

Exodus 15:22-27

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- [0 : 00] Well, I don't know about you, but I love coming on Sunday and arriving in readiness for song. And this week is no exception.
- And what I love about Holy Trinity is that the music just might come from just about anywhere. I mean, as that offertory was going on, I was thinking Roy Orbison or Johnny Cash, one of the two.
- So minimalism, strength, beauty, the lyrics carry. Boy, don't we need our cup filled. Hollywood often makes sequels.
- A sequel is a common occurrence. If a movie does well, believe me, the money makers of L.A. are going to find a way to follow up with something that will expand on the storyline or the characters that energized us so the first time round.
- The single most important indicator of any movie's chances for a sequel, of course, is the box office success of the first one. You do poorly out of the gate and talk of producing a sequel is going to dry up fairly quickly.
- [1 : 34] In this way, then, I find the book of Exodus ironic. In one sense, it is a sequel. The opening word of the entire book is a conjunction.
- And. It is following on the heels of a story where God promised to bless all the peoples of the earth through Abram and his offspring.
- So a sequel we are in the midst of. And yet. It will follow with Leviticus and. Further books that almost make the whole scriptures look like a series.
- More than anything else. The irony, though, is it rises from a different set of circumstances. In Hollywood, something that's successful.
- Is followed up with more. When you're reading the scriptures, it's the lack of ultimate success that propels the producer to keep the story moving.
- [2 : 43] We need more stories about God and his plan to intend his promises to Abraham by saving a people himself. Not because the first run was a spectacular success.
- Instead, the early stories give us so many indicators that what was accomplished in those days had severe shortcomings. Take our text today for an example.
- And I hope you've got it in front of you. Exodus 15, 22 to 27. Just a brief vignette here in the history of Israel. To this point, the picture show of Exodus has been rising in action to the salvific acts of God.
- God saves. They're in slavery, but now he has saved them. And upon saving them, the great song, which we looked at last week, has been sung.
- God's salvation has come. The people have sung song in antiphonal response. But now, here we are.
- [3 : 59] For the first time, there's an obvious disconnect between this salvation and what was truly needed. Israel's external circumstances have been forever changed for the better, but the interior world of their collective heart seems to have been, in some sense, untouched.

This is the first story in a string of stories, all the way through chapter 18, that will cry to the reader, God saves, and we need a sequel!

Because there are so many shortcomings. I mean, just take a look. You're just going to see where are we in the narrative. The grumbling comes today.

It will be followed by this rising negative story on bread and the lack of it in 16. It will return to the basic necessities of water and the people's rebellion in 17.

You will see that Israel, although saved in 17, still has earthly enemies it needs to deal with. Whatever salvation this is, it hasn't solved everything.

[5 : 14] And then you get that great old father-in-law Jethro advice in 18, which is necessary because Moses is spending all his day doing what?

Adjudicating law cases among the people of God. God saves. Chapter 1 to 15. But we now pivot.

And we see the demonstrated need for a sequel. Well, what's the primary indicator here?

Verses 22 to 24. I'm just calling it Israel's grumbling. Let me read it again. Then Moses made Israel set out from the Red Sea, and they went into the wilderness of Shur.

They went three days in the wilderness and found no water. When they came to Marah, they could not drink the water of Marah because it was bitter. Therefore, it was named Marah. And the people grumbled against Moses, saying, What shall we drink?

[6 : 19] In all likelihood, it had been called Marah previous to their own arrival. The people around it knew that it probably had a salt content that just made it undrinkable.

Can you imagine, though? Here's the deal. Can you imagine being saved on a Saturday, singing songs on a Sunday, only to find yourself cantankerous on a Wednesday?

Yeah, welcome to Israel. Welcome to our own heart. This is the precise state of Israel at this point in the text.

They have been brought through towering waters of salvation and judgment, only to be bitter and testy over water three days on.

Now, the real frightening thing, and while you won't know it unless you've read this before, and I know a number of you are exposing yourself to the Scriptures with us for the first time around, and I commend you for that.

