

Water from the Rock

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[0 : 00] May God bless these readings from his holy word as we turn to consider the theme of our thoughts or sermon this morning, water from the rock.

Four things to focus on in our hearts this morning. A complaint repeated, the Israelites complaining again against Moses and against God for the way that they believed they were being treated. And then the call to go forward, God giving Moses the call not to go back, not to go back into Egypt, but to keep going forward, certainly ultimately to the promised land.

Then a command to be obeyed, what God commanded Moses to do there at that rock at a place called Horeb. Very important place, as we'll see in a moment. And then finally, really bringing all this together, the Christ, the one true Savior, the Christ to be trusted.

Water from the rock. You know, it's one of the, I think, the saddest and most distressing aspects of a believer's life, that he doesn't learn.

[1 : 11] He doesn't learn from God's gracious provisions for him or her. The believer who keeps on repeating the same mistakes again and again and again.

And these mistakes that really boil down to a lack of trust in God, a lack of trust in God's perfect and righteous ways with you. You know, God the Lord, he'll test you.

And yet, instead of continuing to trust in him always, we put God to the test. You know, when after his testing of your faith, you believe and you move on in faith and do so for a time.

But then another time of testing comes and you lapse and you fail the test and you start challenging God as to why God put you through these particular times.

You've been challenging God to act on your timescale and your ways rather than trusting him continually. And certainly that's what we're seeing here with the Israelites.

[2 : 15] They failed and failed and failed again, failed to continue to trust in God for all that God was doing for them and with them. And it's that failure, of course, that we must learn from and apply it in our own lives.

But the priority, surely, in our focus in this passage, and of course the related passage in 1 Corinthians 10, the focus has to be the mercy and grace of God. How God responds to these times when we do fail, when we do lack trust in this.

His provisions for us. And so, ultimately to see in the passage here, the mercy of God, the compassion of God, that God gives what he gives out of his grace.

And above all, the blessing of God giving to you that which you need always. And of course, what you need always, the Lord Jesus.

You need that life-giving source, that life-giving power, that water from the rock, the rock that's Jesus. And so that's what we have to see here in this passage in Exodus, the bigger picture.

[3 : 22] So focus on God in your hearts. Don't focus on, you know, other things. We're here to worship God. So worship him. Look to him. Give him thanks for his grace towards you.

Even in his continually providing for you all that you need, even in the Lord Jesus Christ. Because Jesus is the true water of life.

He's that great provider. He's that rock. He's that rock in whom you put your trust. Christ. So what do we see here then in regards to that complaint, the complaint repeated?

Well, just think for a moment. Just life in general. You know, in life, the tendency of the human heart is never to be satisfied.

You know, there's always something we're not entirely happy about. Maybe it's the weather. We're always complaining about the weather. Maybe it's something to do with our own politics.

[4 : 24] Maybe it's something to do with our favorite team. We're reading Proverbs. It's a rather quaint proverb. Proverbs chapter 30. The leech has two daughters.

Give and give, they cry. Three things are never satisfied. Four never say enough. There's lack of, it's been satisfied in God's provision for us.

Because when it comes to God the Lord, when it comes to his ways with his people, we can so easily grumble and complain about God's ways with us.

You know, I once heard an illustration that I think really sums this up perfectly. It's the case of a sheep that wanders away. Wanders away from the flock and gets to a particular location, a very dangerous promontory perhaps, an inaccessible place.

And then that sheep is rescued, taken back to the flock. And what happens? The same sheep goes to the same place of danger that it was rescued from before. And of course has to be rescued again.

[5 : 30] Isn't that the case with so many of us? You know, returning to the same sin. Even the sin of lack of contentment in God. That sin of not trusting him and his ways.

Not giving him that trust for his perfect providence towards you. And we grumble. We complain when God gives to us what he gives out of his love and his grace.

And we complain of what God keeps from us that we think we need. And no, God's ways are perfect. Just as with the Israelites here. Because for the third time, if you've been with us through these passages, for the third time, and certainly what appears just to be the third month of the exodus from Egypt, the third time they're not satisfied.

I mean, and yet they've no reason to be dissatisfied. They've got the pillar of cloud before them. God has promised his presence with the people. It's there. It's there for them to see.

