

You Shall Know I AM:
Spreading the Knowledge of the LORD (Exodus 18)
Preached by Pastor Jason Tarn at HCC on February 3, 2019

Introduction

- ❖ Since December, we've taken a brief hiatus from our series through the book of Exodus. We got as far as chapter 17. By now we've seen the confrontation between Moses and Pharaoh, the ten plagues, the Passover, and God's deliverance at the Red Sea. We left off with the Israelites in the wilderness, grumbling about food and water, and then being attacked by the Amalekites. Chapter 17 ended with Joshua leading the army into battle while Moses watched from a hilltop raising the staff of God, which symbolized the presence of God. **That was to communicate that the LORD is the One fighting Israel's battles and that he reigns supreme over the gods of all the nations.** That's been a consistent theme.

- ❖ **We've already seen how the ten plagues weren't just miraculous signs demonstrating God's power but how they were a polemic against the gods of Egypt.** God was proving a point to Pharaoh and the Egyptians. You worship the Nile? Watch me turn it to blood. You worship gods depicted by a frog's head or a cow's? I'm going to send a frog invasion or a disease to kill all your cattle. You worship the sun god? I'm going to blot out of sun.
 - The point the LORD is proving is the same point that Moses's father-in-law came to recognize in chapter 18:10-11. Listen to what he says to his son-in-law, *"¹⁰Blessed 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. ¹¹Now I know that the LORD is greater than all gods."*
 - The LORD is greater than all gods. **That's the lesson God is teaching his people and the nations through all his mighty acts – the LORD is great and greater than all gods** (1 Chr 16:25; 2 Chr 2:5; Ps 95:3; 97:9; 135:5).

- ❖ **But let's be clear, when the Bible speaks of God being greater than all gods, don't imagine the LORD being greater merely in terms of power.** Like how Zeus is understood to be greater than all other Greek gods or how Vishnu is the greatest among the Hindu gods. They're considered supreme gods among a pantheon of lesser gods. **But in Scripture, the LORD's claim to supremacy is a claim to singularity.** He is greater than all gods – not merely in power – but in essence. He is the *only* God.
 - I've been reading *The Lord of the Rings* to my daughter, so I've had to teach her about the different races found in Middle Earth. You've got unassuming hobbits. Then there are stout dwarves and mighty men, yet elves are superior to them. But then there are the Maiar – which include Gandalf, Saruman, and Sauron – who are more powerful than elves. We typically see things within that kind of hierarchy.
 - But don't view God like that. **Don't imagine the LORD being greater than all gods like Gandalf is greater than a hobbit. It's more like the way Tolkien is greater than all his characters.** The LORD is the Author and Creator. Everything else owes its existence to him. That's how he's greater.

- ❖ And he wants everyone to know it. This great God wants to make himself known. We've seen this constant refrain in Exodus – of God saying he's going to do this or that to the Egyptians – and you shall know that I am the LORD (6:7; 7:5; 8:22; 14:4). **God acts in such a way as to spread the knowledge of his Name.** And here in chapter 18, we see that purpose advancing.
 - Before I started to prepare, I figured I was going to preach a message on leadership. Many of us are familiar with this section where Moses's father-in-law gives him leadership advice (i.e. the Jethro principle of delegation). But when I got to studying it in context, I realized it's not really about leadership. **This chapter, as a whole, is about the spread of the knowledge of the LORD and his greatness.**
- ❖ Unlike the Amalekites in chapter 17, we have a Midianite who represents the proper response to the knowledge of the LORD and his great acts of salvation. The Amalekites hear about the Exodus but it doesn't move them to worship. It moves them to battle. But when Jethro hears of the Exodus, he recognizes the message being sent and worships. That's how it should be. That's God's heart – to spread the knowledge of his Name to the praise of that Name.
 - And in chapter 18, we see that purpose advancing into three realms: (1) into our own family, (2) into all the families of the earth, and (3) into the hearts of God's people.

