

The Lord who Heals

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[0 : 0 0] May God bless these readings from this Holy Word as we see this morning, as we see that great message, that great truth, God making himself known as the Lord who heals.

And three aspects to that great theme that we read there in the passage, particularly the second passage, where we see, first of all, the bitterness revealed, the bitterness in the hearts of the Israelites when they had no water for three days.

And following on from that, the testing that God gave to the Israelites, testing their faith, testing their commitment to continue to follow God.

And then thirdly, the healing provided that God showed and God gave through the command that he gave to Moses, as we'll see in the passage.

The Lord who heals. How many times have you been, as it were, you've been on the mountaintop? In other words, you've been strong in faith.

[1 : 0 8] You've had a real zeal for the Lord. You've rejoiced in his goodness there on that mountaintop, really strong in the Lord. But only a short time later, sinking.

Maybe sinking in the valley of despair or falling in some kind of sin, certainly falling in some kind of faithlessness. The faith that you had, that you thought was so secure, that faith crumbling.

Crumbling almost to nothing because of some particular affliction, maybe some change in your circumstances. And you become, whether it be tempted or even, you become bitter against God.

Some time ago, remember, Andy was preaching on the book of Ruth. And remember the story when Naomi, Naomi from Israel, had gone to Moab. And Naomi had lost her husband there, her two sons.

And when she returned back to Israel, she told the people, don't call me Naomi. Don't call me by the name that means pleasant. Call me Mara. Call me bitter.

[2 : 2 2] She was bitter against God for the way that God had dealt with her in her life. And you know, it can be the case with believers today. We can, at times, become bitter against God.

And that bitterness, it's a wasting away in your heart, in your life. It's a wasting that really brings no peace and no joy in your life. And there, for the Israelites, there in their journey to the promised land.

Remember what had happened to them up to this point. They'd left Egypt. They'd left the slavery of Egypt. God had, through the plagues, God had moved Pharaoh to allow the people to leave Egypt.

And then, by the miracle of God's parting the Red Sea, the Israelites had crossed through the sea in dry land. And yet, the Egyptians that followed them, they were drowned and the waters came together again.

The people had seen God's power. They'd seen how God was working for them. They'd been led by God in the pillar of cloud by day, the pillar of fire by night.

[3 : 30] They'd seen so much of God's presence with them. And yet, when it came to the bit where they were truly to trust in God, for God to provide for them, and that water not to being exactly at the time when they wanted it, what do we notice?

They grumbled. They were bitter, bitter, bitter against Moses, which, of course, indicated bitterness against God. Their faith had diminished.

They had that complaining attitude of heart that, of course, can be so easily within even God's people today.

And so, this morning we're going to allow God's Word to probe your heart and my heart. And allow God's Word to see if there's any offensive way in you, even the offense of bitterness against God.

Because remember, it is an offense. It is a sin. Bitterness is a sin against the God who's loved you with an everlasting love. Well, what about bitterness then?

[4 : 40] Well, as we saw in the story, at first everything had seemed, well, as it should be. The Israelites that crossed over the Red Sea in safety.

And you would expect them to have strong faith, as we've already seen them. And God has been with them in the past. He's been with them in the immediate past. And they're on their way to the promised land.

God has shown His blessing upon His people. And you would expect them, the next time they meet a particular obstacle, a particular difficulty, they'll trust God.

God who's taken them out of that terrible oppression in Egypt. God who's taken them through the Red Sea. You'd expect them again to trust in God. I mean, if God could split a mighty water, surely He could provide a spring of water for the people.

But what do we read there in verse 22? They've traveled for three days and they find no water. And then when they come to springs of water, these springs are bitter, they're undrinkable.

[5 : 48] And the bitter waters imitate the bitter hearts of the people. And they're grumbling, they're crying out, what shall we drink? What had seemed to the people to be their salvation.

What had seemed to be life-giving water. Well, turned out in their estimation to be their doom, to be their destruction.

The last hope of life, as it were, had seemed to disappear. And they immediately turn against Moses. Moses who'd led them thus far.

And they'll do something that they're going to do again and again in that journey towards the promised land. For their 40 years in their journey. They grumble.

They grumble. Yes, they turn against Moses. But above all, they're turning against God. They're turning against God who's been with them thus far. The God of creation.

