

Benefits of a Bitter Place

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[0 : 00] Meanwhile, we're in Exodus chapter 15, and no, I will not kick her out, shut the lights off. I will leave for lunch, but she can talk to... Alright, Exodus 15, we went to verse 21 last Sunday, had a good week with the baptism, had a blessing, had a good time, and then we studied in this service that the first time, the first song that's ever recorded in the Bible.

And since the Bible is more than a history book, since it's written for our learning, for instruction in righteousness, we decided to take a look and see what the Bible has to say about song. And the few things that we looked at was the occasion for the song, the content for the song, and the effect of the song, that it was inviting to the Lord, that it was edifying to the saints, and challenged you last week in the area of music in your own life.

Is it addressed to the Lord? Does it exalt the Lord? Is it declaring His work and His word and His will? And I hope that you were challenged by the music that you listen to and the effect that music has on you.

So, let's begin in verse 22 then, and we'll finish this chapter. Because it's not long after such a great deliverance that they run into a snag. And so, let's read verse 22 on.

So, Moses brought Israel from the Red Sea, and they went out into the wilderness of Shur. And they went three days in the wilderness, and found no water. When they came to Marah, they could not drink of the waters of Marah, for they were bitter.

[1 : 36] Therefore, the name of it was called Marah. And the people murmured against Moses, saying, What shall we drink? And he cried unto the Lord, and the Lord showed him a tree, which when he had cast into the waters, the waters were made sweet.

There he made for them a statute and an ordinance, and there he proved them, and said, If thou wilt diligently hearken to the voice of the Lord thy God, and wilt do that which is right in His sight, and wilt give ear to His commandments, and keep all His statutes, I will put none of these diseases upon thee, which I have brought upon the Egyptians.

For I am the Lord that healeth thee. And they came to Elam, where were twelve wells of water, and threescore and ten palm trees, and they encamped there by the waters.

So, God leads His people for three days, verse 22, three days through a wilderness that offered them nothing to drink.

No doubt they had some supply. No doubt they had exhausted that supply. And when they finally reached this place where they were anticipating a quenching of their thirst, they found that it was undrinkable, which makes the thirst only worsen.

[2 : 51] And what had promised, maybe what had looked promising to them, turned out to be a major letdown. But we remember that God is leading His people here.

God led them to this place, Marah. It was not by accident. You might say, Well, why, God? Why? If you're so good, why would you lead your people to no water, and then when you finally give them hope of water, it's bitter and it's not drinkable?

Why would you do that to them? Why would you not lead me beside the still waters? Why would you not restore my soul if you're good? Well, God is good.

He's still good regardless of the way the outlook initially is. By the end of this chapter, they've got twelve wells of water. And so God is good and He knows what He's doing.

But in the moment, they did not know what He was doing. It says in verse 25 that we read that there He proved them. Now, when we closed chapter 14, the last thing that we read was that they saw the great work which the Lord did upon the Egyptians, and the people feared the Lord, and the people believed the Lord.

[4 : 09] And then three days later, three days later, the Red Sea is no longer in sight. They're not happy. They're not fearing the Lord, and they're not believing the Lord, but they're murmuring against Moses.

Now, the place is called Marah, and verse 23 describes that the waters there were bitter. And Marah means bitter. Do you remember in Ruth chapter 1 when Naomi came back into the land to Bethlehem?

They called her Naomi, and she said, Don't call me Naomi. Call me Marah. For the Almighty hath dealt very bitterly with me. And so the place is Marah, and it means bitter.

And God is leading His thirsting people into a bitter place. A bitter place. And I've already preached through this passage.

We've already understood that it is the Lord's job to lead. It is our job to follow the Lord's leading wherever it goes, and to allow Him to guide us. But do not misunderstand, and do not listen to somebody that would lead you astray, and proclaim that where God leads is always going to be prosperity.

[5 : 23] And if God's leading the way, it's going to be health and wealth. That is not the God of the Bible. That is some imaginary God, and some imaginary gospel. But it's not the truth.

And God led His infant nation into a bitter place. And some of you may have been in Marah before. Some of you may feel like you're still there right now in a bitter place in life, and you can't understand why God would not take it away. You've asked Him to.

