

## Sermon Summary 12 February 2023

### The Camel: by Graham Mol

In his book *Resilient*, pastor and author John Eldredge begins with the insight that camels have a weakness, an Achilles' heel, but this vulnerability is hidden by their legendary resilience. Camels have been crossing the harsh desert sands since before the time of Abraham. They are able to carry heavy loads across long stretches of desert, going for weeks without water. The treacherous thing about camels however is that they will walk a thousand kilometres and more with seemingly endless endurance, giving little indication that they are about to collapse and then it just happens. They suddenly lay down and die.

John Eldredge goes on to say that human souls hide an Achilles' heel too. We have an amazing capacity to rally in the face of disasters and trials. We'll rally and rally until one day we just can't. We're done. And then we ourselves collapsing into discouragement, depression or blankness of soul.

As I reflected on this comparison, I thought how true it was. How often we just press on not showing signs of the toll that things have taken on us. How we can see someone day after day and not pick up on how much they are struggling. Then one day, catching us by surprise, it all comes apart. One day we wake up and we just don't have the capacity to cope. It is such a human – and camel – thing to do.

So how do we avoid this kind of burnout? The burnout of the soul? The wonderful thing is that God knows this about us. He understands our humanity. As the psalmist king, David, says:

For he knows what we are made of, remembering that we are dust.  
(Psalm 103:14)

He knows how we are formed. He knows our frame. In the verse before David writes that the Lord has compassion on us, as a father has compassion on his children. David can make this declaration for he knows what God is like from his own experience but also from the history of God's interaction with his people. None more so evident than in the life of Moses. A man whom God called to lead His people to freedom. A man who had a close and deep relationship with the Lord. A man who was human and flawed.

Who better to point out your shortcomings than your father-in-law? Moses' father-in-law joined the Israelites bringing Moses' wife and two children. They had stayed in Midian while Moses had gone to face off against Pharaoh. From the account you can see that Moses and Jethro had a good relationship, one of respect and open sharing. Jethro had the authority to speak into Moses' life.

Exodus 18:13-6

The next day 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 you're doing for the people? Why are you alone sitting as judge, while all the people stand around you from morning until 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."

Here is one of the reasons why many people keep pushing on, not showing their vulnerability when facing trials and troubles. Moses is acting like it all depended on him. We see this in the answer he gives to Jethro. Why are you alone sitting as judge? Because the people come to me, there is expectation. They look to him to make the decision, to resolve the issue. He is the one "called by God", he places God's expectation on himself.

When you feel like it all depends on you – you can't allow yourself to stumble – to show weakness. Despite the exhaustion or trials and difficulties you keep on rallying. You can't let them down.

In what areas of your life do you feel that it all depends on you?

- Finances?
- Big Decisions?
- Maintaining relationships?
- Your kid's lives (faith, future?)
- Your marriage?
- Work?

I believe God speaks wisdom through Jethro here to Moses. Let us hear these words too:

Exodus 18:17-18

"What you're doing is not good," Moses's 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."

Maybe you need to hear those words? Maybe someone close to you has told you this but you haven't listened.

Jethro goes on to acknowledge Moses' calling and role as leader of the people representing them before God, teaching them the law of God and how to apply it in their lives. Moses still has purpose and calling, it is not now taken from him just because he's struggling. But he tells him to find trustworthy and upstanding men to serve as judges over the people:

Exodus 18:22-23

"They should judge the people at all times. Then they can bring you every major case but judge every minor case themselves. In this way you will lighten your load, and they will bear it with you. If you do this, and God so directs you, you will be able to endure, and also all these people will be able to go home satisfied."

To his credit, Moses shows humility and does what his father-in-law advises. He does a very important thing, he allows people to come alongside and help him.

From this account of Moses we've been able to see one of the underlying problems as to why we're like the camels – pushing on until we drop. It's that sense that it is all up to you. We can also see one of the answers to that problem: allowing people to come alongside to help us.

Let us consider one more interaction between Moses and God. This happens later on during the 40 years of wandering in the desert. It was a difficult time for Moses leading the people. They often grumbled and complained. Even when God had provided miraculously for their needs – bringing water forth in the desert and Manna from the heavens to nourish them – they'd find something new to moan about. In this case they were moaning about their one-food diet. They missed all the different foods they had in Egypt – despite the fact that they were slaves back then and probably didn't get such nice food anyway. The people's ingratitude angers the Lord, and Moses too. After all the ups and downs, the challenges and complaining, Moses breaks down. He's had it up to here – he's done – checking out.

Numbers 11:11-15

So Moses asked the LORD, "Why have you brought such trouble on your servant? Why are you angry with me, and why do you burden me with all these people? Did I conceive all these people? Did I give them birth so you should tell me, 'Carry them at your breast, as a nursing mother carries a baby,' to the land that you swore to give their ancestors? Where can I get meat to give all these people? For they are weeping to me, 'Give us meat to eat!' ***I can't carry all these people by myself. They are too much for me.*** If you are going to treat me like this, please kill me right now if I have found favour with you, and don't let me see my misery anymore."

Moses doesn't sugar-coat his words. He's open and honest before God. Although he's broken, fed-up and ready to walk out, he does one of the things that we all should do that will help us remain resilient in our souls. That is:

***He places the burden of responsibility in God's hands.*** "Lord I can't do this on my own, it is too heavy a load for me to bear," "Please help me!" God does provide help for Moses. He tells him to bring 70 elders and officers of the people who are known to him and trustworthy leaders. They are to come before the Lord who would then anoint them with His Holy Spirit to lead the people – just as Moses had been anointed by God's Spirit. They would then help Moses bear the burden of the people so that he would not have to bear it all himself.

To build resilience one must also: ***Look after your spiritual vitality.*** Moses would regularly meet with the Lord in the tent of meeting. In some ways it was like meeting with a friend, he had a close relationship with God. This was a privilege given to Moses but now for us, through Jesus, we all have that privilege to know the Lord as Saviour and as friend. Jesus longs for us to have a close daily walk with Him. Therefore, it is vital for our souls that we encounter Jesus daily through ways such as quiet times, the word, worship and prayer.

Lastly to be resilient: ***Open up to the help of others.*** Allow Jesus to minister to you and support you through His Body the Church. We see this principle at work in how other judges came alongside Moses to serve the people and when the 70 elders and leaders shared in Moses' calling and ordaining in order to share the heavy burden of responsibility for leading the people. I have experienced this in my own life. In 2018 I was going through a time of inner distress. Like a camel I wasn't showing it on the outside. God gave insight to a mature believer in this congregation who reached out and like a life saver cast out into the stormy seas God used this person to bring hope and healing, guidance and care to me. Still to this day I value and appreciate their care and guidance for my life.

The truth is, if we are going to be resilient, if we are going to stand firm and not collapse, we need people. We need the body of Christ. We need to be open to Jesus ministering to us through His body the Church.