Into Our Own Family

- ❖ **Let's begin by considering the spread of the knowledge of the LORD into our own family.** We're going to focus on vv1-9 and look at the dynamics within Moses's own family. If you recall, in chapter 2, Moses fled from Egypt into the land of Midian. There he helped Jethro's family and was given his daughter Zipporah as a wife with whom he bore two sons.
 - **Now at some point earlier, Moses must sent his wife and sons back home to his father-in-law Jethro.** We don't have details as to when that occurred and whether or not his family was present to witness the events of the Exodus. But at this point in the story, Moses has led the Israelites to Mt. Sinai, and soon he'll go up to receive the Law. But before that, Jethro arrives and reunites Moses with his family.
 - Now in v3, we're reminded of the names of his two sons. *“The name of the one was Gershom (for he said, “I have been a sojourner [stranger or alien] 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”)”*.
- ❖ You've got to understand that, in those days, they didn't consult books or websites on the top 100 baby names. Parents gave names based on the name's similarity to a meaningful word or statement made at the time of birth (or describes the circumstances surrounding the birth). So if, after the baby was born, someone said, “He reminds me of his grandfather who dug the first well in our village”, then they might name the kid Doug.¹ **Essentially, names were meant to recall and preserve the memory of significant events.**
 - So when Moses's first son was born, he was living in exile, as a stranger in a foreign land, and so he named his Gershom, which sounds like the Hebrew for “stranger there”. I was a stranger/alien there in Midian. And remember why he was exiled. He killed an Egyptian. He was on the run. So his sojourn was his shame.

¹ Douglas Stuart, *Exodus*, vol. 2. The New American Commentary, 404.

- ❖ **But apparently, by the birth of his second son, he came to recognize his exile as a means of deliverance.** God used it to deliver him from Pharaoh who sought his life. He was able to escape from Egypt and find shelter in Midian. And so Moses names his second son Eliezer, which means “My God is help”. Eliezer’s name is a perpetual reminder of God’s gracious help and deliverance.
 - **So now every time saw his boys and called them by name, Moses would recall the story of his life: “I was a stranger there but God is my help.”** In fact, that would also be the story of Israel up to this point. Like Moses, Israel was a sojourner, a stranger and alien, in Egypt. But God was their help. He delivered them from Pharaoh’s sword. That’s the Exodus – it’s a story of God’s help and deliverance for a people who were alienated and enslaved.

- ❖ Friends, that same story can be ours. We can experience that same transition when we come to Christ. **We move from being strangers to God – alienated from him and enslaved to sin – to being helped by God and delivered through Christ.** Like Moses, every one of us is a great sinner deserving of exile from God. But like Moses, while in the wilderness of our shame, God will graciously meet us in the person of Christ and be our help.
 - So if you feel far from God, if you feel alienated – then go to Christ. Tell Jesus that you want him to be your Deliverer, your Savior. **The Son of God went to the cross bearing our sins, and there he was alienated from God and died in the place of sinners.** So that if you turn and trust in Christ, then this story of help and salvation – recalled in the name of these sons – will be the story of *your* life and *your* salvation.

- ❖ Brothers and sisters, I’m sure like Moses you have members of your own family who are not worshippers of the LORD. They may be adherents of another religion or they claim to be non-religious. But everyone worships something or someone. **The question is: Have you told them about the LORD and how he is greater than whatever it is they worship?**
 - Moses is an example of someone responsible to shepherd a nation, but he’s also someone who made sure to shepherd his own family. He made sure to tell his father-in-law about the LORD. Look at v8, *“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.”*

- ❖ The word for “*told*” is the Hebrew word for proclaiming or preaching. Moses was preaching the LORD to his father-in-law. That’s how Moses loved his family. So what about you? **Do you have family members who don’t know the LORD?** Pray for the opportunity to preach the knowledge of the LORD. And pray for the courage to speak up when opportunity comes. **I know it’s the hardest to share with family. It’s because they know us the best and they’ve seen us at our worst.** So it’s often our shame that keeps us from preaching the LORD to family members. It’s because we’re ashamed of our witness.
 - But did you notice what Moses shared with Jethro? Look back at v8. **He didn’t just share all the highlights of the Exodus. He also shared their hardships.** He told his father-in-law *“all the hardship that had come upon them in the way.”* That would include all the shameful moments where Moses and the Israelites miserably failed.

- ❖ **But when we're honest about our hardships and transparent with our shame, then we have an opportunity to tell our family that the LORD is greater than all other gods** – in that he, unlike the gods of this world, loved us while we were still sinners. While we were still weak, Christ died for the ungodly (Rom 5:6, 8). **That means the LORD saves us in spite of the sin and shame that our family members are so familiar with.** That should free you from whatever is holding you back from telling them about the LORD.

Into All the Families of the Earth

- ❖ So we've seen the spread of the knowledge of the LORD into Moses's own family. Let's consider the next realm. Let's see it spread into all the families of the earth. **What we see revealed in this chapter is God's heart for the nations.** Remember, Jethro was not just a family member who didn't worship the LORD. He was a Midianite priest – a Gentile, an outsider, a stranger to the covenants of promise.
 - And yet he's not beyond the LORD's concern. Yes, the LORD has a chosen people. In the OT, they were called Israel. It was one nation, one family, that he chose to be a special covenant people. **And yet his choosing of Israel was not to compliment them but to commission them – to spread the knowledge of the LORD to all the families of the earth (Gen 12:3).**
- ❖ That's God's missionary heart. **And it's beautiful to see the nations – as represented by this Midianite priest – to see the nations coming to a saving knowledge of the LORD.** In case you're not familiar, the Midianites were descendants of Abraham (cf. from his wife Keturah; Gen 25:2). But they didn't worship Yahweh. They were still Gentiles. They worshipped other gods. And Jethro is one of their priests.
 - But now when he hears of all that the LORD had done for Moses and his people, v9 says Jethro rejoiced. He rejoiced in their deliverance, and then in v10, notice what rolls off his lips, "*Blessed be the LORD.*" This pagan priest of Midian is not just saying "Praise God" like some generic expression. **He's using the covenantal name of God (Yahweh).** That's a name revealed to his covenant people. But here a Gentile is adopting it for himself. He's blessing Yahweh.
- ❖ That's a big deal. I know there are some commentators who doubt that Jethro converted. But I think he did convert. Because of what he says in v11, "*Now I know.*" Now I know that the LORD is greater than all gods. Remember, the purpose of the Exodus has been – you shall know. You shall know I am the LORD. Well here Jethro says, "*Now I know.*" **I see Jethro being depicted as the epitome of how God wants people to respond.** That's why I think he truly became a true worshipper of Yahweh.
 - So what's happening here is the missionary task playing out. Moses is preaching the knowledge of the LORD to a Midianite priest. He's taking the name of the LORD to a people where he is not named. That's what a missionary does. I never saw Exodus 18 as a missions text. I thought it was about delegating leadership. But this moment where the knowledge of the LORD crosses into an unreached people and a pagan worshipper is converted – this moment is so close to the missionary heart of God.

- ❖ **There's this beautiful scene in Revelation 15 where the heavenly host is standing with harps of God in their hands, and it says they sang "the song of Moses" and "the song of the Lamb".** The song of Moses is referring to that song we looked at back in Exodus 15 that celebrates the exodus from Egypt. It was a wonderful song of redemption. But the song of the Lamb carries an even sweeter tune – as its lyrics focus on an even greater exodus from the bondage of sin and death. In **Revelation 15:4**, it says they sing these words, *"Who will not fear, O Lord, and glorify your name? For you alone are holy. All nations will come and worship you, for your righteous acts have been revealed."*
 - Isn't that what we see happening in our text? As God's righteous acts at the Red Sea were revealed to a Midianite – he came and worshipped. **And in the same way, when God's elect among the unreached peoples of the world hear of the righteous acts of Christ in his death and resurrection – they will come and worship.** That's what the song of Moses and the song of the Lamb are all about.