You've cried out for Him. But it's just bitterness. I want you to realize that bitter places are beneficial to you. And I'd even go so far as to say that a bitter place is a necessary place in the Christian life. I want to give you some reasons this morning why God would lead us into a bitter place and try to reveal from this passage those benefits of the bitter place. So let's pray, and then let's try to understand something this morning that can help us.

[6 : 25] God, I mean that. Would You please help us? Help us from Your Word. May this story, this incident, and this trial of Your people have bearing on our lives today.

May we reflect upon it, and it teach us something. Help us to understand Your leading. Help us to understand Your will for us today, and that Your grace is always sufficient even in the bitter places, that You provide a way, that they're temporary, that You've got it figured out.

Help us to trust You. Help us to obey You. And never murmur against You. And we pray these things in Christ's name. He's worthy. Amen. Amen. So let me begin right away with the first thought about how this bitter place can be a benefit to you, because number one, it's a place of calibration, meaning it's a place that can get you centered.

It can get you balanced. Calibration is something like, I don't know what your jobs are individually throughout the spectrum here, but there's instruments that need calibrated. There's rifle scopes that need calibrated.

There's cars and certain portions of that, the mechanical side that need to be calibrated every now and then. And this is what the bitter place is. It's a place of calibration.

[7 : 41] The Israelites are coming off an extreme high. Like, they've been shouting, they've been singing, they've been dancing. Their song of deliverance was loud, and it was long, and there was such a spirit in them and such an energy that they had on the other side of the Red Sea now.

And yet that is slowly diminishing as they get one day, then two days, now three days into the wilderness without water in sight. The Red Sea is, it's only a memory at this point.

They can't see it anymore. And the mirth that they had has faded, so much so that now it's turned into murmuring when they realized that this is a bitter place.

But the Bible says that God proved them there. God is proving them. They had something they needed to learn at the onset of this journey through the wilderness.

This is still very early. And right away after this major defeat of Pharaoh, God's going to lead them into something where they need to learn. And they need to get calibrated.

[8 : 48] God is orchestrating this because this place will keep you centered. It will keep you, we might say today, it will keep you in check. They could go from flying high.

God has delivered us. God is nobody's. Who is like unto the Lord among the gods? Who is like thee, glorious and holiness? Thou did this, you did that, you did this. You're going to do this to our enemies and they're ready to go.

And so the Lord says, wait a minute, wait a minute. I've got to put you in check a little bit before we go into all of that. And he brings them to Marah. He brings them to Marah.

You can be flying high and in doing so adopt this distorted view of what the Christian life is. And get this imagination that it's going to be all wonderful things if I just trust and obey.

It's going to be good from here on forward. I don't want the bitter place and I don't want God to lead me to a bitter place. I want good times. I'm going to walk with God. It's going to be good. But God's going to lead you to a bitter place.

[9 : 53] If everything was just easy, if you're singing Oh Happy Day every day, if you're just with those Hebrews marching through the wilderness singing I am bound for the promised land as the, I'm sure it started strong and on day two it probably just got a little quieter and somebody said, come on guys, we're following the Lord.

We're not in Egypt. we're bound for the promised land and they started up again but it wasn't as loud and it fell off a little bit quicker until they're just done singing. And if every day was that easy, how long do you suppose until they and you yourselves alike took the blessings of God for granted and begin expecting God to just fix everything for you and do everything and all the good stuff will just fall into my lap.

It'll always be easy. You'll begin to imagine well I'm saved and I belong to God and God is good so He's just going to do everything good for me. Everything I ask will not be denied.

It's going to be blessing from here on forward. And that is not the life that God has promised you. That is not the life of this Bible.

That is not the life of the people of God. It never has been. Where did you get the idea that it is just going to be wonderful? You didn't get it from the book. Maybe from some preacher who's kind of manipulating the scriptures or just telling one side of the story.

[11 : 19] But that is not the life that God intends for His people. And I want you to think on it from His perspective. How does God get glory from a people that He saves, He delivers if all it is is just feeding them and clothing them and just everything they want.

What do you want today? Here it is. What do you want tomorrow? Here it is. Here it is. Here it is. I'm so good. I have everything. I'll give it to you. How does He get glory? You know what happens to that people? Human nature tells you what happens to a people like that.