[6 : 50] The God who'd even put His name, El, into Israel. The God that put His name into their name. Yet, they're not living by faith in the one true God.

And faith, yes, at one time seemed so focused on God the Lord who'd provide for them. That faith couldn't see beyond the bitter water there at the water of Marah.

And so they call these springs there, they call it by the name, bitter. They call it the Hebrew name Marah. Bitter place.

And in that bitter place, the Israelites become bitter. Bitter against Moses and bitter against God. And it's a place that many have been to.

Maybe even some are, even to this day in Christian life and Christian experience, when God's providences seem, well, to be setbacks in your progress as a Christian.

[7 : 52] Maybe when God doesn't work in your life in the way that you'd expect Him to work or want Him to work, you can become bitter. When God seems, when God appears to be silent, when you want God to address you and to direct you immediately.

Maybe some particular crisis in your life, just as the Israelites had faced that particular challenge in their life. You can become bitter against God and grumble and think wrongly, think that God doesn't care.

God's unfair, that God's forgotten to be merciful. But whenever we think like that, whenever you think like that, well, it's a wrong way of thinking.

To think that God has forgotten any of His children. Listen to the words that Isaiah proclaimed. Isaiah 49. God's worked as people.

Can a woman forget her nursing child, that she should have no compassion on the son of her womb? Even these may forget, yet I will not forget you. Behold, I have engraved you on the palms of my hands.

[9 : 09] God has never forgotten any of you. You may forget God at times. God has never, ever forgotten you. But maybe there are even times when you're tempted to be bitter against God.

Well, again, listen to the word of God. When God's word commands you not to be complaining against God. Not to grumble against God. Not to be bitter, even when His providence is frowning against you and frowning upon you.

The number of times you read in God's word, even the command, don't grumble, don't complain against God. You see it in the Old Testament. You see it in the New Testament. It's that command not to complain against God.

Not to complain against those who serve God. Paul wrote against grumbling when he wrote to the church. He wrote to the church in Ephesus and he actually commanded them, put away bitterness from your lives.

Or he wrote again to the church in Philippi, do all things without grumbling or questioning. Peter, when he was writing to the church, he said this, show hospitality to one another without grumbling.

[10 : 23] You know, we live in a society that takes offence so easily at the littlest things, but we ourselves can take offence very quickly. Especially when God asks you to do a particular work for Him.

And that work, yes, can be trying, it can be difficult. When God asks you to give of yourself, give of your resources. When at times you might just prefer an easy kind of hassle-free life.

But God doesn't lead His people to heaven without the necessary testing and trying of your lives, even on that journey. Because that really comes to this whole aspect of testing.

When we're thinking the testing that God gave to the Israelites, think of the testing that God gives to you in your life. Somebody's written this. It's God's normal way of working.

That entering into glory doesn't immediately follow salvation. And in most cases in life, there's that time of testing, that time of preparation, that time when your faith is tested and tried, just as precious metals tested and tried by fire.

[11 : 39] And your faith will be tested. It will be tested in the fires of adversity. And when that time comes, as God's Word commands, stay strong in the Lord and continue to trust in Him.

Don't resent these times of testing. And don't grumble. Don't complain when God's hand is heavy on you. He disciplines in love.

Just as a father disciplines in love to his child, God disciplines you in love. And He tests you. And He's too kind to be cruel.

God was testing the Israelites here and there in the wilderness, there at the springs of Marah. So don't grumble even when the waters that God takes you through and brings you to are bitter waters.

Maybe even in these difficult times that we're living in, when you can't quite understand God's dealings with us as a people. Maybe when God's hand is heavy, a heavy hand of pain, we're still commanded by God not to grumble.

[12 : 51] As we've said already, grumbling against God is a sin. And it's a sin that, of course, the world so easily succumbs to. We live, as I mentioned earlier, but we're just expanding it a little more.

We live in an age of grumbling. Offense taken at the slightest of afflictions. Complaints and negative criticism. It happens in society.

It happens in the church. There's grumbling at our leaders. There's grumbling at our friends. There's grumbling at anything that offends our sensitivities. But that isn't the way of the Lord Jesus, our Savior.