[7 : 27] Keep reading. But for those who have looked ahead, this moment in the text is actually a foreshadowing of something much more severe.

This will be the repetitive, habitual pattern of the generation of those who were saved out of Egypt, to the point where none of these, over the age of 20, will enter into the promised rest.

They will all die in a state, and the New Testament will record very clearly, as the Old Testament puts forward, it was because of their unbelief. So what looks like grumbling here, I identify with that state.

Is a frightening foreshadowing of a life that disbelieves. The issue, okay, God saves me, but that was Sunday.

Today's Wednesday. And let me tell you the salt content of the life around me. And the question is, can he sustain me?

[8 : 42] Many of you know I've been a fan of Augustine over the last five or six years. This ancient, fourth century genius in all areas of life.

A Renaissance man long before we had the Renaissance. He founded a monastery and was dealing with community. And he writes this, Let no one grumble in whatever he has to do, lest he incur the judgment of the grumblers.

What was the judgment of the grumblers? That the very things that happened to Egypt, judgments and diseases and disasters, befell the entire generation.

So the significance is there. I mean, Augustine's words are strong because nothing pollutes the local religious assemblies more quickly than grumbling.

Well, there it is. Israel's grumbings. What will God do in light of it?

[9 : 57] We've already seen what he did in light of Pharaoh's hardened, calloused heart. He wouldn't put up with it.

This is where it's really interesting in the text, though, because Israel's grumbling is actually met in this instance with God's grace.

Just take a look. Verse 24, they're asking Moses, What shall we drink? And he cried to the Lord. I imagine he did. And the Lord showed him a log, like a tree, and he threw it into the water, and the water became sweet.

Now, this is really something. If you are a naturalist here this morning, you just say, You know what? I'm coming on because I know some folks here, but I'm not a supernaturalist, and I know we've got a lot of you here.

You're going to look at this log story. You're going to read it in one of two ways, it seems to me. This is either going to be, for you, some kind of biblical fairy tale.

[11 : 11] Here we go again. I can't make anything of this other than that. Or you might be more reflective and astute and say, Well, there are probably natural things that could have happened on this.

I mean, ancient world, they're treating water to be able to drink it. And the log, whether bits of log were thrown into water pots or a large bit thrown into the pool itself, something happened chemically where it basically attracted the minerals, the salt, and took it onto itself so that the water itself became clear.

This is the way we do it in your own home with water heaters today. I mean, a water heater has a copper rod in it, a log, as it were, and what it does is it actually attracts the minerals and the deposits to it so that the water you get tastes good.

Well, the problem with those water heaters, though, at least as I was on a well for a while, man, the smell of the water was brutal. I mean, it might not have tasted bitter, but it smelled like rotten eggs until the point where in my own house, I took the copper log out so I didn't have to smell that anymore.

Give me all the minerals you can give me. They said, well, you don't want to do that. Your water heater is going to rust out within a year. And I said, I'll replace it in a year, but I can't handle the smell of water.

[12 : 37] I just built that in. That was part of the expense of living on land with a well. I don't know how we get into that. Let's come. He puts a log in.

And if you're a naturalist, you're saying, well, that probably accounts for what it is. But more to the point, I would just say this to you. There's no way you can read this text and just end on those two, fairy tale or some kind of fundamental scientific understanding.

that you're reading literature that presupposes the existence of God from the very opening word in the beginning, God. And you're reading literature that speaks about God's activity in life.

And you'll have to at least wrestle with the original reader's understanding of the text was that God did something. Whether he did it through first causes in a natural way or not, he was active.

And anyone would at least have to acknowledge that that is going on here. He was gracious.

[13 : 52] They grumbled. He was gracious. Now, what was the point behind all this for Israel? Fortunately, the narrator steps in at this point.

Did you notice how the narrator takes over? And the narrator now provides the interpretation of the whole scene. And he does so with these words in 25b and on.