They're being fed daily, as we saw last week. We've fed daily with the manna from heaven. God's provided for them at every stage of the journey up to that point.

[6 : 43] He's tested their faith. And he's shown that he's provided for them. But now when this next test comes, this next test of faith, what do we find?

They're going back to their old ways. They're grumbling against God's leaders. And ultimately, grumbling against God himself. And what's the grumble about this time?

Well, the grumble is, well, there's no water for them. But yet, hadn't God provided water for them before? They'd been at a previous resting place.

Obviously, in their journey, they're going to have to stop every so often. In the previous resting place, God had given them water. God had promised that he'd be with them, to take them to the promised land.

His presence was with them always. They shouldn't have grumbled. God had given them exactly what they needed at the right time, at the right place.

[7 : 39] But they were discontent. They were discontent. The people start grumbling again. They're back to their old ways. They're thinking that their life in Egypt was so much more preferable than their time in the desert.

And the fact they're complaining again shows that they hadn't learned. They hadn't learned from the past. They hadn't learned that they had to strengthen their faith.

That faith that was so weak and so fragile. And that lack of faith that led to discontent. And, you know, surely this brings a lesson to ourselves.

To you and to me. Because we can be so easily lacking in maturity of faith. And need to know that we are to contently trust in God.

Because God's the faithful one. He's the one who is altogether lovely in his love for you. And so be reminded and apply what you learn.

[8 : 44] Well, as somebody just read just last week. About that trust that we need to develop. I need to develop. You need to develop. Trust is accepting what God sends in your life.

Whether you understand it or not. Trust is accepting what God sends in your life. Whether you understand it or not. That is a quote from Tim Keller.

You know, we can't always understand God's ways for us. We can't. That's not what we're to do. But his ways are not my ways.

His ways are the right ways. And so we have to echo the words of Job. Job, the Old Testament saint. When Job said to God, I've uttered what I did not understand.

Things too wonderful for me which I did not know. You know, you can all look back. Even look at your present situation now.

[9 : 45] And even at times when you just weren't content with the way that God dealt with you. There will be times when God caused you to wait for him.

And in these times, instead of waiting with patience, waiting with trust, you became agitated. And you struggled to remain consistent in your faith. But as was said to me so many years ago, and I've never forgotten it.

And I know I've said it before and I'll say it again. God is too kind to be cruel. Now, how can I come before him? How can you come before him with grumbling and complaining of his ways with you? When we're assured from God's word, his infallible word. That he's loved you with an eternal love. So that complaint, the repeated complaint, let's learn to continue to trust in God, yes, at all times. And to listen to that call to go forward as we see here in the passage. I mean, think of Moses here. I mean, he's obviously perplexed at this latest outburst from the Israelites.

[10 : 56] In fact, I think more than just perplexed. He's exasperated. I mean, this isn't the first time this has happened. Twice already the people have gone to him. They've blamed him for their predicament.

And Moses has had to show them that God is in control. God's going to provide for them and has provided for them exactly what they need. But now there's this third complaint in as many months. And, you know, Moses, he's exasperated. What shall I do with this people? Well, they're almost ready to stone me. What's he to do? Well, the Lord gives him the answer.

He's to move forward. He's to move forward. He's not to go back to Egypt. But he's to go forward. And he's to go walk in front of the people.

He's got to go ahead of the people. And he's going to take that staff, that stick. Remember that stick that he'd used on other occasions. The stick that he raised when God parted the Red Sea, for example.

[12 : 00] And he's going to take elders with them as witnesses to what's about to happen there at the place called Horeb. And that's important. And that's important. Why Horeb? A name that doesn't maybe mean much.

But it's a very, very important place. Because Horeb is the mountain range on which Mount Sinai is located. Because it's Mount Sinai that Moses is about to meet with God.

It's Mount Sinai in which God's going to give Moses the law. It's in Mount Sinai that Moses is going to hear the law. He's going to hear God's commands. And Moses gives these commands to the people.

These commands that will tell the people how they're to honour and glorify God. And Moses is to go first to that place. Now, obviously, it's some distance away from where the people are, where the people are camped.

But it's not just the elders who are going to be Moses' witness. It's a miracle that's about to happen. But God's going to be with them. God's presence is going to be there at that mountain, at that mountain range.

