened to the 'telling'.

Exodus 18:10-12

"Jethro said, 'Blessed be the LORD, who has delivered you out of the hand of the Egyptians and out of the hand of Pharaoh and has delivered the people from under the hand of the Egyptians. Now I know that the LORD is greater than all gods, because in this affair they dealt arrogantly with the people. And Jethro, Moses' father-in-law, brought a burnt offering and sacrifices to God; and Aaron came with all the elders of Israel to eat bread with Moses' father-in-law before God.'"

Jethro listened to the '**telling**', and his response was joyous. "Now I know that the LORD is greater than all gods" (vs 11a), and he brings a sacrifice to God. This is regeneration of the heart. This is one 'given the eyes' to see God. Jethro's response is not the common response. No. Rejection is the common reaction to the Gospel, as we saw in Pharaoh's response, for example, 'so stark', it was pure rejection. Not always does the 'proclamation' of the 'good news' bring about positive response, yet it still remains a reason for 'telling'. Indeed, '**Go and Tell**'!

The Lord encouraged Paul to '**Go and Tell**' regardless of opposition, for there are souls to be saved, and 'faith comes through hearing the Word of God' (Romans 10:17). We read:

Acts 18:5b, 9-11

"Paul was occupied with the word, testifying to the Jews that the Christ was Jesus ... And the Lord said to Paul one night in a vision, 'Do not be afraid, but go on speaking and do not be silent, for I am with you, and no one will attack you to harm you, for I have many in this city who are my people. And he stayed a year and six months, teaching the word of God among them.'"

This is our confidence, many are still 'Jethros', still 'outside' of God's people; still, many will yet come to salvation, but they need to hear the message, need to hear the Word of God. We must '**go and tell**'. It is not about us --- it is about God. It is about God's work; His choosing, His calling, His regeneration, **His 'help'** through and through. He chose Jethro, and we cannot know who the next Jethro will be, so we must give the message to all.

We know that Jethro's conversion was real. He clearly professed 'knowing' God (unlike Pharaoh who stated, also clearly, "I do not know the LORD." Exodus 5:2b), and then Jethro worships God. The profession of God is the 'root', the speech, which will lead to further action, the consequential 'fruit' of worship. Jethro professed:

Exodus 18:11-12

"Now I know that the LORD is greater than all gods, because in this affair they dealt arrogantly with the people. And Jethro, Moses' father-in-law, brought a burnt offering and sacrifices to God; and Aaron came with all the elders of Israel to eat bread with Moses' father-in-law before God.'"

And now they 'break bread' together; Jethro has become one of the 'inside', for he **knows** God now. God has saved him, through the '**telling**' by Moses. This is still true in the New Testament.

Romans 10:12-15

"For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; for the same Lord is Lord of all, bestowing His riches on all who call on Him. For everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved. How then will they call on Him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in Him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? And how are they to preach unless they are sent? As it is written, 'How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!'"

We do not know who the next Jethro will be. We '**help**' by '**telling**' WHAT GOD HAS DONE!

II. HELP FOR THOSE INSIDE: (vv 13-27)

Exodus 18:13

"The next day Moses sat to judge the people, and the people stood around Moses from morning till evening."

And so, 'a mass of humanity' stands around Moses, six thousand men alone; one can imagine the crowd and the chaos. And there is Moses, a lone man, attending to them. And Jethro observes this situation, and questions Moses about it. What is this about, Moses?

Exodus 18:14

"When Moses' father-in-law saw all that he (Moses) was doing for the people, he said, 'What is this that you are doing for the people? Why do you sit alone, and all the people stand around you from morning till evening?'"

Moses, it seems, misunderstands Jethro's question. He thinks he is being asked to explain why and what he is doing. He tries to defend his actions to Jethro. They come to me. I am judging. I am informing them, teaching them of the laws of God. This is a good thing.

Exodus 18:15-16

"And Moses said to his father-in-law, Because the people come to me to inquire of God; when they have a dispute, they come to me and I decide between one person and another, and I make them know the statutes of God and his laws."

Moses strives to assure Jethro that he is not doing this by his own desires and inclinations. No. His measuring stick is 'divine rule'; he is doing rightly by God's Law. Moses is anxious to be a good leader, a good shepherd to the flock he has been given. He understands that this is his role by God's standards. He does not wish to be a 'negligent shepherd', does not wish for the people to go astray, to wander away from the fold because he has failed to teach them properly.

We read of God's expectations for God's leaders through Ezekiel, using metaphor. God's people are compared to sheep and their leaders as shepherds to express God's disfavour for poor leadership.