There the Lord made for them a statute and a rule. And there he tested them, saying, If you will diligently listen to the voice of the Lord your God and do that which is right in his eyes and give ear to his commandments and keep all his statutes, I will put none of the diseases on you that I put on the Egyptians, for I am the Lord your healer.

The interpreter, the narrator, now provides you what's really going on. Israel's grumblings I have seen in narrative form.

God's grace I have walked through. And the narrator now says, And all of this was here because God tested them. In other words, the reason this happened, this lack of decent water after three days and your canteen ran dry, was that God was testing them.

[15 : 10] Having taken them through water, He uses water to get a grasp of how far they've come and the material that He wants them to know like any good teacher.

So let me just sit here for a moment. Israel is tested. Now let's make a distinction. To tempt someone is to entice them to do wrong.

That's not what's going on here with this word. To test someone, as anyone going back into the educational world this fall will know, whether you'll be giving the tests or getting them, to test someone is to measure what they have right.

To entice someone is to tempt them to do wrong. To test someone is not necessarily adversarial.

It's just measuring how are you coming on. That's what God is doing here. He is saying to the people that He saved, how much progress are you making with me?

[16 : 24] Now, and that's why it's an abomination for humans to test God. Now, the scriptures throughout will say, you know, don't test God.

Why? Because it doesn't make sense for us to present an exam to the Creator to see how much He's getting right along the way.

Try that, try that with your teacher here, let alone with the one in the heavens. But God should, and God does, test us in hopes of measuring our progress and solidifying our commitments.

In one sense, then, when Israel finds herself without good drinking water, God is merely inquiring to see if they trust Him for the basic necessities of life.

I mean, this is the most basic necessity of life. Having delivered them through waters, He wants to know if they'll patiently look to Him to supply water.

[17 : 42] I've done the big thing for you, and you sing the song of the sea. But will you wait quietly by and by until I provide your daily need?

Now, see, what that really indicates then is that it's all the daily things that actually are the big things for most of us.

In the end, verse 27, the way the story ends is beautiful. If it opens with Israel's grumblings, then the response is God's grace, and the rationale is that Israel is being tested, what you find is that God is proven true.

That's what you find. That's the way the text rolls. Verse 27, Then they came to Elim, where there were twelve springs of water and seventy palm trees, and they encamped there by the water.

In other words, you know, hey, I put a log in one to make it okay for you, but do you have any idea that I actually plan on planting you under palm trees with decent water that require no copper rod to make it work well?

[18 : 54] That's what he did. God proves himself true. That's what this old hymn used to talk about when we don't sing it much anymore, where, you know, I have proved him or and or.

It doesn't mean that you've tested him or that you're angry with him. It means that your situation in life has come to understand that he proves true time and time and time and time again.

And he does it over water. Now, I don't know what your condition is this week, but I know this to be a universal truth. That we can sing songs on Sunday and by Wednesday our soul's loyalty and convictions are live and in play.

God, can you get me through today? God, can you supply for tonight?

God, I cannot see my way to the end of the month. This is the lot of those who look to God for salvation.

[20 : 15] This is why you never get any further beyond one day with God. This is why Jesus, if it was the baptizer who was engaged with him on how one prays and they wanted to know how to pray and Jesus teaches them as John had taught his give us this day our daily bread or in one sense the Son of God is indicating by stance daily trust for daily needs and he never gets beyond it and yet we want to always get beyond it and who doesn't want to get beyond it but this is what God is doing and in the end he's proven true well so much for the text today in its setting I hope you see that I want to do two more things where does this thing go by way of sequel and what does it mean by way of significance by way of sequel in the near term as the

Hebrew scriptures continue to write themselves out this cycle of Israel's grumblings and God's grace just repeats itself in manifold ways this sequel continues to come and the more you read get this in the Old Testament not the New the more you read in the Old Testament you discover that God is very forgiving not this Old Testament God of wrath and the New Testament God of love no it's actually just the opposite in the Old Testament he's incredibly forgiving and when I arrive in the New Testament he has put a king on a tree and calls him judge of the living and the dead so the apostolic record is you have got to deal with Jesus as judge whereas the Old Testament is filled with love and compassion and grace and overflowing that's the way the Bible is actually read according to the apostolic interpretation but

I guess you could say in the near term the sequel is Israel is constantly looking to act on their better half the better side of their interior world and they're never quite able to conquer this thing completely I always get a kick out of it when politicians and it's usually politicians and preachers too I suppose who say that we're all basically good and we could just tap into that good side of ourselves long enough the Beatles line all we need is love but then we forget that they broke up and so what happens in the interior makeup of the human soul is this ritual repetition of calling upon the better side of ourselves I'm not going to grumble next time and indeed we even build in things to help us remember that and it works for a time but you and I both know that the real problem is one that can't be conquered stuff controls!

me! my anger controls me! My lips let loose I'm not in control of myself that's the problem of the human condition so that's what happens the dark side keeps rising now fortunately God gave Israel these rituals to walk out to kind of call yourself back so this whole wilderness experience in the scriptures becomes celebrated annually in something called the feast of the booths the feast of the booths for 40 years they didn't have a home they put the palms over the top a couple of reeds in the ground and you would camp out once a year and you would celebrate for a seven day period that God sustained me in the wilderness he gave me food he gave me water he got me through and they would remind themselves of this time and time again this is even true in today's Hyde Park community within the

Jewish constituency I mean this is a large celebration it'll happen again this fall it happens in my own condominium a six flat you'll actually go in the basement on that week and one of the families which is a Jewish family they will erect a booth in the basement because they are calling themselves to the ritual reminder that I'm not to grumble God does provide we're constantly trying to remind ourselves that but this is the difference it never fully works we gotta come back to it every year the feast though when the temple was up there was a feast Sukkoth I'm not sure if I'm pronouncing it correctly hard to give it to me Sukkoth a more stubborn end to the T water normally wine at the temple would be poured out during this seven day long celebration on the temple but once a year they would pour water on it as well to remember that

[25 : 49] God provided water and so they would go while the temple was up and priests would go to the river and they would draw water out of vases like three of them and they would walk them through the city back into the temple to the sound according to the Talmud of you know trumpets blaring and dancing and singing and they would pour the water over the altar to help them remember that God provides and then comes Jesus John 7 he's in Jerusalem while this festival's going on and he watches day one go and day two and day three and it comes to day seven which is the great day where they had this final ceremony and the pouring of the water over you won't believe how he decides to take the reins and indicate that the sequel has found fulfillment this

Jewish itinerant preacher takes this celebratory moment to stand in the temple and this is the way it's recorded on the last day of the feast the great day Jesus stood up and cried out ready for this I mean this had to just be cutting through everything I mean you have the priest pouring the water and all of a sudden from the back or somewhere to the side in an elevated way here is Jesus the Nazarene if anyone thirsts let him come to me and drink whoever believes in me as the scripture has said out of his heart will flow rivers of living water water I had to be chilling and then

John says now he this he said about the spirit whom those who believed in him who received for as yet the spirit had not been given because Jesus was not yet glorified see in the Old Testament all these images of water connect in the New Testament to the Holy Spirit that's the connection so the external washings become a spirit internal cleaning Jesus himself says I will give you water namely he is life he is the light of the world but he will give you the spirit so that out of your heart will flow living waters that's why today's prayer was so powerful in our midst because we are asking for justice and righteousness to roll down where does it!

come from it can't come from the human soul on his own or her own at least not in any clear consistently applied way but when the spirit of the living God begins to walk out in what you do on these streets and in your profession and you begin to ask God when you go Lord may your spirit help me accomplish something for your ways in the world both in righteousness and justice and salvation and the whole thing the well being of the place we live we're looking for waters to be rolling down all over Hyde Park in Chicago it comes from where though the Holy Spirit you can't do this you already know this we get so frustrated with ourselves because we continue to fail at this well I think that's where the sequel goes to the church at work so let's just talk about the significance and with this