[13 : 10] To reveal and to indicate that it's God who's providing for the people. And so that moving forward, moving forward with the presence of God.

That's a lesson. That's an indication not just for Moses, but for your life and my life. Because God directs you to move forward in faith.

Now, Moses was asked, quite commanded, to go forward in faith. It's what he's been doing since he's left Egypt. But at the same time, it's for you and for me to move forward in faith.

Don't look back. Don't allow maybe the thoughts of times past somehow that appeared so rosy and trouble-free to keep you, as it were, back from going forward in faith in the Lord.

You're on a journey. A journey of faith. Go forward in that journey. Trusting in God at all times.

Because it's that attitude of, you might say, forward-looking faith.

[14 : 14] That's what the Apostle Paul wrote to the church in Philippi. Forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead.

I press on towards the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. See, Paul didn't want to look back at his past sins. He didn't want to look back at these sins as if they were still unforgiven.

He didn't want to remain in the past as if the past was some kind of refuge. Yes, of course he'd look back at the time when he was converted. He'd look back at that time when the Lord Jesus stepped into his life and saved him.

Of course he'd look back with gratitude at what God had done for him. Just as I'm sure Moses, many times Moses looked back at these times when God stepped into his life.

And God worked miraculous power even as Moses witnessed that power. But Moses was on a journey as with the Israelites. Moses was on that journey to move forward.

[15 : 17] And in that journey, they had to stop at that place at Horeb, at that Mount Sinai. Because that was the place where God would meet the people in that drama.

That incredible drama of God giving the law. But of course, ultimately the people were heading to the promised land. Going forwards and not backwards.

And you who are in Christ, look forward in faith. Because the Lord Jesus, he's the good shepherd. He's leading you. He's going ahead of you. He's directing you. Leading you to the land of promise. That ultimate promise. The promise of heaven itself. It's that place where Jesus has promised that he's preparing a place for you.

You're not there yet. But you cling to that promise and look forward in faith. Trusting that what Jesus has promised is as good as fulfilled. And he's leading you there.

[16 : 22] He's leading you to that place of the eternal presence of God. Forward in faith. But just to say this before we move on.

There are actually many, even at this moment, who are claiming that Bible-believing Christians prefer to look back and not forward.

You know, saying that somehow to keep God's law, to keep to the truth of Scripture, to keep to our Bible principles, principles grounded on the gospel, people are still saying, that's moving, that's going backwards, that's the wrong place to be somehow.

Let's, you know, go down the progressive route. Forward equals progression. You know, adapting to the modern mindset. Keep to the culture of the day. Get away from these biblical principles that keep you back rather than keep you moving forward.

But that kind of forward progression is not what we're seeing here. It's not a kind of moving forward into the world's mindsets. No, that's moving forward in faith is continue to keep your eye on the Lord Jesus as he leads you, as he guides you, as he calls you to trust in him at all times in the life that he gives you.

[17 : 42] And that freedom that he gives you. That moving forward in faith isn't a restriction of freedom. It's a moving forward in the freedom that God gives you. That freedom to love one another.

That freedom in the power of sin. That freedom to live in the presence of God forever. Look forward. Go forward in faith.

These are God's commands, not just to Moses, but to you and to me, to obey, to keep on obeying. In fact, there's more obedience to be looked at here, the command to be obeyed, that God gave to Moses.

Moses was to, as we're told there in verse 5, pass on before the people. In other words, go ahead of the people. As we saw, take some of the elders with him.

Take that stick that he had already used when he struck the Nile and blood came from the Nile and the same stick, as we said, that indicated God's presence, parting the Red Sea.

[18 : 47] And then God says, I'll stand before you there in the rock at Horeb and you shall strike the rock. There's the command. You shall strike the rock and water shall come out of it and the people will drink.

And then we're told, Moses did so in the sight of the elders of Israel. So Moses does as the Lord commands. He does go ahead of the people. He does take elders with him.

He does take that staff with him. He does strike the rock as God commanded him to strike the rock. And water flows from that rock. You see, Moses had obeyed God.

Later in the New Testament, we're told of Moses as the man of faith. And this man of faith, he trusted God. He trusted that God would lead him to that source of water. Moses didn't doubt God's word.

And that contrast with the people, the people who'd failed to obey God, the people who'd failed to obey God's word. And that contrast between Moses' faith and the people's lack of faith, what we see there and the place names that Moses gives to that place where water came from.

[20 : 00] They're all, I love place names. And these place names, certainly, place names indicate so much of a location. Not just in biblical times, of course, present day. But there are two Hebrew

names Moses gives to the place.

Massah, which means testing. And Meribah, which means quarreling. Because Moses gave these place names to indicate that the people hadn't trusted in God.

These two names that characterize the people. people who'd quarreled with God and then the people who tested God's provision for them. Even saying, is the Lord among us?

Is the Lord among us or not? See, Moses was faithful to God's commands. But the people still had so much to learn about obeying God and His word.

So that really begs the question, where do you stand in relation to God the Lord?

[21 : 02] Are you with Moses doing what God asks you to do, all that God asks you to do? Are you following God's word because God's word is given to you in His love and His mercy?

Do you hear His word and do it? Because isn't that surely the mark of a believer, a true believer in the Lord Jesus? You hear His word and you do His word.

That's what Jesus taught. That's what Jesus said in the parable of the wise and foolish builders.

The man who built his house in sand. Somebody who heard the words of Jesus but didn't do them.

But the man who heard Jesus' words and did these words compared to the man who built his house in what? On the rock. And of course, bring that to application.

That rock is Jesus. That rock that the miracle of the water from the rock points us to. That miracle that tells us of the Christ to be trusted.

[22 : 06] You know, this episode that we read off in Exodus 17 happened something like 1500 years before Jesus came from heaven to earth and Jesus became man for us.

And see then what's happening in this passage in Exodus that points to Jesus. Let's look at the picture again. God had provided for the people there in the desert.

He provided through the miracle of God's grace. He provided life-giving water. That water that would last for the entirety of their time in that particular area.

It was that water that truly satisfied. Psalm 78 tells us of that. Verse 15 and 16 tells us of that that that water supply was abundant.

He split rocks in the wilderness and gave them drink abundantly as from the deep. He made streams come out of the rock and cause waters to flow down like rivers. So God was showing his faithfulness towards his people.

[23 : 07] He was showing them that they had no excuse. no excuse not to trust God. He was showing them that he is the all-faithful one whom our faith has to be constant.

Now bring this to Jesus. That's why we read there in 1 Corinthians 10.4 when Paul writes of God's people there in the desert. They drank from the spiritual rock that followed them and the rock was Christ.

The people drank from that spiritual rock. In other words the source of that water in the desert wasn't by some kind of natural phenomenon that just happened now and again.

No. It was by God's giving that the people were kept alive. Now we might even say in one sense yes it was the Lord Jesus there in the desert who provided the Israelites with that water from the rock.

but there's a greater sense surely that anticipation of the full measure of that water of life that comes only from Christ the rock because it's the Lord Jesus Christ the rock in whom you build your life on.

[24 : 21] It's on Jesus in Jesus that you keep building your life and know that new life in him and we might say then that you are nourished continually refreshed revived by the water of life the Lord Jesus.

Remember what Jesus said of himself whoever believes in me shall never thirst. Remember what he said to the woman of Samaria whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never be thirsty forever.

The water that I will give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life. Do you know that water?

Do you know that water from the rock? Are you drinking from that life-giving water? Are you being continually refreshed in Christ nourished by him?

Are you as it were being kept alive in him alive eternally? If that's the case rejoice and give thanks for that water that never runs out.

[25 : 30] But if you haven't yet come to Jesus if you haven't yet tasted from that life-giving water you come to him now. He's not going to turn you away.

You come as you are and you'll know eternal life in him. You'll know Jesus as the rock of your salvation. So pray that even after these thoughts in this great passage that our minds and hearts will be the more turned towards the Lord Jesus Christ the true water of life the true rock of our salvation and that we'll know that in him and him alone we are life and life eternal.

Amen. Let us pray. Lord we thank you and praise you for that life-giving source that is the Lord Jesus he who gives and gives and gives again so that we might never perish but have everlasting life.

Lord we ask your blessing upon this time of worship may we know that you have called us to worship you and we pray Lord that our lives indeed will be our lives that continually worship you in spirit and in truth.

So hear us Lord as we continue before you even now and we pray Lord these things in Jesus name Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.