

# A Fresh Perspective

*Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.*

Date: 27 November 2022

Preacher: Nick Louw

[ 0 : 00 ] Well, it's November. And that is end of November is really the time of the year where I find, I'm sure you find the same, everybody's a little frazzled.

You know? Fuses are a little bit shorter than usual. We've all had a fairly long year. Students have just done their exams, if not doing some SUPs at the moment.

There's the final deadlines at work. Everybody's a little bit short with each other, a little bit more irritated with each other because of where we are in the year. And so it seems that the last thing we're ready to do is head into a season of peace and goodwill among all people.

And that's just as true in churches, I find. Because we're not immune to those emotions. We're not immune to stresses. We're not immune to being irritated with each other.

We are worn out. And it's easy. It's very easy for us, Christians, God's people, to not be in the right frame of mind as we approach the Christmas season.

[ 1 : 05 ] And that is why, before we stop Exodus for the year and we head into the Christmas series, I want to spend some time in this chapter, Exodus 18. Because Israel are about to enter, in the narrative, a very important moment.

They're about to meet God at Sinai. They're about to embark on the new life that God has called them and miraculously saved them out of Egypt for.

But if you remember where we've been just in the last few chapters of Exodus, they're not in the greatest state to do that. They're frazzled, right?

I mean, just think back to the last few sermons. They've been in the wilderness. They've literally been through the wars. They've faced trials. They've faced hunger.

Tempers have fled. They've been grumbling. Moses is on the verge of burnout. And so this doesn't seem like the best moment for them to enter into this great meeting with God.

[ 2 : 09 ] But that is why chapter 18 is here in Exodus. It stops the narrative. It pauses the narrative. It's the chapter that's wedged between the wilderness trials that we've seen over the last few weeks and Sinai and the giving of the law that we're going to look at next year.

And we find this chapter. It's a strange chapter. It's all about the visit of Moses' father-in-law, Jethro, which we haven't seen for a while.

And now suddenly he comes back on the scene. And him visiting Moses seems insignificant. Why is it even recorded and takes up a whole chapter in our Bibles? And yet as we read it, what we discover is that this visit by Jethro served to snap Israel and Moses out of the rut that they had now found themselves in.

And gave them a fresh perspective that they desperately needed before they embarked on the life that God had called them to. And it's a perspective we need as well.

And there's a very important reason this chapter is in our Bibles. And so let's see what happened. Let's see what Jethro did. What was the significance of his visit? And what does it mean for us today?

[ 3 : 27 ] So the first thing we see as we look at this chapter is that Jethro inspired the Israelites to worship God again. So it's important to realize that Jethro was not an Israelite.

That's the first major piece of information you need to understand the significance of this chapter. Jethro was not an Israelite. He was a foreigner. He was a Midianite. He was actually a pagan priest. But here, it's in this chapter that we read of Jethro's conversion to worshipping the true God.

To believing in Yahweh, the true God of Israel. And he addresses him by his actual name, Yahweh. And he does that because he learned what God has done for the Israelites.

So pick it up from verse 8 with me. Moses recounted to his father-in-law all that the Lord had done to Pharaoh and the Egyptians for Israel's sake. All the hardships that confronted them on the way

and how the Lord rescued them.

Jethro rejoiced over all the good things the Lord had done for Israel when he rescued them from the power of the Egyptians. Blessed be the Lord. That's Yahweh. That's the name Yahweh he uses there.

[ 4 : 36 ] Jethro exclaimed, Who rescued you from the power of Egypt and from the power of Pharaoh. He has rescued the people from under the power of Egypt. Now I know that the Lord is greater than all gods.

Because he did wonders when the Egyptians acted arrogantly against Israel. This is an awesome moment. Jethro's eyes are opened. He realizes who the true God of creation is because he is the one who showed himself in these great acts of redemption to Israel.

He comes to realize this because what Moses told him about what God has done in history. And it's the same today. People come to realize who the real God is not because what we say is philosophically stimulating to them.

It's because God has actually done things in history. And it's as they learn about the real concrete things God has done in history. The acts of God that people come to faith in the true God and shed off all these false ideas of God.

Which are just that. Just puffs of smoke in the brain. Just ideas. But the true God is the God that Jethro has discovered now. But what's interesting and what I want us to notice is how Jethro responds.

[ 5 : 50 ] How he responds to discovering who the true God is. And it's really interesting. Verse 12. Then Jethro, Moses' father-in-law, brought a burnt offering and sacrifices to God.