Remember what Isaiah wrote when he prophesied of Jesus? He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he didn't open his mouth. He was led like a lamb to the slaughter and as a sheep before her shearers is silent, so he didn't open his mouth.

But for the Israelites, their grumbling indicated where their hearts were before God. They'd forgotten who God is. They'd forgotten the power of God.

[13 : 58] They'd forgotten the love of God. They'd forgotten the faithfulness of God. They'd forgotten to cry out to God for mercy. But Moses, he cried out to God.

See that in verse 25, and God gives Moses an immediate answer. It's not the answer I know that Moses would have expected. The answer was provided.

A piece of wood. Now, you look at the passage, there's nothing magical in that piece of wood. This wood that was a sign, a sign that people would see that God's in control.

And God in control, even in what would apparently seem to be an impossible situation. But the piece of wood there that Moses had put in the spring was a sign, a sign that God was with his people, that God would change bitterness into joy.

And Moses throws that piece of wood into the spring, and the water loses its bitterness, and the water can be drunk. What just a moment before had seemed to spell doom and death and destruction, is now seen to give life and deliverance through the sign of the piece of wood.

[15 : 16] They move on 1,500 years from that incident there in the wilderness. We move on 1,500 years to the cross, to the crucifixion of Jesus. Of course, there was another piece of wood, that wooden cross.

And that cross, the bitterness of sin was cleansed. That cross in which bitterness was turned to joy. The joy, the joy of salvation.

That joy of freedom. Freedom from all that kills freedom of life in Christ. The joy that the believer knows because Jesus died on that wooden cross.

That cross where Jesus healed sinners. Healed sinners from the power of sin. So when there does come these times of testing, and when you're tempted to be bitter against God, just turn your eyes and look to the cross.

Look to that wooden cross. And look to Jesus on that cross. And look to Jesus in whom there was no bitterness. No bitterness at the work that his father had given him to do.

[16 : 29] Because Jesus was given that work of suffering, of sin bearing for you. There was no bitterness in Jesus' heart. And given that work.

Rather, as we're told in Hebrews 12, verse 2, of Jesus, who for the joy that was set before him, endured the cross, despising the shame, and seated at now the right hand of the throne of God.

And so, yes, look to Jesus. Look to him, even as he bore the wounds on the cross. Because it's by his wounds, by his stripes, that you're healed.

That's what Isaiah told prophetically of the Lord Jesus. By his stripes, by his wounds, you're healed. He is our healer. He's your healer.

Just as God made himself known there to the Israelites, it's the Lord who heals. For we see that healing, healing provided. As we saw, I mean, God had tested the Israelites there at the waters, the springs of Marah.

[17 : 36] In their testing, of course, the Israelites failed that test. They hadn't fully trusted in the God who provides. But in God's grace, God made himself known to the people by one of his names, the Lord who heals.

And God making himself known to the people to give them that aspect of his character. To tell them, even at that point, tell them that the greatness needed of the people, it wasn't water.

Yes, they needed it for their physical, health. But their greatest need wasn't water. But their greatest need was to be strong in the Lord, to trust in the Lord, and to be healed of the bitterness of the sin in their heart.

That's what God says there as we read in verse 25. He speaks through Moses that God had made for the people a statute and a rule. In other words, God's saying there's a rule, there's a law here, and it's the law of obedience.

It's that decree to trust in God in all circumstances. And God follows that rule with a promise that if the people obeyed God, if they put their faith in him, then God wouldn't have inflicted on his people the same afflictions that he put on the Egyptians, the plagues.

[18 : 59] And you know, even in that little section there, there's a comfort for you. There's a comfort for you to know that God who demands faith and obedience from you is the same God who heals you, heals his people of rebellion, even of the sin of bitterness, that sin of grumbling against God.

Maybe you have backslidden in sin, and you need that healing touch of the Savior. Well, listen to what God says in his Word, in the Old Testament, the book of Hosea, chapter 14, I will heal their backsliding.

I will love them freely. Maybe you're, at this moment, far from the Lord, and you know that you're spiritually sick, but you know that you lack that zeal, that zeal for the Lord.

You're slackened in that energy and witnessing for your Lord and Savior. I'll seek the Lord. Come before him, the Lord who heals. He's the Lord who heals and restores even your sluggish heart, even your broken heart.