- ❖ Some people have this impression that, in the OT, God was only concerned with Israel. That he was so preoccupied with one family to the neglect of all the other families of the world. But that's a false narrative. **When God blesses a chosen people, he does so with a view to blessing all the peoples of the world.** And he does so not by elevating the nations to an equal status to rival Israel in glory – but by grafting them into Israel like a wild olive shoot is grafted into the nourishing root of a good olive tree (Rom 11:17). According to the song of the Lamb, the nations are grafted into Israel through union with God's Son.
 - **All nations will come and worship God by being united (grafted) into the Son of God. And the good news is that anyone can be grafted in.** Regardless of where you come from, what language you speak, what your social standing is, what your political views are – regardless, you can be born again into the family of God. And not by rights or effort but by faith in Christ. That's the good news we have the privilege and responsibility to preach to all the families of the earth.

Into the Hearts of God's People

- ❖ So we've seen the knowledge of the LORD spreading into one family and then to all the families of the earth. **Lastly, in vv13-27, we see the knowledge of the LORD spreading into the individual hearts of his people.** This is the section where Jethro gives his son-in-law advice on how to divide the time-consuming labor of judging. We're told that Moses would have to go from morning to night, listening to case after case.
 - Any issue, no matter how large or small, was brought to Moses and he would settle disputes and make known *"the statutes of God and his laws."* **In other words, he was revealing the will of the LORD to these people.** They didn't know God's will for this or that situation, and so they went to Moses and he told them.

- ❖ **This exhausting task of having one man to mediate the will of God for an entire people – this sets the stage for the giving of the Law, which we'll see in the next few chapters.** Keep in mind that the Ten Commandments and the Book of the Covenant (21:2-23:19) were meant for the people of God to hear or read for themselves directly.

- ❖ **This episode is intended to make the point that God's design was never for his will to be mediated by just one priest. Israel was to be a kingdom of priests (19:6).** Where everyone could know the will of God personally because it was revealed – it was written down. Having an entire people depend on one man or one magisterial office to know and apply the revealed will of God is, as Jethro puts it, “*not good.*” That's not the way it should be.
- ❖ This was the concern that fueled the Protestant Reformation. **The Reformers recognized the need to make accessible the revealed will of God to the people of God.** There shouldn't be one man or one magisterial office that we all depend on to know God's will.
 - No, God has revealed his will to all his people – in Scripture! So the church is to be a kingdom of priests (Rev 1:6). **That's why the Reformers were so burdened to get the Bible into the hands of the people, in a language they could read, and with the skills to make right interpretations.** That's been God's design since Exodus.
- ❖ Think about this, Christian: **The will of God has been revealed and made accessible to you in a book that you can read for yourself.** For most of us, it's leather-bound, neatly formatted, and accurately translated for readability. What a privilege! How blessed are we!
 - **But do we take advantage of this great privilege or are we relying too much on pastors and discipplers to mediate the will of God for us?** I know there's a proper place for seeking pastoral advice and wise counsel, but there's also the danger of shirking your priestly responsibility to search the Scriptures yourself to discern the revealed will of God. That's the warning and advice that our text has to offer.
- ❖ Now let's look at v19 and see the advice that Jethro gives to Moses. In vv19-20, he basically suggests for Moses to function as a primary teacher of the Law. But in vv21-22, he's to select capable men and empower them to judge simpler cases among smaller groups of people. And Moses only has to concern himself with the most difficult ones.
 - **Now in v21, we're given three qualifications for the kind of men Moses should be looking for to carry out this task.** They are to be men who fear God, who are trustworthy, and who hate bribes (that is, they're not lovers of money). In Deuteronomy 1:9-18, we're given more qualifications. They're to be wise, understanding, and experienced men who can judge impartially – based on the revealed words of God and not the loud cries of his people.
- ❖ I think it's beneficial for all believers to ask themselves: **Do I fit these qualifications? Would I be someone whom God could use to help others understand his will?** Do I have the wisdom and understanding to rightly interpret his Word? Am I easily intimidated or swayed from speaking the truth? Do I fear God enough to speak his will no matter how hard or unpopular it is? That's the kind of person God is looking for.
- ❖ Now how did Moses respond to Jethro's advice? If we look at v24, it says, “*Moses listened to the voice of his father-in-law and did all that he had said.*” Now he didn't follow the advice simply out of respect to his elders or to stay on the good side of the in-laws. **No, Moses listened to Jethro's voice because, in it, he discerned God's voice.**

- ❖ Look at v23. Jethro concludes by saying, *“If you do this, God will direct you, you will be able to endure.”* So he understood that his son-in-law was a prophet and priest of the LORD. **He knew Moses would ultimately seek God’s direction in this matter.** That’s why he says, *“God will direct you.”* So Moses sought the will and direction of God and discerned that it was to do all that Jethro recommended. And it ends up blessing Moses and Israel.

- ❖ So this passage is not really about what I thought it was about. It’s not really about leadership principles. It’s about the spread of the knowledge of God. It’s about this progression in Scripture from knowing God’s will through human mediators (chapter 18) to knowing God’s will through written revelation (chapter 19 and on). But even that’s not good enough.
 - **Because even with the privilege of written revelation – having direct accessibility to the will of God – the people of God still are unfaithful and commit idolatry.** We’ll see this in chapter 32 with the golden calf. What’s missing for God’s people is a change of heart. We get hints of that in Deuteronomy 6:6, *“And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart.”* Or in Deuteronomy 11:18 *“You shall therefore lay up these words of mine in your heart and in your soul.”*
 - **That’s the goal: To have God’s will not written on stone or paper but written on our hearts until his words and his will become an integral part of who we are (Ps 40:8, 119:11).**

- ❖ That’s why the old covenant that God made with Israel was insufficient. Now it was a good and righteous covenant. **The fact that it failed to produce faithful obedience from the heart was not a fault in the old covenant – but a fault in the people** (Heb 8:7-8). The OT is not the problem. We’re the problem. Our hearts are hard because of our sin.
 - And that’s why God’s plan was to bless a chosen people as a means to bless all the peoples of the earth – by establishing a new covenant. **This new covenant would involve a change of heart for everyone who enters it.** God says in **Ezekiel 36:26** that in this new covenant, *“I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you.”* And **Jeremiah 31:33** says, *“For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the LORD: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts.”*

- ❖ **The point I’m making is that the NT emphasis on obeying God from your heart is not an innovation.** It’s a reaffirmation of the same morality and obedience that the OT called for – for us to internalize God’s Law so that we obey from the heart, out of faith in God and with a desire to please him. That was the plan all along – for the knowledge of the LORD to spread into the individual hearts of God’s people
 - In the next few weeks, we’re going to be looking at the giving of the Law at Mt Sinai. **I think, in the church today, there’s a lot of confusion when it comes to interpreting and applying the OT law.** Some will say it’s irrelevant for Christians since we have the NT. They’ll disregard the Law. Others will go to the other extreme and treat the OT law like a checklist of do’s and don’ts. We’re going to wade into all of that in the weeks to come.

- ❖ But I leave you with this question: **Do you love the Law of God? Would you describe the Law as something cherished in your heart?** A Christian – that is, someone in the new covenant that Christ established by his blood – a Christian will answer Yes or at least want to emphatically say Yes. Christians are those who have the knowledge of God, in law of God, written on their hearts.