They're spoiled. They're selfish. They can't handle that kind of God and blessings. It's never been designed to be like that. You can see that from a parent and a child.

It's so obvious. Human nature teaches us. You can't spoil somebody and expect them to turn out with character. They won't. And they can't handle bitter times.

When opposition shows up, they melt down and fall apart. The first time they don't get their way, they sit down and scream until they get their way. That is not who God is going to train this people to be.

[12 : 33] And that is not how God will train you to be. And so that's not the life that God intends for you to be some arrogant, self-conceited, expectant, and entitled Christian.

Turn with me to Proverbs chapter 30. Keep your place. We'll be right back. But Proverbs chapter 30. The bitter place is a place of calibration where you get centered.

Where you come down off of that high and realize that there's more to it than that. In Proverbs 30, would you look at verses 8 and 9?

The Bible reads, Remove far from me vanity and lies. Give me neither poverty nor riches. Feed me with food convenient for me.

Why? Lest I be fool and deny thee and say, Who's the Lord? Or lest I be poor and steal and take the name of my God in vain.

[13 : 37] If that was the road God had for them, just the high road flying high never coming down, that's the kind of people they'd be. They would be fool, they would deny him, and they did, and they did.

They would say, Who is the Lord? And they did. And so, the place of bitterness is a place of calibration. God sends bitterness. It doesn't feel good and it's not appealing.

And in the moment, this is what they're thinking. We're dying of thirst here. This is not the time for bitter water. We're already stressed out.

Things are already bad. This is not what I need right now. Does that sound familiar to you? This is not a good time for this to be happening in my life. Have you ever said that?

I've heard it with my ears. I've said it with my mouth. I'm imagining I'm not the only one here. A time of bitterness shows up. God leads you to Amara and there you are saying, This is not the time for this to be happening.

[14:43] And yet, God led you to that place. God allows the bitter place. It's important and a reminder in life. Their lives were bitter in Egypt with hard bondage.

And God gave them those bitter herbs in that Passover meal for a yearly reminder of what that life was. But the path forward is going to have its bitter moments as well.

And they're there to keep you centered. To keep you calibrated and balanced. If you expect life to be easy, you will not be prepared when the opposition comes. You will not be prepared when the day of bitterness arrives.

You'll fall fast. So it causes us to be aware and to remember that there's a cross to bear in this Christian life. There's enemies to engage. There's mountaintops and there's valleys below.

And it's going to be a mixture of it on this journey. So it's a place of calibration. Now consider something else in verse 26. It's a place of confrontation. Look at verse 26 and say, Moses is the Lord here saying, and said, If thou wilt diligently hearken to the voice of the Lord thy God and wilt do that which is right in his sight, wilt give ear to his commandments and keep all his statutes, I will put none of these diseases upon thee which I have brought upon the Egyptians for I am the Lord that healeth thee.

[16:03] Now I want you to see this is what God does after he heals the waters. He says, I'll put none of these diseases upon thee which I have brought upon the Egyptians for I am the Lord that healeth thee. So the whole thing was an object lesson.

An object lesson that was ultimately to confront them with the notion that there are some things that God expects from them in this relationship.

He's not just saying, Hey, remember guys, I can heal you. I gotcha. Anything you need. That's not the words that he's saying. He's saying, I won't punish you with such diseases if you will diligently hearken unto my voice.

If you'll do that which is right in my sight. But he's challenging them here. Look back at chapter 6. Exodus chapter 6.

God's trying to establish some ground rules for this relationship. This is all brand new. people. And he's establishing the three days ago he crushed their biggest enemy.

[17:11] But now they need to realize this is not a one-sided affair where it's just me blessing and helping you. There are expectations for you to meet.

Look at Exodus 6. And this is taking him back to where he was revealing himself through Moses to his people. I'll start in verse 6. Wherefore say unto the children of Israel, I am the Lord and I will bring you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians and will rid you out from their bondage and I will redeem you with a stretched out arm and with great judgments and will take you to me for a people and look, and I will be to you a God and you shall know that I am the Lord.

It's not just about them getting somebody to protect them and redeem them and deliver them. But he's expecting to get a people for himself that will follow him and obey him and represent him.