Ezekiel 34:2,4-6

"Son of man, prophesy against the shepherds of Israel; prophesy, and say to them, even to the shepherds, Thus says the Lord GOD: 'Ah, shepherds of Israel who have been feeding yourselves! Should not shepherds feed the sheep? The weak you have not strengthened, the sick you have not healed, the injured you have not bound up, the strayed you have not brought back, the lost you have not sought, and with force and harshness you have ruled them, So they were scattered, because there was no shepherd, and they became food for all the wild beasts. My sheep were scattered; they wandered over all the mountains and on every high hill. My sheep were scattered over all the face of the earth, with none to search or seek for them.'"

The prophet Isaiah also speaks to the 'straying' of the sheep.

Isaiah 53:5

"All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned --- everyone --- to his own way; and the LORD has laid on Him the iniquity of us all."

But Jethro quickly assures Moses that it is not 'what' he is doing that he has an issue with, but 'how' he is doing it. Jethro is a new convert, but this new convert sees a need in the camp for 'corporate leadership', for 'corporate teaching'. He realizes that Moses' has a role, that he is 'the one' by which the people would know the laws of God, for without proper 'leadership' the people would 'scatter', but he also sees that Moses is but one man, and clearly needs **'help'**, a more plausible way to fulfill this role. Moses is the leader, yet he cannot do everything by himself. Moses, you are only human. You cannot do this all on your own. You are wearing yourself out.

Exodus 18:17

"Moses' father-in-law said to him, 'What you are doing is not good. You and the people with you will certainly wear yourselves out for the thing is too heavy for you. You are not able to do it alone.'"

Our tendency is to resist **'help'** in life, but we saw last week that even God's people need **'help'**. Amalek came and attacked God's people. Amalek 'did not fear God', and was to prove himself an ongoing enemy of Israel. In the end, only with God's **'help'** were the Amalekites defeated.

And now this newly converted priest is pressing in on this strong man of God, seeing an immediate problem, and sensing a bigger problem, and so Jethro sternly gives advice to his son-in-law, Moses. Moses, hear me on this. You cannot do this alone. Obey my voice, Moses. You **'need help'**.

And yes, we fully understand that this can be a problem. This is why leaders face burnout; the job is too big, they need **'help'**. And it is true of all people. There are times when we simply **'need help'**. We give thanks for the able men, the elders, who **'help'** to shoulder the load here at Westmount.

Exodus 18:19-23

"Now obey my voice; I will give you advice, and God be with you! You shall represent the people before God and bring their cases to God, and you shall warn them about the statutes and the laws, and make them know the way in which they must walk and what they must do. Moreover, look for able men from all the people, men who fear God, who are trustworthy and

hate a bribe, and place such men over the people as chiefs of thousands, of hundreds, of fifties, and of tens. And let them judge the people at all times. Every great matter they shall bring to you, but any small matter they shall decide themselves. So it will be easier for you, and they will bear the burden with you. If you do this, God will direct you, you will be able to endure, and all this people also will go to their place in peace."

We note three observations concerning Jethro's advice:

1. Jethro is new to the faith, yet he starts '**helping**' right away. He observes the need, identifies the need, and 'acts' on it.
2. Jethro does not just criticize and walk away. Jethro provides the solution. His advice flows from God. His solution is Biblical. He provides 'spirit advice'.
3. Jethro provides practical advice. Look for 'able men' (not just any men will do); look for rare men, not fleshy men. Look for these particular qualities:
 - * Look for men who fear God, who do not/will not fear other men.
 - * Look for men who are trustworthy, men who can be counted on.
 - * Look for men who hate a bribe, men of integrity, men for whom prestige and money do not mean a thing.

It is rare to find 'able' not 'fleshy' men. Jethro has pointed to three necessary qualities to be in such men. He understands that Moses will require 'men of character' who can share this heavy load with him. This is a high bar, a high standard, yet we read this very morning that indeed this list is simple by New Testament standards for the 'overseer' (Review I Timothy 1:1-13)

Moses heeds the advice of his father-in-law and puts it all into place. He implements 'shared' leadership, implements the godly structure. His 'able' men '**helpers**' will now look after the simple cases, and Moses will respond to the harder cases.

Exodus 18:24-27

"So Moses listened to the voice of his father-in-law and did all that he had said. Moses chose able men out of all Israel and made them heads over the people, chiefs of thousands, of hundreds, of fifties, and of tens. And they judged the people at all times. Any hard case they brought to Moses, but any small matter they decided themselves. Then Moses let his father-in-law depart, and he went away to his own country."

And so, having '**helped**', Jethro heads back to Midian, but take note, Jethro is not the same person that we met in the beginning. Jethro, once pagan, is now transformed. Jethro, once worshipping who knows what, is now a worshiper of YHWH. Jethro, formerly a priest of Midian and lost, now is found, and worships 'with' Israel. Jethro, was the father-in-law, but is now also a brother in faith. Jethro received '**help**'. He received the '**helping hand**' of Moses, who told of all the Lord had done, and he received the '**helping hand**' of God who gives faith, life, hope and peace. This was '**help**' for the 'helpless', inside and out.

Will you receive God's '**help**' today? Will you?