I close there's a difference between having a relationship with God and doing religion with God religion or ritual continually attempts to appease God indicating to him I know I'm falling short but you know I am offering you something I'm giving it another run by this Wednesday God that's ritual that's religion you work with God according to a set of rules you accept me God because you know I'm giving it a good run now a relationship is totally different when you have a relationship with God well your your your activity your obedience your justice your righteousness your your conversations this week the holding of your temper is something that the spirit within you begins to well up and come out from you now so don't forget that so what

[31 : 02] I'm calling some of you to today is to commit your life to Jesus Christ through whom you'll get living water by that I mean the Holy Spirit which is a deposit of the world to come where God will give you everything you need for every day throughout all eternity now notice that that's when Christianity then is actually dealing with a heart condition not some kind of head condition or some kind of external thing your heart is what's needed to be changed you don't have control of your own will you don't but the spirit can begin to reorient that and begin to weed that stuff out and begin to conform you to the likeness of Christ where somebody looks at you two months from now and goes wow you're just a bit different than you were before and you can't say yeah that's because I'm really digging down and going after it no you say well

I learned that in my grumbling God is gracious and in his son he saves in my dependence upon him somehow he's helping me get along in this wilderness world but but for those who I would say today some of you need to do that today you need to do that today you need to give up on getting it together and get on with the one who can grab you from the inside out I'll talk more to you about that just call me up we'll sit down but I also want to say something to those of you who have who have done that and yet you you're still struggling this passage then is a passage of warning!

less what I will be read by future generations as foreshadowed moments that actually indicated my disbelief all along so I gotta this is a great little text for people who don't know God and you walk out of here skipping like calves from the stall you're like whoa what a burden off me this is the best day of my life I went to Holy Trinity today and I realized for the first time it's already walking with him you're going to walk out of here and go whoa my weekly pattern better not be a foreshadowing of my disbelief let me stop on this for a moment again Augustine with his rules this is the rule of Augustine chapter 5 I think 39 those in charge of the pantry now remember he's talking about community those in charge of the pantry like where you go to get your food or of clothing and books should serve their brothers and sisters without grumbling this is why

Peter says practice hospitality without grumbling let me put it to you this way notice what Augustine is saying it's the people who are placed in charge of things who are instructed against grumbling it's the people that have access to stuff that Augustine calls out on grumbling now all you gotta do is go to an impoverished third world context or particular neighborhoods in the city and you will see this adage to hold generalization to be true that there are people without a thing who are joyful and trusting God and have everything to teach us and there are people with everything that are the greatest grumblers going on the planet now I'm calling myself out on this there's nothing I lack so why is it that my heart rises up in grumbling it's an indictment

I've been on this road too long for this way I love it Augustine talks to the people who got charge of things says stop your grumbling Lisa's dad my wife's father passed away about 27 years ago of cancer went through a rough run down those final years never did I hear one word of grumbling although he was a quiet man by nature so we didn't hear many words from him on a good day but he kind of let me just get you the gist of his philosophy this is the gist of the philosophy of my wife of 31 years my wife's dad I've heard it from her over the years something if you're going to end up doing something do it do it right away and do it with a good attitude see he understood that it was a matter of the heart if you're going to end up doing something don't like dig your heels in get all angry about it and grumbling about it and then eventually have to be pulled like a mule to get about it he said no if you're going to do it do it right away and do it with a good attitude in other words no grumbling here get on with it well

[36 : 47] I wish he was around he could preach a sermon or two on this well let me shut it down because the little ones are waiting God saves us God will daily test us to measure our progress on whether we trust that he will sustain us all the way through this wilderness world so be freed come to him today and for those of us who are already on the way let us be careful how we walk and let us take care with what we say for out of the heart a man speaks our heavenly father these ancient texts!

Causing us to read on bring us back next week having applied what we know this week may we trust Christ may we trust you indeed that satisfaction we long for may we find it in you in Jesus name amen!