

Sermon File # 660

Scripture Text: Exodus 18:13-27

Sermon Title: *Sharing the Ministry*

Manuscript written by Roger Roberts and sermon preached

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Unless otherwise noted, Scripture quotations are from the New International Version.

Sources cited in this manuscript are listed at the end.

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Sharing the Ministry

Introduction:

Open your Bibles with me to our text, as we continue looking into the Book of Exodus, with its theme of God's deliverance of his people. Last Sunday we noted in Chapter 17 how God's presence delivered his people from the attack of the Amalekites, which was instructional for how the people of God are to be prepared for and then engage in spiritual warfare. We must trust and follow Jesus as our Commander-in-Chief, relying on prayer for ourselves and one another.

Chapter 18 seems almost an uneventful interlude between the excitement of the battle in Chapter 17 and then the appearance of God's glory on the mountain and the giving of his covenant in Exodus 19. The first verses in Exodus 18 narrate the visit of Moses' father-in-law, Jethro, pagan priest of Midian (2:16), who evidently had become a worshiper of the Lord, Yahweh (18:11f). Whatever his background, Jethro is instrumental in giving to Moses some important advice, which, though not dramatic, was crucial to Moses and to the wellbeing of the people of God.

Follow as I read this conversation between Moses and his father-in-law, Jethro, in **Exodus 18:13-27**

Now just over 44 years ago, I was ordained to the Gospel ministry by my home church in Columbus, Ohio in the Midwest of the USA. After passing the interrogation by the examining council consisting of area ministers, pastors and deacons in my home church, and following the ordination charge given me by my father, I was ready to get married and then head off to seminary and look for a church to serve during my student years. I soon took my first charge, a newly begun church plant which at that time was comprised of one family with teenagers and an elderly couple. We worked with this church plant on weekends, located about an hour's drive from the seminary and Nancy's university. I visited and was able to recruit a few more members, before eventually offending one of the founding couples who left in protest. But not long after the slow beginning, we experienced a large increase in membership. Being full of youthful energy, and the people realizing we were students and eventually young parents, I was happy and fortunate to have at least a part-time, volunteer secretary as my only staff member.

But following those seminary/graduate school days, we moved to larger pastorates with multiple staff associates and large deacon bodies. Although I had these people on our payroll and elected deacons on our boards, I carried much of the pastoral leadership burden, and particularly on an administrative level, even though my calling and gifts were in the area of preaching, teaching and pastoral care. American churches are often in a competitive mode, competing with other churches in the community for members. Many pastors in the US often feel pressured to become what Eugene Peterson describes, tongue-in-cheek, as "necessary pastors," that is pastors who are good growth experts and market-directed managers (Dawn & Peterson, 1ff). The pastoral duties of the ministry of the Word, prayer and spiritual direction can often be given short shrift or neglected altogether as long as the managing CEO-type pastor gets the necessary results of bigger numbers. And I heard in church growth conferences that pastors could in good conscience avoid the task of being shepherds of the flock and instead should think of themselves as ranchers, delegating the shepherding to associate and assistant pastors.

But I have chosen to be what Peterson calls "an unnecessary pastor," staying with the work that is spelled out in Scripture and I think pictured for us in this text. Moses was busy doing the work of teaching God's will and word and giving pastoral guidance to the people; but as has been true of my ministry, something was awry and Moses' father-in-law perceived the problem and suggested a wise solution. If I were honest, I would have admitted my tendency to operate alone in ministry and not share the work with others, as God intends. When I was a young pastor I could do a lot of the work alone, but then I was not allowing others to receive the benefits, not only from what they could receive from others but also from what they would give in sharing the ministry.

Let's note that the first thing involved in sharing the ministry is to...

Evaluate the situation

It was Moses' father-in-law who first noticed a situation that needed to be addressed, Moses' trying to do the ministry all by himself, one that Jethro saw as detrimental to Moses and the people to whom he was trying to minister. When he was living in exile in Midian with his father-in-law, Moses helped Jethro by tending his sheep (Exodus 3:1). Now Jethro is helping Moses by giving him advice for better 'tending his sheep,' the Israelites (Enns, 371). Observing his son-in-law's incessant labor, Jethro was impressed as he saw...

Unlimited needs

I like the way *The Message* paraphrases Jethro's observation of Moses' trying to give counsel to people waiting in an endless line "from morning to evening":

"What's going on here? Why are you doing all this, and all by yourself, letting everybody line up before you from morning to night?" (13f). Moses' answer was that the people had serious needs to know God's will and word regarding their needs, disputes and other problems.

Remember, the Israelites were an immature bunch, who failed to trust God and failed his tests of faith whenever they had problems. In fact, they were so immature that most of them of that generation failed to reach the Promised Land (1 Corinthians 10:5, 9f). But spiritual needs that require teaching, preaching and personal counsel are not unique to the carnal, unbelieving Israelites. God's people continue to need the careful and regular instruction of the word, regardless of the level of maturity, and some will require special counsel and also assistance in solving disputes and in mending fractured relationships.

IBC Brussels is no exception. We have mature and a few immature people, and many of us are dealing with stressful circumstances. Expats and others who are strangers and foreigners to this culture know something of the stress and strain of loneliness, of adjusting to a new culture, a new job, a new school and having to make new friends. Like a container that might have tiny cracks that are noticeable only if the container is filled with pressurized water, so if there are any cracks or weaknesses in your psyche or emotions and suddenly you're feeling extra pressure, weaknesses and needs are likely to show up like cracks in a vase.

There are needs, questions and issues that are worthy and needy of attention, but some of you are too sensitive to my time pressures to ask for an appointment with me. I'm not trying to conjure needs that don't really exist, but I think there are needs here at IBC that are going unmet, for understanding the Gospel and how to know and follow God's will. And if all of you were to ask me for help, I probably wouldn't

have the time needed or be able to give the attention you deserve because, as was Moses, so am I a...

Limited minister

We see another instance of Moses' humility in his openness to his father-in-law's advice. Moses was no "kid," being over 80 years of age, but he was still teachable and willing to admit he was no superman. Someone suggested that Jethro was possibly afraid Moses would work himself to death and leave Jethro's daughter without a husband and his grandsons without a father (Wiersbe, 113). Moses was headed for burnout (Ryken, 482) and ministry burnout is a raging epidemic in church life today as well, with thousands of pastors leaving the ministry out of exhaustion and/or discouragement every month, according to a Web site I read this past week.

I'm not complaining about my workload, and am grateful for all the support our elders and many of you give to me, enabling me to remain at least somewhat effective in ministry. But what God will do here at IBC and the teaching, counseling, coaching, disciple-making and problem-solving, requires far more than I can give. I realize my limitations in time, energy, wisdom and expertise in dealing with the needs of this diverse congregation. Not only am I limited in what I can do and give, unless I share this ministry with others, the people of God are short-changed and cheated of what others have to offer with their counsel, guidance and ministry.

Jethro recognized Moses' limitations, even though he knew Moses was an anointed servant of the Lord and was entrusted with the heavy weight of responsibility in bearing the greater teaching role and in resolving the more difficult cases that would establish precedents.

I too have been called to bear the primary preaching and teaching role as the elder who receives financial support from the congregation (1 Timothy 5:17). Although I have been given the role of the lead pastor, I realize that I am accountable directly to the other elders and to the congregation, and am serving under the Lordship of Christ, who is the Head of the Church. To be worthy of the followership and loving support of the people (Hebrews 13:17; 1 Thessalonians 5:12f), I must serve with a strong awareness of the account I must give to the Lord (James 3:1; 1 Corinthians 4:1-5; Hebrews 13:17).

I have, throughout my 44 years of pastoral ministry, sought to develop my gifts of preaching, teaching and oversight in pastoral care, and to live above reproach, hoping never to dishonor the Lord or embarrass his people (1 Timothy 4:15f; 1 Peter 4:11; Psalm 69:6). My goal is still, as Paul charged Timothy, to "preach the Word, be prepared in season and out of season, correct, rebuke and encourage—with great patience and careful instruction...to "keep (my) head in all situations, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist," and "discharge all the duties of (my) ministry (2 Timothy 4:2-6). This discharging of all the duties of the ministry has always been a challenge for me. I've never found the administrative side of ministry to be to my

liking or my strong suit, yet I must care for that work also if I am to be faithful. Moses' big challenge was to see and accept the need to be a good administrator as well as a teacher and counselor (Oswalt, *NLT*, 156). I hope and pray that when I come to the end of my ministry work (which may not be that far away!) I can approximate at least some of Paul's self-assessment toward the close of his ministry (and probably his life on earth):

"I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith" (2 Timothy 4:7). Then I can look forward to his approbation from the Lord of "Well done, good and faithful servant" (Matthew 25:21).

An important part of my responsibility is to share the ministry, not only with its responsibilities but also with its rewards. If I try to do it alone and fail to share it, I'm acting selfishly but also presumptuously.

Moses was confronted by his father-in-law about his limitations, and how much more do I realize mine! Even Jesus, in his earthly incarnation, acknowledges the limitation of his physical presence when he promised the Holy Spirit, who would do greater things (in extent, not degree, I believe) than he was able to do in his earthly ministry because the Holy Spirit would be sent into the entire church (John 14:12). This meant that the ministry of Christ, who is now the risen Christ, would be extended and expanded through the church of the Lord Jesus Christ, here at IBC and throughout the world.

We have a congregation with great needs, needs the Lord alone sees, and needs that can be met through Christ alone and through the power of the Spirit. I am called to give general oversight to the church but also to preach and to teach God's word and will. But I am very limited, infinitely more than Christ and also much more limited than Moses. So the next thing involved in sharing the ministry is to...

Enlist more ministers

It seems that there were already some elders among the Israelites, but so far they hadn't been of much help to Moses and needed to be given a new and clear assignment (Wiersbe, 112, cites Exodus 4:29). So, Jethro advises Moses to...

Select fellow servants

This is another clear example of our need to be a part of the community of faith, and the Body of Christ. This is the way Christ ministers to us—through one another. And this is the first model we have, with Moses' selecting elders and others to share his ministry of pastoral care, and meeting the needs of the people in knowing and obeying the will of God and in relating properly with one another.

Jethro advised Moses to not relinquish his role as the under-shepherd and principal teacher and leader, but to share the ministry with fellow elders, men who could learn from him and reflect the consistency of his message, his teaching the word and will of God. Basically they were to share in the pastoral care and spiritual oversight of the people, and were to help safeguard relationships between people that had become fragile and even fractured.

The criteria for these fellow servants included men who were capable, who feared God, were trustworthy and hated dishonest gain (21). In summary, these were not to be “small, petty people” (Oswalt, 425), but rather men with the capability of making good judgment, men of strong faith in and reverence for God, and trustworthy men of integrity who had a contempt for dishonesty and greed (Kaiser, 413). These are qualifications that are similar to the ones for the earliest deacons, who were called out by the Jerusalem Church to serve the needs of a neglected element of the church body (Acts 6:1-7). The qualifications for servant leaders in the church can be summarized by these for Moses’ assistants in our text: people of spiritual wisdom, faith and moral integrity (Exodus 18:21 & 1Timothy 3:1-13; Titus 1:6-9). As my Old Testament seminary professor remarked, this list of criteria in our text is “perhaps the finest list of qualifications for public service anywhere in Scripture” (Kelley, 87).

It’s important to realize that Moses wasn’t following a set of rules and applying them in wooden, legalistic fashion to the problems of the people. The source of Moses’ counsel was God himself, thus he needed to select his delegates with great care, seeking those who also could follow God’s guidance through his imparted wisdom (Durham, 250f).

Based on Deuteronomy 1:9-18, these representatives and assistants of Moses were selected from the people themselves, even though they were ultimately appointed by Moses (Wiersbe, 115). This seemed to be the way the first elected servant leaders in the Jerusalem church were selected by the congregation and appointed by the apostles (Acts 6:5). The church is not a humanistic democracy, but is to be a Spirit-led theocracy, with God-appointed leaders who listen to what God is saying to the entire congregation (It’s important that here at IBC we listen to what God is saying to all our members as the current elders consider, pray about and interview elder candidates to be presented at our 19 June Church Members’ Meeting).

To share the ministry burden, Jethro advised Moses to “select capable men from *all* the people” (21, italics mine). It was important to involve people in leadership who could represent all the groups of the Israelites, just as the early church selected Greeks to minister to the Greek widows who were being neglected (Acts 6:1&5). Our desire as elders at IBC is to involve as elders, deacons, team and other servant leaders people who will represent the great ethnic, international and cultural diversity in our church, which will strengthen our ability to minister to all the people (Ryken, 488f). Your elders are committed to and now involved in an effort to enlist and help to disciple those in our church we think God may well be raising up to become

elders, deacons, team and other servant leaders in IBC and wherever God may lead them in the future. We think our leadership should reflect the same kind of diversity as the entire congregation.

God has blessed us with a great number of gifted and spiritually qualified people who can serve in a vast number of ways, even in ministries God is yet to assign to us. And he uses those of us considered by the world to be weak and insignificant, yet who in his hands can do great work (1 Corinthians 1:26-31). The people God seeks are those who are deeply committed to him, living godly lives of integrity and humility, who are living in fellowship with the Spirit and one another, and who want to be useful in his kingdom and for his glory.

We select such people to...

Share the work

When he counseled Moses to select and enlist others to help him, Jethro understood the principle expressed in a well-known statement attributed to the great 19th Century evangelist, D L Moody: "I would rather put ten people to work than to do the work of ten people" (Wiersbe, 113). God's work is to be done in community, in harmony as part of the Body of Christ, as Paul beautifully expressed it in 1 Corinthians 12:12-31.

There is a task each one of us can do, and the most essential and Christ-honoring things are often the most unnoticed, such as prayer and personal discipling and one-on-one ministry and acts of loving kindness.

I know I need to share more of my work of the ministry of teaching the Word and spiritual direction with fellow elders, home group leaders and small group teachers in Sunday school and other venues. All of us elders, ministers and deacons need to share the ministry with the many capable and willing people God has brought and continues to bring to IBC. Let's think of it as sharing the load, but also sharing the joy of ministry; and there is no greater joy than sharing the Word and seeing God bring life and transformation in the hearts and lives of the hearers.

It's interesting that Moses and then later his associates taught the people the decrees and laws of God even before the giving of the Decalogue on Mt Sinai. The work of Moses and his representatives was not "narrowly legal," but rather was a spiritual work that involved bringing issues to God and imparting an understanding of God's will to the people (Motyer, 174).

The intent of this teaching and counseling ministry was to lead the people into a relationship with God by putting his law, his word, into their hearts, not just knowing laws and statutes "in an academic sense." The work Moses was to share with the others was one of spiritual direction and formation, and not one of giving a legalistic "checklist" of expected or prohibited behaviors (Enns, 377). And the work we are to share here at IBC is not to offer the Bible as a "morality manual," but rather as a lamp to our feet and a light to our path (Psalm 119: 105), guiding us to true holiness

and Christ-like character formation. (Some of you have indicated an interest in sharing in the pastoral care ministry of the church by your attendance in the introduction class taught by professional Christian counselor Jef DeVriese).

We have the people and the resources, but just as was true for Moses and the task before him and on his shoulders, the next thing involved in sharing the ministry is to...

Engage in the ministry

We read that “Moses listened to his father-in-law and did everything he said” (25). He chose the leaders who engaged in ministry, serving as judges for the people, and referring only the most difficult cases to Moses, who served as a sort of “chief justice,” or senior pastor/elder, as it were (26).

Shared ministry is effective if done...

In the will and power of God

Jethro had told Moses that if he followed this suggested plan of action, “the people will go home satisfied” (23). The plan will succeed if done in God’s way and with the wisdom, grace and strength he provides.

When Jethro began laying out this strategy for shared ministry he said what almost reads like an aside but is at the core of ministry success: “and may God be with you” (19). How crucial it is that we not devise our own plans and expect God to bless them. We must realize that this is God’s church, a vital part of his kingdom, and that he is already at work in the lives of the people and through its worship, fellowship, preaching, teaching and ministries to people.

God has sent us people with gifts and a sense of calling and purpose for ministry, and we need to help them discover their gifts and calling; and then we must give them “a track to run on” and resources and support any ministry that will evangelize the lost and/or edify, i.e. build up the church.

We noted last Sunday, from the Israelites battle against and victory over the Amelikes, the absolutely indispensable work of prayer, both in the believer’s personal prayer life and also in the work of intercessory prayer support for one another. God works through the prayers of his people and we must give priority to the ministry of prayer if we want to join God in his supernatural kingdom work.

This means that as preaching/teaching pastor, I must preach with the anointing of God’s Spirit and provide Spirit-led oversight of the church as I work with my fellow elders. I need your prayers and support for this task, and need wisdom in sharing the oversight responsibilities with my fellow elders. And of course we need your prayers as we seek and present to you candidates to serve with us as elders.

We need to support not only the elders but our ministers of worship and youth as they minister to and with our people and as they seek others to join them and as they equip others to share in their ministries. We must provide wise counsel and direction to our deacons and they to their team leaders as we serve the needs of the Body of Christ and seek to find and utilize ways to reach the lost, make disciples and minister to the needs of those God leads to us and leads us to reach out to, here in our own community, and through missions, to reach out to the ends of the earth.

I cannot speak of prayer and the need for the undergirding work of intercession without mentioning the importance and priority of our prayer ministry. All of you can be a vital part, play an indispensable role in the work of the Kingdom through prayer. It's great to know how God is leading even young children to be involved in our prayer ministry, such as the 24-hour Prayer Chain. Every member of this church fellowship has an important role to play in kingdom advancement and spiritual warfare.

When we are sharing the ministry and everyone is engaged in some meaningful way, ministry is done in the will and power of God...

Resulting in peace among God's people

Jethro promised that if this plan for shared ministry is implemented, "all these people will go home satisfied" (23).

That sounds a bit too much like the customer satisfaction being provided by some seeker-friendly churches these days, particularly in my home country, the US. The purpose of biblical, resurrection-life ministry is not customer satisfaction, achieved by providing services that make attenders (i.e. customers) happy. Sadly, many are looking to churches to satisfy their desire for entertainment, for social activities, and self-help and support groups and various therapies. The church exists to glorify God through Christ-exalting worship and through offering resurrection life through the Gospel of Christ and through the formation of a Christ-like, cruciform character in followers of Christ who obey the Great Commandment and the Great Commission. The result of the church's God-given mission may not entirely satisfy everyone, especially if the goal is customer satisfaction.

A more literal translation of the hoped-for result in verse 23 is from the New American Standard Version: ²³"If you do this thing and God so commands you, then you will be able to endure, and all these people also *will go to their place in peace*" (Italics mine).

The peace of Christ is the end result. The Hebrew word is "shalom," meaning much more than the absence of conflict, but a sense of spiritual health, wholeness and well-being in God, and being rightly related to him and to others. We have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, who gives us access to God through his grace (Romans 5:1f). And when the peace of Christ rules in our hearts, as Paul says

we must allow him to do, then we answer the call to be at peace with one another in the Body of Christ (Colossians 3:15). This peace is nothing less than spiritual wholeness and maturity.

Shared ministry results in peace, in the lives of those who will be led to faith in Christ, receiving peace with God as a result; but also this ministry results in peace in the hearts of all of God's people, who will receive the love and pastoral and care that everyone needs.

Conclusion:

44 years of pastoral ministry have taught me a lot of things and some of these experiences have made me a bit wiser and I hope a bit stronger in the grace of Christ and in the fruitfulness of my ministry. I hope I continue to grow even at my advanced age, in the effectiveness and fruitfulness of my ministry gifts so that my progress will be evident to all (1Timothy 4:15).

One thing I believe I can improve upon, and that is in the way I can share my ministry with others, and be more involved in helping to equip other servant leaders and to help enlist and involve others in the ministry. And these ways of service may not be so obvious or "up front," as they say. Your ministry may appear as does mine, as an "unnecessary" ministry. All you're doing is simply making a disciple by your sharing the word of the Gospel, by your giving godly counsel for spiritual direction and by your faithful and always effective ministry of prayer and intercession.

I pray God will give us more "unnecessary" servant-hearted and involved people, men, women, young men and women and boys and girls, who are willing to share the ministry.

If we could hire Jethro to be our church-health and ministry consultant, I wonder what his advice would be for us? In the US he would typically find about 10% of the church congregation doing 90% of the work of ministry, and probably about that same percentage (10%) giving 90% of the church's financial support. He may not be so worried about the pastor/elder working himself to death since he's getting along in age anyway, but he would like to see him spread the joy of sharing the ministry. Jethro might agree with the observation of the pastor who authored Hebrews, lamenting that his congregation was too spiritually immature to understand his teaching, not to mention to be able to share the ministry of teaching (5:11-14). Sharing the ministry is the effective way of making mature disciples and bringing true spiritual health and deep peace to the fellowship.

IBC is a unique opportunity to join God in his worldwide ministry of making disciples and obeying the Great Commandment and Great Commission. Even if your stay in Belgium is only for a few years, with business, government or studies, God is calling you to serve with his people in this place, and I urge you who haven't committed to

membership to speak with me so I can invite you to a membership class on June 12th. Before we're free to approach you about ministry, we'd like for you to enter the membership covenant with us. God's led you here for this Kingdom purpose, not just for your job. It's part of your vocation as a follower of Christ. You will likely never be in another church that offers such a unique opportunity to connect with fellow believers from all over the world, and thus to impact the world for Christ.

May God lead you and help you in helping us share the ministry!

Thoughts and questions for personal reflection and/or group discussion:

1. Describe Moses' work load that prompted Jethro's advice. What negative results did Jethro observe and foresee?
2. What are some of the expectations people have of pastors and ministers today? Which ones are biblical and which are not?
3. What are the primary needs of people that can and should be addressed by pastors, elders, ministers and other servant leaders in the church?
4. How may these needs be addressed and this ministry be done effectively at IBC?
5. Write your own list of criteria for spiritual leadership, with verse 21 as your guideline, but using your own words.
6. Assuming that every believer has at least one spiritual gift (1 Corinthians 12), what is (are) your gift(s), and how are you using and developing your gift?
7. What difference do you think it would make if every member and attender of IBC would become involved in sharing its ministry?

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