You know, so much of our own spiritual sickness, rebellion, backsliding, is induced by ourselves, by our own sins, of a rebellion, and as we said, backsliding.

[20 : 29] But God is a God who forgives. God is a God who restores and heals. Seek him. Call upon him. Ask him for that healing touch in your heart and your life.

Again, listen to the Word of God and other parts of Scripture. 2 Chronicles 7, verse 14. If my people who are called by my name humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and heal their land.

Isn't this a cry that the Lord's people even this week should be making? That God would heal our land. we're sick. You know, we're sick in sin, we're sick spiritually, we're sick morally.

There's that sickness of rebellion against God and we have to say we've seen it even in our political leaders even most recently and we have to say that lines have been crossed.

The line that we've even considered to be a benchmark in acceptability, that line's been crossed and the evil of rebellion has come right to the fore in our public square and we tremble certainly.

[21 : 46] But pray, pray to the Lord for his healing, healing upon the church, healing upon our land, healing that will avert a disaster unless the Lord intervenes.

The Lord, he healed, he showed to the people that he is the Lord who heals. Even there at the spring of Mara. And he's the Lord who heals even in our own land because we wander far from him.

So pray then that the Lord who heals, that he'll make his power known, his healing power known even in our land, even in our nation at this time. That he'd give even his people, even those who love him, a time of respite, a time of healing a time of restoration.

We see that in the passage, verse 27. Then they came to Elam where there were twelve springs of water and seventy palm trees and they encamped there by the water.

You know the name Elam, you've seen it all, you've seen it frequently. It's actually a fascinating word. It means large trees. That's what it literally means. And of course, by implication, if this is a place of large trees, this is a place where there's plenty of irrigation for these large, beautiful trees and palm trees there, obviously, the place where God led them to was a place where there was sufficient water for the people.

[23 : 14] And of course, the people could be provided there in that great oasis. Of course, there'd be many, many more tests that the Israelites would face. But there at that moment, there at Elam, was a time of respite, a time of rest.

That little period of time when, yes, when the Israelites could rest in the Lord. Yes, look back at their failings, their failures of faith and look forward to the God who provides.

Of course, as we said, sadly, in these future times, they failed. Failed so easily. Failed the many tests that God gave them.

But God would continue to be with his people and provide for them. He'd give them, as it were, these opportunities to rest in him, as we would say nowadays, to recharge their batteries.

And yet, the people still grumbled, still weakened in faith. And you know, isn't that a warning to each one of us? God in his grace and his faithfulness will provide for each and every one of you.

[24 : 26] we've had God's word before us to teach us and instruct us in the way of faith. But how frequently do we ignore that word and choose to go our own way and do our own thing and live by our own understanding rather than by God's word?

What's the command of God? Live by faith and not by sight. You who love the Lord Jesus as your saviour, have that resolve the more to live by faith.

Be faithful, children of God. Trust in him. Don't look to the circumstances even of the world, but look to him. He's the God of creation. He's the God who provides.

He's the God who redeems. And yes, you will have your times of testing at your places of Marah. But you'll also be given times of refreshing at your places of Elam.

And when you are at these times of, these places of Marah, learn. Learn from these experiences and learn from your times at your Elams as you deepen your faith in the one who's leading and guiding you even in your path of life.

[25 : 44] He's with you. He's with you every step of the way. So move forward in faith and know that you who love them are heading towards your heavenly home.

And in that heavenly home there's no bitterness. There's no grumbling. There's an eternal rejoicing. Why? Because of the grace of God who heals.

Who's healed you of that disease of the power of sin in your life. He's brought you from darkness to light. He's healed you. I'm giving you that joy of everlasting life.

Follow Him. Trust Him. Don't grumble. But give your life to Him who first gave His life to you.

Amen. And let us pray. Lord our God, we give you thanks for your word. That promise of who you are, the Lord who heals.

[26 : 47] And Lord, where there is that need for healing in so many different lives, so many different circumstances of life, Lord, heal, restore, deliver.

May you bring your people to these places of healing, these places of rest. May your people find that sustenance, that provision. May they go in their way rejoicing.

Rejoicing. Hear us, Lord, as we continue before you now and we pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen.