

The Journey

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Preacher: Jonathan de Groot

[0 : 0 0] Well, what is involved in being a Christian? C.S. Lewis, the author of the Chronicles of Narnia, said this in a series of articles in his book, *God in the Dock*. He said, as you perhaps know, I haven't always been a Christian. I didn't go to religion to make me happy. I always knew a bottle of port would do that. If you want a religion to make you feel comfortable, I certainly don't recommend Christianity. Well, what is C.S. Lewis saying? Well, essentially he's saying, don't assume that being a Christian and following Jesus will mean that you have a comfortable or an easy life. Christianity won't make you comfortable. And if you've been a Christian for a long time or even just a short time, you'll be well aware of this. But even if you wouldn't call yourself a Christian, you'd be the person that C.S. Lewis is addressing when he originally wrote those words. Then don't go to Christianity for a comfortable life because that won't happen.

Today, Christianity is counter-cultural and so life as a Christian in today's world isn't going to be easy. But this is nothing new for God's people because we see this in Exodus as the Israelites journey through the wilderness. God reveals himself as the God who saves, but life isn't always easy for the Israelites because the God who saved his people from their slavery in Egypt is leading them towards the promised land, but he's leading them through the wilderness. And so this is not just the history of the people of Israel. Exodus shows us the pattern of God's salvation because he is the God who saves his people, who saves people like us from our slavery to sin through Jesus Christ. And he is leading us, if we are a Christian, towards the ultimate promised land of heaven. And so Exodus is the story of the

Christian life because if we are a believer, then we are on this journey. But it won't always be easy. It won't always be comfortable as we travel and make our way through life. And so we're going to look at three implications of this journey in our text today. First of all, remember God's salvation.

Chapter 17, verse 8 to 16. Secondly, proclaim God's salvation. Chapter 18, verse 1 to 12. And then thirdly, live out God's salvation. Chapter 18, verse 13 to 17. So remember, proclaim, and live out God's salvation. First of all, remember God's salvation. Now as we pick up the story here, God's people are under attack. Verse 8 says the Amalekites came and attacked the Israelites at Rephidim.

Now this was the first battle that they faced as they left Egypt, but it wouldn't be their last. And the Amalekites, they're thought to be the descendants of Jacob's brother Esau. And so just as God had provided bread from heaven, we saw that last time, and just as God had given them water from a rock in the wilderness, so now God will need to fight their battles for them as they come against their enemies. And so let's just see how this happens. Verse 9.

[3 : 3 4] Moses said to Joshua, choose some of our men and go out to fight the Amalekites. Tomorrow I will stand on top of the hill with the staff of God in my hands.

Now this is the first mention of Joshua. Joshua, his name means the Lord saves, which is appropriate given the context of this situation. Later on, Joshua would be Moses's successor. He'd be the one who would lead the people into the promised land. But here he's Moses's assistant. He is the captain of the army. And so he had to fight against the Amalekites.

And as he fought down in the valley, Moses stood on top of a hill with the staff of God in his hands. So Joshua fights the Amalekites. Moses is there with Aaron and her on top of the hill. And so we read verse 11. As long as Moses held up his hands, the Israelites were winning. But whenever he lowered his hands, the Amalekites were winning. When Moses's hands grew tired, they took a stone and put it under him. And he sat on it. Aaron and her held his hands up one on one side, one on the other, so that his hands remained steady till sunset. So Joshua overcame the Amalekite army with the sword. So what is happening here as Moses's hands are held up? Because what is happening in that action of Moses is crucial and the victory of the Israelites. Because the holding up of hands here is often interpreted as being like prayer. Although there is no mention of prayer here. It does say later in verse 16 that

Moses lifted his hands up to the throne of the Lord, which does sound like prayer. But whatever is going on, the elevation of Moses's hands with his staff symbolizes that it is God who is saving his people.

Now remember from the plagues how the staff was a symbol of God's power. Remember in the crossing of the Red Sea how the staff was significant. And here the uplifted staff is basically a sign of God's victory in battle.

[5 : 53] Because when Joshua and the Israelites were winning, they were only winning when Moses's hands were lifted up. And so it was an indication that the Israelites were completely and utterly dependent on God for victory.

And yet despite this, you notice that Joshua still had to pick his army and he still had to go into battle and fight. So the battle belonged to the Lord, but God involved his people in the fight.

And so while the Lord fought for them at the Red Sea and they needed only to be still, chapter 14, verse 14, here the Lord fights for them, but they need to engage in the battle.

So while God saved them, they were saved not to sit back and do nothing, but to fight their enemies. And so Moses on top of the hill with the staff held high was a reminder that it was God's mighty power that would give them the victory.

And so verse 14 says, Then the Lord said to Moses, Write this on a scroll as something to be remembered, and make sure that Joshua hears it, because I will completely blot out the name of Amalek from under heaven.

[7 : 11] So God wanted the Israelites to remember the victory as his victory. And that's why they had to write it on a scroll.

This is actually the first time that there's any mention of something being written down. And so the Israelites would face plenty more battles in the future on their way to the promised land.

But it was important for them to remember that the battle belonged to the Lord, that the Lord was the one who would give them the victory. And so verse 15 and 16, Moses built an altar and called it, The Lord is my banner.

He said, Because hands were lifted up against the throne of the Lord, the Lord will be at war against the Amalekites from generation to generation. So the altar is called, The Lord is my banner.

Now the word for banner here can refer to a pole or a staff, like a flagpole. But it can also refer to a military standard or a signal, like a flag, a piece of cloth, like we would understand a banner.

[8 : 21] But whatever this looked like, the banner was what an army would look to. Any army would look to their banner as their rallying point.

The banner would give them their identity. It reminded them of who they were fighting for. And it would give them their bearings in the battlefield. So as long as the banner was flying and people could see it, the battle was not lost.

And so here, this was a way of remembering that God himself gave them victory over the Amalekites. And so the Lord is my banner was a sign that they could look to, they could look to it and see that God was the one who would give them victory in their battles.

God would fight for them. And the reason for this is because Israel wasn't just like any other nation. As God's people, Israel were part of God's greater salvation plan for the world.

And that's why the journey of the Christian life really echoes the journey of the Exodus. Because as one of God's people, every single Christian is engaged in battle.

[9 : 37] Not a physical battle, although perhaps in some places it will be, but we're engaged in spiritual warfare. And so the war against the Amalekites is actually part of a bigger battle that continues to rage on today.

But it's a battle where victory is not only assured, but victory has already been won. It was won at the cross where Jesus Christ died and then in the empty tomb of his resurrection, that's where the battle was won.

Because Jesus defeated our greatest enemies of Satan, sin, and death when he died and then rose again. And so the good news of Christianity is that Jesus Christ has triumphed.

He has triumphed over our enemies. And so just as God fought and gave Israel victory over the Amalekites, enabling them to share in that victory, so Jesus fought against our enemies, allowing us to share in his victory.

And that's why I don't think it's any coincidence that it's Joshua here whose name means the Lord saves. He's the one who leads the Israelites in victory over their enemies.

[10 : 55] They're fighting physically, but the Lord saves. It's the Lord who saved them. And so Joshua is a foreshadow of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Even the name Joshua in Hebrew is equivalent to the name Jesus. And so Jesus is the true and better Joshua, whose victory becomes his people's victory.

And so we are able to say, the Lord is my banner in Jesus, because Jesus was lifted high on the cross to die for our sins. So that by looking to Jesus, as the soldiers would look to their banner, by looking to Jesus, we are saved.

And the victory has already been won. And we remember the victory by looking back to the cross and to the empty tomb. And yet still, the victory's been won, but the battle rages on.

And so as a believer, we've got to keep fighting even though ultimate victory is secure. I think the best illustration of this comes from the end of the Second World War.

[12 : 04] Because the war was won on D-Day when the British and American troops made their Normandy landings to liberate mainland Europe from Nazi occupation.

But despite the D-Day Normandy landings, there were still great battles to be fought and there were still many lives that were lost until we got to V-E-Day, victory in Europe.

So although the war had been won, it was V-E-Day when the Germans finally surrendered. And so it's like we are living between D-Day and V-E-Day right now.

And that's why it isn't going to be comfortable. There's still a battle. We're in a war zone. There's still fighting that needs to be done. And yet we fight with the knowledge that the victory is assured.

And so when things are tough, and they will be if you want to follow Jesus in this world, then we don't look to ourselves. We don't think that we have got the strength to conquer and it will come from within.

[13 : 13] No, we look back to what Jesus has already done, to what he has already achieved, to his work on the cross, and through his resurrection.

So that's the first thing. We need to remember God's salvation. The second is we need to proclaim God's salvation. And so as we come on to chapter 18, chapter 18, I think, is basically a bridge in the Exodus story because it connects the deliverance of God's people from Egypt with God giving them the law.

And so the pace slows down a bit and we get this encounter between Moses and Jethro. But it's not just a conversation between two individuals because there's a theological point here about God's salvation and God's salvation plan.

And so all of this begins with Moses speaking of all that God had done for his people. So he says, chapter 18, verse 1, Now Jethro, the priest of Midian and father-in-law of Moses, heard of everything God had done for Moses and for his people Israel and how the Lord had brought Israel out of Egypt.

So Jethro, we first met him in chapter 2 of Exodus. He was the priest of Midian. We don't know why. Moses sent his wife away in verse 2 to be with his father-in-law, his wife Zipporah, and his two sons.

[14 : 44] Perhaps he entrusted his family to Jethro, his father-in-law, to take care of them, to keep them safe. But when this family reunion takes place, Moses then tells Jethro everything that God had done.

So verse 8, we read, Moses told his father-in-law about everything the Lord had done to Pharaoh and the Egyptians for Israel's sake and about all the hardships they had met along the way and how the Lord had saved them.

So Moses tells Jethro the good news of Israel's salvation. And here, the word that's translated told in verse 8 has a sense of declare or proclaim.

And so Moses is proclaiming the good news of salvation. Essentially, he is preaching the gospel to Jethro. Because from the beginning to the end, the story of the Exodus is the story of what God has done for his people.

It's good news. It's gospel. And that's because the storyline of the Bible is the story of what God has done to save his people in Jesus Christ.

[15 : 56] And so just as Moses was able to tell how the Lord had saved the Israelites, so every Christian is able to tell how the Lord has saved them. And so we proclaim what God has done for us in Jesus.

It is good news that needs to be proclaimed. So after Moses tells Jethro all of this, then Jethro responds. Verse 9. Jethro was delighted to hear all about the good things the Lord had done for Israel in rescuing them from the hand of the Egyptians.

And so when Jethro heard of all that God had done, then he celebrated. He says, verse 10 and 11, he said, Praise be to the Lord who rescued you from the hand of the Egyptians and of Pharaoh and who rescued the people from the hand of the Egyptians.

Now I know that the Lord is greater than all other gods for he did this to those who had treated Israel arrogantly. Now this is like Jethro's confession of faith in the God of Israel.

Because up until this point, Jethro didn't seem to know or perhaps he wasn't sure what he believed. Perhaps he thought there were many other different gods out there like people do today.

[17 : 16] And the God of Israel was just one amongst a menu of many others. But notice that Jethro says, Now I know that the Lord is greater than all other gods.

And in saying this, this is more than just the confession of one man. Because Jethro's language here echoes a common phrase that is constantly being repeated right the way through the Exodus narrative so far.

And it's a familiar phrase that comes from God. And it comes up so many times where God says, You will know that I am the Lord.

You will know that I am the Lord. And so, God is saying the point of the Exodus is that the Israelites and the Egyptians, in fact, the whole earth will know who God is.

That they will know that God who saved these people is the Lord. Lord. And so, when Jethro says, Now I know, he's picking up on one of the main points the Exodus is making about God.

[18 : 28] And the Egyptians didn't get it and the Amalekites didn't get it. But here is Jethro, the Midianite, the non-Israelite, learning the lesson of the Exodus.

The lesson that the Lord is greater than all other gods. And so, whether this is the beginning of his faith or the strengthening of his faith, Jethro declares himself to be a worshipper of the one true God.

And so, through the story of God's salvation, Jethro comes to believe. And that's why this story is a bit like a bridge in the narrative because it's making the point that the whole Exodus story is about the God who saves.

the only God, the true God, the God who is incomparable. And so, what we hear from Jethro's lips points to God's purpose being realized.

So, the missionary purpose is that the mighty God who is greater than all other gods is the God who can be and who is to be known.

[19 : 41] This God, the God of the Bible, can be known. And so, perhaps you're here this afternoon and you don't yet know this God.

Well, see what he has done in saving his people, Israel. Because the purpose of the Bible's story is to show us that this God is the God who saves and the God who we can come into a personal relationship with.

And he's done this in the Exodus to show us, but he's done it even more clearly in what Jesus Christ has done to save his people. And so, we, today, come to know God in a sense in the same way that Jethro did, by hearing what God has done and then by believing, by putting our faith in God.

God. Because when we do believe, then we become one of God's people. And when we're one of God's people, then we'll want to tell everything of what God has done, just like Moses proclaiming God's salvation to Jethro.

We've got the good news of God's salvation in Jesus Christ to proclaim to the world. And that's our purpose as a church. That's why we're here.

[21 : 02] It is to tell the world of the good news of Jesus. And that sounds like an intimidating and even impossible task. But it's actually quite simple when you break it down.

Because see how it begins here. It begins with a one-to-one encounter between two men, Moses and Jethro. And we can all sit down with somebody, encosta, beefcake, anywhere, over a coffee, and speak to them about Jesus Christ.

We can tell them what he has done. What he has done in history and also what he has done for me, for us. And it can be a family member like it was for Moses and Jethro.

Or it can be a neighbor or a friend or a colleague at work or a classmate. And so the challenge is, well, when was the last time that we opened our mouth and told somebody about God and what he has done in Jesus?

Because that's why we're here. And the more that we grasp our salvation and just what it means to be saved and what we've been saved from, then the greater our desire should be to go and share it with others.

[22 : 17] Because everybody needs to hear that there is one true God. The God who has revealed himself in the Exodus and in the Bible.

He is the Lord who is greater than all other gods. And that's why we need to share the good news of his salvation, to show people that all the false gods that they worship will only let them down and will never save them.

And so just as it took the mighty power of God to save his people in the Exodus and the mighty power of God to give his people victory in their battle over their enemies.

So it's only the mighty power of God and the death and resurrection of Jesus that can save you and me and whoever else in this world who needs to be saved.

And that's our only hope. That's our message. And it's good news. So first, remember God's salvation. Second, proclaim God's salvation.

[23 : 23] And then third, live out God's salvation. And this is chapter 18, verse 13 to 27. So in the second half of chapter 18, we see how God's salvation is actually worked out in the communal life of God's people.

Now that they are saved, then what does it look like to live as saved people? And so here, Moses served as the judge of all the people.

people. But Jethro, his father-in-law notices that there's an issue because Moses bears the burden of the weight of responsibility all by himself. The people wanted to know God's will so that he could act accordingly.

But what's the problem? Verse 15 and 16, Moses answered him, because the people come to me to seek God's will. Whenever they have a dispute, it is brought to me and I decide between the parties and inform them of God's decrees and instructions.

So Moses has got an important job, that's clear, it's a two-fold job. He's to be a teacher of God's people, teaching them God's decrees, God's instructions, so that they know what God requires of them because they want to obey God.

[24 : 36] And his second role is as the judge of God's people. So he's got to be involved in helping them resolve their disputes. But Jethro could see that Moses was on the verge of what we call today a burnout.

So verse 17, Moses' father-in-law replied, what you are doing is not good. You and these people who come to you will only wear yourselves out. The work is too heavy for you, you cannot handle it alone.

And so Jethro has a suggestion, a more effective working pattern for Moses. He wasn't trying to stop Moses in his role as the leader of God's people or the judge of God's people, but he wants to propose this workable solution so that Moses can be better at teaching and judging the people.

So capable men from all the people should serve as judges so that only the tough cases go to Moses. And it would preserve Moses' authority as God's leader, but it would make his load a bit lighter.

And it would help in shepherding God's flock. So the leaders, what were the qualifications? Well, the primary qualification was they had to be men who feared God.

[25 : 53] They also had to be trustworthy, and their leadership had to be shared so that they carried the burden of responsibility together. And so this was Jethro's organizational structure for Moses.

And Moses listened and put the plan into operation, and so it's clear that God used Jethro as a means of helping Moses implement a better way of caring for the people.

And so what we get here is actually the beginning of a structure for how God's people are to be led, for Israel and then the church. And that's why there are clear parallels between what we see here and then what we see later in the New Testament about church leadership, where God wants his people to be led by qualified men.

For Moses, these leaders were judges. In the New Testament, we get the leaders as elders. And that's where we get our church government from, Presbyterianism, from here, where there's a minister, a pastor, who's called a teaching elder.

His role is to teach God's word and apply it to the lives of the people. And then there are ruling elders. Their role is to govern the church, to share the burden for the care of the people.

[27 : 17] And so we can see the pattern starting to develop with Moses and the Israelites. Leaders are needed to teach and apply God's word and to govern and care for God's people.

And so it's the responsibility of the elders in the church, just as it was for the judges in Israel to serve by informing people of God's truth and helping them apply it to their lives and their individual situations.

Because God's purpose for his people in the Exodus, as it is now, has always been to know him and to know his will for our lives and then to apply his will to our lives and to live it out.

And that's why this section here in Exodus 18 really anticipates the giving of God's law in Exodus chapters 19 to 24.

God is preparing his people for how to live out their salvation. And so as we close, this is how God's people, the Israelites, are to live in response to God saving them.

[28 : 30] On their journey from Egypt, through the wilderness, towards the promised land, they are to live out their salvation. They are to represent God in this world by being the kind of people that God wants them to be.

And that's why as God's people today, we too are to live out our salvation in Jesus Christ. And even if we know what we should do and how we should live, the reality is that we often fail to do it.

We might have highlights along the journey, of course. Everybody does. But we will also stumble along the way. We'll fall and we'll fail. Because despite our very best efforts, we will always let God down.

And yet, what this is telling us is that in Jesus Christ, the true and better Joshua, we have one who has gone into the battle before us.

He fought for us in our place, dying for our sin and failure. He was defeated on the cross instead of us so that we might be the ones on the victory side.

[29 : 49] And so our inability to live as we ought to stems from us forgetting what Jesus Christ has already accomplished on our behalf. Because when we stop looking to him and remembering what he has done through his death and through his resurrection, then we become easy prey for our enemies of Satan and sin.

And so it's only by knowing that they have been defeated, Satan has been defeated through the cross, sin has been defeated through the cross. Only knowing that, and knowing that we're on the victory side, only that will help us courageously fight on despite the many challenges that we're going to face.

Because it's only the good news of Jesus Christ that transforms our lives. And so it must be proclaimed to the world and it must be lived out together as Christ's church on this earth.

Amen.