Now why is that so interesting? I'll tell you why it's interesting. Because that's what Israel was supposed to be doing in the wilderness. Do you remember back when they were still in Egypt? And God told Moses, go to tell Pharaoh, let my people go that they may worship me and offer sacrifices to me in the wilderness. Remember that? And that repeated quite a few times.

Sacrifice. And that was important. This whole idea of sacrifice. Not just to go and sing songs to God. But to actually take things that they own. Valuable things. And destroy them. Sacrifice.

Because you see, sacrifice. We learned this in our series earlier this year on sacrifice. If you haven't listened to that, then it's important to go back to our sermon library. Just three sermons on this idea of sacrifice.

[ 7 : 00 ] Because sacrifice is an act of worship. It is a sign of what we value. It's reminding ourselves and those around us and showing God what we truly value. And we're saying when we make sacrifices for God, that God is more valuable than this thing that I've got.

Because this is God. This is the true God. And so he is the giver of all good things. So he is by far more valuable than the things I own.

And that's the significance of sacrifice. And that's why it's the first thing Jethro does when he finds out who the real God is. And that is the right response actually of all who come to a real relationship with God.

I mean, anybody can say I'm a Christian. But those who are in a real relationship with God, how do you know? It's because you see them sacrificing things for the sake of God's name. And for the sake of God's kingdom.

But what's interesting about this, it's what Jethro does. But we haven't read of Israel doing this at all since they left Egypt. Since they were rescued. The last few chapters, their wilderness wanderings, we haven't read once of them making a sacrifice.

[ 8 : 11 ] Why? Well, I'll tell you why. Because they've been too busy grumbling. Just page back. Let's see what Israel has been up to in the wilderness when they were supposed to be making sacrifices.

15 verse 24. Exodus 15, 24. And this is just after their great song of salvation.

A few verses later, 15, 24. The people grumbled to Moses. What are we going to drink? And then 16 verse 2. Just a few verses on. The entire Israelite community grumbled against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness.

17 verse 2. So the people complained to Moses. Give us water to drink. And this is what they've been up to in the wilderness.

They've been too busy grumbling about what they don't have to spare a thought of giving up what they do have in worship to the one who gave them all they have. They've been too busy grumbling

about what they don't have to spare a thought to give up what they do have to worship God and to show him how valuable he is to them.

[ 9 : 24 ] But it's the first thing Jethro does when he discovers the true God. That must have been a pretty awkward moment for the Israelites.

When they see this excited new convert making sacrifices to God. He's a pagan. A pagan priest. Who has had much less time with God than these Israelites.

And yet the first thing he does is the thing that they should have been doing all along. He makes these sacrifices to God. Because he's so excited about the God that he's discovered. While that's the picture.

He's taking all of his expensive cattle and stuff and making sacrifices. And the Israelites are still holding on to their manna that they've tried to hoard for themselves. While here's Jethro just so excited about giving up all the stuff for God because he's found the true God.

And that's the scene here. Very awkward for the Israelites. And the whole scene sort of shows us and shows the Israelites that they needed to snap out of it.

[ 10 : 30 ] They needed to snap out of their rut that they were in. They needed to snap out of this grumbling and this taking their salvation for granted. And they would do that by recapturing what Jethro was feeling right now.

By recapturing how they felt in chapter 15 when they sang that amazing song after they were rescued. But they had lost that excitement in the next few chapters as they went through these trials.

As they faced difficulties. As they rubbed up against each other. They'd lost their initial excitement about God's salvation. And so it's just as well in our story in Exodus 18.

They take their cue from Jethro. And they have a party. Verse 12. The second half of it. They're getting it now.

But I think as we look at the Israelites. Am I not right in saying it's very easy for us to get into that same rut as Christians?

[ 11 : 40 ] Especially if we've been Christians for a long time. And especially if we've gone through some tough trials. We very easily forget the excitement we once had about God.

But just think what we've got. Think what we've got as God's people, as Christians. Who have put their faith in Christ. And who've followed them as their Lord and Savior. Think of what we've got. And through the cross of Christ. His atoning death that we remembered earlier. We have been cleansed of our sins. We have been washed from the penalty and the power of sin over us. And through His resurrection and His ascension to glory. We have been given power through His Holy Spirit for a new life. To put off the sins that once controlled us. To live the new life we're called to.

And we have the certainty of our own resurrection. Bodily resurrection from the dead one day. And new life in the new creation. The restored world where everything will work properly.

[ 12 : 41 ] And there will be no death and sin and suffering and pain. Eternal life. Come on. Just think about that. Eternal life. Eternal life.

Do we get that? Do we remember that? It's incredible. What we have. And yet it very quickly becomes ordinary.

And we lose our excitement. And those just become doctrines. That we believe. And we forget what we've got in Christ.

And we grumble. Because things aren't exactly how we want them. My dad spent his career in shipping.

And he worked for the shipping company P&O.; You may have come across it. They run both cargo and big cruise liners. And once there was a worldwide cruise.

[ 13 : 39 ] Big fancy cruise ship. Coming down through Cape Town. Up to Durban. And then around the world. And my dad managed to get me and my brother tickets.

For the Cape Town to Durban leg. In this super fancy cruise ship. It was very exciting. I was like 20. My brother was a bit older. And so you can imagine. For like some young 20 year olds.

To have a three day party on a cruise ship. With all expenses paid. And all the food is free. And there's like seven restaurants on board. We were very excited. As you can imagine. And so we did. From the moment we got on board. We milked this little leg up to Durban. For all we could. We hardly slept. We went to every one of the restaurants. We ate as much food as we could.

And then we ran around the deck. Like five times to work it all off. And then we went back to the restaurants. And we ate as much food as we could. And we played all the games. And we swam in all the pools.

[ 14 : 35 ] And we sat in all the jacuzzis with martinis. It was a fun three days. But you know what struck me? As I was talking to some of the other passengers.

And these are mostly retired people. Burning off all their life savings. What struck me is how ordinary the cruise seemed to them. And how grumpy they were.

I often came across people who were arguing. Couples arguing. Just having this little grump. And I was amazed. As this 20 year old. Going this is awesome. Why are you grumpy?

I didn't say that to them. But that's what I was thinking. They weren't excited about it. We were really amped about what we were doing. But they weren't excited about it at all. And the reason is because they had got used to it.

They had already come from Southampton. They had already been weeks on board. And it had become normal for them. Maybe they were excited when they first got on. But now it was just ordinary. They had become used to it.

[ 15 : 38 ] But isn't that what we do? With what God has given us. As his people. And you know what? Often it's the new converts. Who have just discovered the gospel for themselves.

Who show us up. For our complacency. Isn't it? And remind us why we should be excited. About what we have in Christ. Because when we do.

When we recapture. Who we are. And what we have in Christ. Then our tendency to grumble. Is overridden by a tendency to worship.

And that's what Jethro had to snap the Israelites out of here. And it's what we need to be snapped out of. Listen to Philippians 2. Paul writes to the Philippian Christians.

And he says this in verse 14 to 15. Do everything without grumbling. And arguing. So that you may be blameless and pure.

[ 16 : 41 ] Children of God who are faultless. In a crooked and perverted generation. Among whom you shine like stars. In the world. See what he's saying there?

Grumbling. Then grumbling. Has no place. In God's redeemed people. If we realize who we are. And it's only then.

When we realize who we are. And we recapture our salvation. And we stop grumbling. That we can actually focus on the task. God has given us in the world. And that leads me.

To the second point. We're going to see this morning. Of how Jethro's visit. Affects the Israelites.

Not only does it inspire them. To worship. But it organizes them. To serve.

It organizes them. To serve. Read with me from. Verse 13. In Exodus 18. The next day.

[ 17 : 37 ] Moses sat down. To judge the people. And they stood around Moses. From morning. Until evening. When Moses' father-in-law. Saw everything he was doing. For them. He asked. What is this thing you're doing.

For the people. Why are you alone. Sitting as judge. While all the people. Stand around you. From morning. Till evening. Moses replied. To his father-in-law. Because the people.

Come to me. To inquire of God. Whenever they have a dispute. It comes to me. And I make a decision. Between one man. And another. I teach them. God's statutes. And laws. What you're doing.

Is not good. Moses' father-in-law. Said to him. You will certainly. Wear out. Both yourself. And these people. Who are with you. Because the task. Is too heavy for you. You can't do it alone.

Now listen to me. I will give you some advice. And God be with you. And then he goes on. And he advises. Moses. With some really practical.

[ 18 : 32 ] Father-in-law advice. To delegate. What others can do. That Moses is busy doing. But what others can do. So that Moses can focus. On the things.

That only he can do. It's very practical advice. And the things that. Only Moses could do. At that time. Being the conduit. Between God and Israel. Was to bring the people's needs.

To God. And God's words. To the people. And so Jethro says. That's what you should be doing.

Just shed all this other stuff. To other people. Who can do that. So you can focus on the ministry. God has given you.

You see. Jethro comes along. With fresh eyes. He looks at the situation. And he realizes. Moses is on the verge of burnout. Because he's trying to do everything. He's trying to do all the ministry.

But the result. Is counterproductive. Moses is. Is breaking his back. Trying to do all the ministry. But it's actually not. Achieving its objective. Because it's not giving the people.

[ 19 : 28 ] What they actually need. We look at verse 18 again. You will certainly wear out. Both yourself. And these people. In other words. They're. They're going to be worn out. Because they're going to be waiting.

And they're not going to get. What they need. And then he says. Because the task. Is too heavy for you. You can't. Do it. Alone. That's.

Very humbling. For anyone to hear. They're busy. Doing their job. They've. Put their. Entire. Effort. And energy.

Into doing this job. And then someone comes along. And says. You can't actually do that. You can't. You're not good enough. That's what. Jethro. With some frank wise advice. Is saying.

To Moses. It's very humbling. To hear. That you can't do it. Let me tell you. I think that's what a lot of pastors. Need to hear. In the ministry today.

[ 20 : 23 ] It's what a lot of us. Need to hear. But. Especially. Pastors. Running churches. Teaching people's. God's word. You know. Burnout. Is one of the major reasons.

Pastors leave the ministry. And that's no good. For God's church. And they often. I admit. Bring it. Upon themselves. They want to believe.

That they can do everything. They want to believe. That they have it within them. To do all that is needed. To make the church. Work. And to make it grow. And to reach all the people. They need to reach. And they can't.

But it's also. Follow. The expectations. That other people. Put on them. And I've experienced it. In my years of pastoral ministry. The expectations people.

Have of them. These unspoken expectations. They're not necessarily. Biblical. Expectations. But they're just. What people think. A pastor should be doing. And then everybody's got.

[ 21 : 21 ] Different expectations. And then they. They grumble. When the pastor. Can't fulfill them all. And that is not good. For God's church. And so.

What Jethro tells Moses here. You can't do it alone. Is also what a lot of churchgoers. Need to hear about their pastors. We can't do it alone.

We can't. We have limited skills. We can't do all the ministry. We can't solve everyone's problems. We can't visit everyone. We can't give everyone what they want. But we shouldn't have to. Because that's not actually our job. Look at Ephesians 4.

If you want to know the job description of. The ministers in God's church. Ephesians 4. 11 to 12. It will be on the screen behind me as well.

[ 22 : 26 ] And he himself. That's talking about Jesus. Gave some to be apostles. Some prophets. Some evangelists. Some pastors and teachers. To equip the saints.

For the work of ministry. Look at those words. Please. The job of the pastors. Is not to do the ministry.

It's to teach the words. So that they can equip the saints. You. In the pews. To do the ministry. This is a very important teaching. But many people.

Many people sitting in churches today. Do not realize. Ministry. Is your job. And that is why we find this situation. In Exodus 18. In churches.

Over and over again. Even in the early church. In Acts. We found this situation. It is a threat to churches. When people. Don't realize.

[ 23 : 23 ] That ministry. Is their job. Listen to Acts chapter 6. This is. What was read for us earlier. But. I want you to. As I read it again. Notice. How similar.

The situation. In the early church. With Paul and the apostles. Is. To how it was. In. With Israel. In. In Exodus 18. This is Acts 6.

1 to 4. In those days. As the disciples. Were increasing in number. There arose. A complaint. You know what. You know what the original word is there.

A grumbling. There arose. A grumbling. By the Hellenistic Jews. Against the Hebraic Jews. That their widows. Were being overlooked. In the daily distribution. Apostles.

You're not. You're not seeing to everyone's needs. Grumble. Grumble. Grumble. Okay. Let's see what happens. Verse 2. The twelve summoned the whole company of the disciples.

[ 24 : 16 ] And said. It would not be right for us. To give up preaching the word of God. To wait on tables. Brothers and sisters. Select from among you. Seven men of good reputation. Full of the

spirit and wisdom.

Whom we can appoint to this duty. But we. Will devote ourselves to prayer. And to the ministry. Of the word. This is a very similar situation.

Do you see. To what Moses was facing. What Jethro came with fresh eyes. And helped him to see. Was the problem. People were grumbling. The.

The apostles here realized. They couldn't do everything. They couldn't do all the ministry. They were being distracted. From what they were called to do. Which was to bring God's word to the people. And to bring the people's needs to God.

Just like Moses. And so they asked others. To get involved. And because of that. Look a few verses later. Act 6 verse 7. Because of what had just happened.

[ 25 : 18 ] So the word of God spread. And the disciples. In Jerusalem. Increased. Greatly. In number. These passages.

These passages. Teach us. You. Especially. As congregants in a church. The importance of protecting. And safeguarding the ministry. Of the word.

In your church. And allowing those who are called to it. To do it properly. And not put extra expectations on them. That the bible doesn't put on them. So that everyone can get what they want. If you. If you actually. Don't seek the pastor. To give you all that you need. You will eventually get what you need. Because you know what you need. Deep. Vital. Accurate teaching of God's word. Every week. Is what you need. But for that to happen. For that to happen in a church. You need to step up. You need to do the ministry.

[ 26 : 15 ] You're called to. In your church. And many have. I give thanks to God. Many in this church have done that. But there are still many.

Who need to. There are still many. Who are not involved. Who are not doing anything. And I say that. Because God has given.

Everyone. Every one of his people. Something to contribute. To their church. We see this in the bible. 1 Corinthians 12 verse 7. Says this.

A manifestation of the spirit. Is given to each person. For the common good. And then he goes and lists some examples. He's talking about the gifts of the spirit. To every believer.

Who's received the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is given a gift. A particular set of skills. Or talents. Maybe something from their. From their previous life. Before they were Christians.

[ 27 : 13 ] That they can now use. And has been reformed. To be used in the church. Maybe a new gift. But whatever it is. Each person has been given. A gift from the spirit. To contribute. For the common good.

And it's therefore. The responsibility. Of each Christian. To learn the gifts. That God has given them. And to use them. Because that is how the church will grow. I don't grow the church.

You grow the church. Back to Exodus 18. And with this. I will conclude. Another thing that.

Is interesting about this. Chapter. Is that it's the first time. We learn the name. Of the second son. Of Moses. First time in Exodus.

That we learn. The name of the second son. Of Moses in verse 4. And it's. Eliezer. Now it's. It's interesting. That Moses. Who wrote this. Chooses to introduce his name.

[ 28 : 11 ] At this point. I think he's trying to tell us something. Eliezer. Which is literally. God is my help. But here.

In his father-in-law's visit. Moses realizes. How God. Is his help. God is his help.

Through the wisdom. Of Jethro. God is his help. Through the willingness. Of others. To get stuck in. That is how Israel.

Are made ready for the job. That they're about to be given. And that is how we. Are made ready for the job. God has given us. In this world. And so.

As we enter the Christmas season. You might feel frayed at the edges. You might feel frazzled. I want to encourage you. To really guard yourself.

[ 29 : 09 ] From grumbling. By firstly. By firstly. By firstly. Taking time to remember. What God has done for you. In Christ Jesus. Get excited about it again. And Christmas is a great time.

To remember. God coming down. To rescue us. From our sins. And get excited about it again. And then secondly. Get stuck in.

Help us who teach. Help us who teach. To do our job. One of the simplest ways. You can help us to teach. Is invite people.

To come listen to what we have to teach. We can't go out and invite everyone. We can't. You must. That's how we grow the church. That's how we get people. Hearing the gospel. And visit people who are sick. Visit people. Who need it. Who need a reminder of God's word. We can't visit everyone. And use the unique gifts.

[ 30 : 08 ] God has given you. For the benefit of his church. And for the growth of his kingdom. Let us pray. That we will have a productive. And fruitful. Month ahead.

Father. You have saved us. You have given us eternal life. Help us not to lose sight of that. Help us not to lose. Our excitement. For the great salvation.

You have brought your people into. And Lord. Help us to realize. That this is our church. And you have called all of us.

To ministry in it. Lord. I pray for those who are not yet sure. Of where they fit in. That you would help them. Help them to find a place that they can contribute.

Help them to find a place where they can fit in. Help them to know what their gifts that you have given them are. And as we all. Stand up. And use what you have given us.

[ 31 : 08 ] We pray for your blessing over this church. We pray for your blessing over the month to come. That as we teach. As we open the Bible. To learn about the benefits of the gospel.

And what Jesus has achieved by coming into our world. We pray Lord. That you would cause us to be. A great signpost to those around us.

To our community. To those who are in darkness. That you would help us to shine. Like stars. In this dark world. And that you would grow this church. To be a great force.

For your kingdom. In this community. Through us. In Jesus name. Amen. Amen.