He wants to get some pleasure out of this relationship. So it's a two-sided affair. Come back to chapter 15. It's a place of confrontation. This is not about gaining their trust.

This is not about telling them I can defend you or I can defeat your enemies and fight your battles or that I'm greater than all other gods. He's already performed that and established that.

[18:29] But this here is to confront his people, cause them to understand that the best life that they can possibly live and experience is conditioned upon their obedience to him and walking in the ways that he prescribes.

he must be allowed and revered and worshipped as their God. It's got to be a two-way street.

And so far, they've only been instructed to follow him and he will lead them. And he led them to a bitter place. He led them to a place where they're going to be confronted with a decision to make. because God is a God of confrontation. I don't mean the kind of road rage or like anger or expressing rage, nothing like that.

I mean, just God will confront you. He'll do it in a still and small voice inside of your spirit. And he'll speak to your heart and he'll confront you about a decision.

[19:33] He'll confront you about a word you said. He'll confront you while you're talking about somebody. He'll speak to you. He'll reveal it to you. And he likes to expose things to you.

He likes to confront man. And this bitter place is a place of confrontation. A place where he can push them to realize there's something they need to decide.

There's decisions to be made. Sometimes you can come to church and the preacher preaches and it's a bitter message. For some, it's just, it's good, it's normal, but for somebody else it's like, oh, I just don't like this.

I just don't like how that sounds. I don't like how it's making me feel. And it's because God is challenging you to see whether you're under his authority and whether you'll subject yourself to the word of God in all corners of your heart and he'll confront you and he'll confront you and you and you and just on his own way.

One day, one week, one Wednesday, one Sunday, one special meeting, he'll confront you. And then you like the messages about heaven. You like the messages about Christ taking your place and you're rejoicing and glorifying God in your salvation and you like the funny stories and you like the political jabs against the liberals or the Democrats and you like to sit and hear that come out of the pulpit.

[20 : 53] But what about when God confronts you about your sin? What about when God confronts you about your allegiance to him or about confessing him publicly or about walking with him every single day of your life?

Those are the ones, oh, I don't want to be confronted. You didn't come to church to get confronted by God, did you? You came to church to worship him, to see your brothers and sisters.

But God's a God of confrontation. He'll take you to a bitter place. He's not afraid of it. He insists upon it. He'll bring you right into it because he wants you to deal with something and that's God.

He wants to determine if you're surrendered to his will in every area or not. So it's a place of confrontation but that confrontation, the point of it is to turn into a commitment and it can be a place of commitment as well.

You see that at the beginning of verse 26 and he said, if, if thou wilt, that's their choice, isn't it? He's giving it to them in their plate saying, if thou wilt diligently hearken.

[22 : 05] That's a condition. If you hearken, then I won't put on you these diseases that I did on Egypt. There's a choice that needs to be made and the bitter place is a place that confronted them with the need to commit their way to the Lord and to make decision in their own life collectively, individually, that they are going to follow and obey the voice of the Lord their God.

There are days they're not far ahead that he is going to dictate their dress, their diet, the days that they will observe and worship and can't work.

He's going to put something on them. It's going to be a long list. And he's already telling them, if you'll obey me, then I'll do this.

And it's a place where they're to make a commitment to him. The bitter place is where they're confronted with a decision. a place to make a commitment to the ways of God and say, yes, Lord, we will diligently hearken to your voice.

We will do that which is right in your sight. We will give our ears to your commandments and keep all of your statutes. We will allow you to decide the rules for our lives.

[23 : 20] We'll let you do that. You are our God. God, you make the rules. They didn't come to this place thinking that way.

But there's a commitment to be made in this place, this bitter place. And the bitter place is a place that aids you and I in making decisions in our lives for the Lord.

It's a place where God can bring you to help you to establish some parameters in your life. Some boundaries, some convictions can be built and established in the bitter place because there is rules that you need to live by.

There are rules, there are parameters that need to be built up. There are walls that need to be built up in your life. And God's prompting you to draw a line, to establish a statute like Moses said at the end of 25 there.

He made for them a statute and an ordinance. And you develop that statute and say, this is how I'm going to live my life. It's going to be for the Lord Jesus Christ.

[24 : 32] In Genesis 28, a man named Jacob deceived his father. And his brother found out and he was in a rage and he's going to kill him. And Jacob fled toward his uncles.

But before he ever got there, the first night he spent was laying out there under the stars. And he's got his heart pumping. He's running for his life. He's going and barking on some new place.

He knows where he's heading far to the east, but he's never been there. He's not, he doesn't know what that's going to look like, if they're going to receive him, how that's going to go. He doesn't know he's going to meet Rachel right away. Right now he knows, I'm a dead man.

I deceived my dad. I stole from my brother. And they're going to kill me and I'm out of here. And he takes off. And he lays there under those stars in that nervous situation, fearful, and there the Lord shows up.

And Jacob vows a vow to the God of Israel. A vow that he keeps, a vow that turns that place into Bethel. And later on, the Lord shows up to him and says, hey, I'm the God of Bethel where you vowed that vow unto me.

[25 : 37] It's a place of a commitment. Do you remember Hannah in 1 Samuel? Chapter 1, she was in bitterness of soul. Couldn't have a son and she's crying to the God for a son and she's pleading with the Lord and that bitterness inside of her caused her to vow a vow to that God saying, you give me that son, I will give him right back to you.

All the days of his life, he's going to be consecrated to you. It's that bitter place that helps you make some commitments. It's a place of commitment. It's a place of reflection and of personal decision.

And so, the bitter place is a place of calibration, of confrontation as well as commitment. But I want you to, before we close, realize that the bitter place can always be manipulated by God.

That is, he leads you into a bitter place, into a place that you're just like, what in the world? How are we going to do anything with this bitter water? Well, that's nothing to the Lord. I mean, he's already got the plan out ahead and he knows that Elam's not far away either.

But what looks devastating to the children of Israel, what looks overwhelming and has really dropped them even lower, that's never an issue to God. And if God brings you to it, he can bring you through it.

[26 : 57] And if the Lord allows it in your life, then you just have to say, this is from the hand of God. This bitterness is for me. And I'll take it. The Lord Jesus Christ had a bitter cup to swallow.

He didn't want to take it, but he surrendered to it. He committed to it and he took it. And when you're powerless, God is not. And he can work this together for good.

And so, in verse number 25, he showed him a tree. He showed him a tree which when he had cast into the waters, the waters were made sweet.

Now that tree, I'm assuming, just looked like any other tree. If he asked Moses, Moses, I want you to find a tree, Moses would have probably looked for the best looking tree there was.

Or he would have looked for one that was real close to the water's edge and not been too hard because who wants to work more than you need to work when you're thirsty. But no, God showed him a tree. God had a tree, a special tree, a specific one.

[28 : 00] One that grew up before the other trees as a tender plant and as a root out of a dry ground. A tree that had no form nor comeliness. And when they're going to look for a tree, well, that tree has no beauty that we should desire that one, but God said that's the tree.

That tree can get rid of the bitterness. And there's a tree, thank God for the tree that the Lord Jesus Christ was hung up on and shed his blood that gave us liberty and gave us life and gave us atonement and gave us eternal redemption.

And the cross of Calvary is our tree that can take every bitter thing in this life and someday, in some way, make it sweet.

Work it together for good. Amen. There's a tree that can put an end to the bitterness.

But without that tree, there will only be bitterness and agonizing thirst that you can ask the rich man in hell in Luke 16, he just wanted a drop of water but he couldn't get it because he's just going to be tormented in the flame because there's no tree for him.

[29 : 19] Now this bitter place, God puts a tree, he has a way to make it sweet and I'm not here to go further onto that. The last thing I want us to consider in closing is that this tree or that this place is just temporary.

God brought him out of it. He healed it. He fixed it. They got enough to sustain him and then they went on to heal him in verse 27 where there are twelve wells of water. Nobody saw that coming, a well for each tribe, enough for everybody where they'd never feel that thirst.

They'd be completely quenched and satisfied. Three score and ten palm trees, what an impressive area. They'll never forget that place, Elim. But they'd like to forget that bitter place because that was ugly and in the moment it was painful.

Now, last week I'm just going to close with a little illustration here and something that I hope I take a little liberty to say. There was a family that came by to visit us.

They're friends of the Solomons. Their names are the Camp family and it was Jeremy and Amanda and their two teenage daughters and their young boy that was in that wheelchair and his name was Asher and you may have seen Asher had himself a dog with him here in the church.

[30 : 40] So, the dog did not say amen one time so, that's the last time he's invited here. but the family came because they're friends here of the Solomons.

But I want to just give a little back story to that family. This is the second time they've joined us in a service and you can't help but notice the young man in his wheelchair. Well, they're two first children, normal, healthy girls and just normal lives and then along the Lord gave them Asher and I don't know the details of the situation but it speaks for itself that he's in a wheelchair and very limited in his mobility and things like that and so the Lord gave him that child and in just a brief conversation I had with him he acknowledged that it was devastating it was hard it was bitter to have that in their life to realize the course of our lives are never going to be like they were.

They're completely changed from here on forward and initially this is hard this is a burden this is going to be tough and they surrendered to the Lord over it and in time and I can't give you the timeline of the whole dealings here but one thing I realized is that when God gave that child to that family the Lord knew that this was going to give them connections that they would never have had they lived in Florida they moved to California live in the Temecula area a little south of here and through the the situation with their son they got involved with a whole other community of people that have to deal with stuff like this and it's because of that that they got in touch with the Solomon family do you know the year?

2021 they got in touch with the Solomon family and this family was going through their what they raised in in the Judaism going to synagogue getting frustrated with the synagogue getting frustrated with the leadership getting frustrated that there's no life and no answers here and they just they walked away from it they got fed up with it they were dissatisfied and they had a relationship with a born again Christian named Jeremy Camp and Amanda Camp and that family and the relationship was so that that family was never pushing them too hard but they were telling them why don't you get a hold of a Bible why don't you read a Bible get a King James Bible and begin reading it and they influenced them and they did they got a hold of a Bible and they started reading the Bible in the New Testament and their story I think you know by now but maybe don't fully realize that it was that family that God used to get them to the Word of God to get them to Jesus Christ and here they are four of them saved sitting in this church every single Sunday morning but if I could take it back beyond when they met it's because of that boy Asher it's because God gifted that family with that boy that they now are seated in heavenly places in Christ Jesus and what was a bitter thing for the family to swallow and had to be hard you can imagine and continues to be it's turned out to work together for good for them and it makes me look at Asher and think how many 12, 13, 14 year old boys have a part in four souls getting saved how many healthy fully functional young men are going to church and have salvation in the blood of Christ and how many of them are doing anything with their life to influence somebody for Jesus Christ and yet that boy in his trials and in the bitterness that's upon him and their family

God has used and will continue to use for his glory the bitter place was a place of calibration for that family there was a confrontation as well are you going to use this for my glory are you going to give up on me there is surely a challenge to give this to God and they made the commitment to follow and obey and the rest is history in some regards but who knows what God will do with this family and who knows what God will continue to do with that family and how God can get glory but you didn't ask for the bitter place did you and you didn't want the bitter place but you need to realize it's necessary and if God led you to it then just receive it from his hand you say I don't like it and I just rather things be easy yeah I would too because I don't know better because I'm weak I'm a sissy [35 : 44] I don't want hardships and trials neither do you but our God guides us into those bitter places so that he can show us to rely upon that tree to turn it sweet so that he can show us that we need to fully trust and commit to him and it will end it's temporary if it's only temporary for this life it will be gone in glory I can assure you of that so don't fear the bitter place church if God leads us to it it's his hand obey trust follow don't murmur just get on your face and walk with him let's be dismissed in prayer our father we are thankful for the Lord Jesus Christ and that he bore that our sins in his own body on the tree he suffered an accursed death on a tree we thank you for turning

the bitterness of our sins into a sweet savor of eternal life and yet Lord along the way there's times in this life that you lead us to places that hurt we feel like we didn't deserve it it's not a good time and yet there it is and we're powerless so Lord help us to turn to you help us to submit to you help us to commit our lives to you and Lord if there's somebody here that's in Amara and if they're in it right now

I pray you give them strength and give them faith help them to look to the cross to gain strength in the Lord Jesus Christ and to go forward trusting you I invite you today to pray invite you this morning to talk things over with the Lord if there's something that's on your heart that's heavy don't leave here without addressing it before him