

# Water for Our Thirst

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[ 0 : 00 ] Perhaps you know the great children's literature book, Alexander and the Terrible, Horrible, No Good.

Very bad day. Yes? I went to sleep with gum in my mouth, and now there's gum in my hair. And when I got out of bed this morning, I tripped on the skateboard, and by mistake, I dropped my sweater in the sink while the water was running, and I could tell it was going to be a terrible, horrible, no good, very bad day.

We all have days like this, don't we? You lock yourself out of your dorm room. You lose your cell phone. You leave your groceries on top of the car and drive away.

You sneeze in your lab experiment and ruin six weeks of research. Or a host of other things that go wrong in our everyday life.

They're inconvenient. They're troublesome. Sometimes they're relatively costly. But sometimes, of course, our days really do begin to get terrible, horrible, very bad, and no good.

[ 1 : 35 ] Sometimes, the things that go wrong start to cut deep in our lives. They begin to cut to the very core of how we live.

We don't have food. We don't have water. We don't have a place to live. There are times when we are pushed by our circumstances, and they seem harder than we can bear, and our very life is being threatened.

The Bible describes this as a wilderness. Think about what a wilderness is, particularly in the ancient Near East.

To go out into the wilderness in Palestine is to be a place where there is no water. There is no food. It is very hot during the day. It is very cold during the night. The animals that are there are threatening, not helpful.

It is a place where your life is in danger if you stay there. Now, look, the Bible doesn't say that going out into the wilderness is always a bad thing. Once, there was a garden, and the garden was a beautiful place, and everyone lived there, and it provided everything we needed.

[ 2 : 49 ] But for most of the time in the Bible, when it talks about a wilderness, it's going into a place where you are facing circumstances that threaten your very life.

They are truly hard. How does God want us to face the wilderness? This brings us to our text this morning. We're continuing in a series in the book of Exodus.

If you want to turn in the pew Bibles in front of you, page 57, if you're following along, we're going to actually look at two sections of Exodus. We're going to look at the end of chapter 15, and then we're going to look at the beginning of chapter 17.

If you remember where we are in the story, God has brought the people of Israel out of Egypt, delivering them from slavery, and he is now in these chapters from 13 to 18, or 13 to 19, God is bringing them from the deliverance of Egypt to the foot of Mount Sinai, where God will reveal himself in the giving of the Ten Commandments and the law.

In the meantime, in this travel through the wilderness, God is using this time to teach his people about who he is. He has brought them into the wilderness so that they will see what kind of God he is.

[ 4 : 10 ] If you were here last week, Pastor Greg preached on chapter 16 and the giving of the manna, how God gave them food that they did not know of so that they would know that man does not live alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.

And next week, Pastor Nick will preach on the internal and external threats to the people of God in the wilderness and how God meets them in that. But today, these two stories are about water and about thirsty people in the wilderness and how God meets them there.

So we're going to read. We're going to start in chapter 15 with verse 22. We'll read to the end and then we'll skip to the beginning of chapter 17. So if you would want to read along with me, this is God's word.

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.

And when they came to Marah, they could not drink the water of Marah because it was bitter and therefore it was named Marah. And the people grumbled against Moses saying, what should we drink?

[ 5 : 20 ] And he cried to the Lord and the Lord showed him a log and he threw it into the water and the water became sweet. And 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.

Then they came to Elam where there were 12 springs of water and 70 palm trees and they encamped there by the water. And then chapter 17, verse 1.

All the congregation of the people of Israel moved on from the wilderness of sin by stages according to the commandment of the Lord and camped at Rephidim but there was no water for the people to drink.

Therefore the people quarreled with Moses and said, give us water to drink. And Moses said to them, why do you quarrel with me? Why do you test the Lord? But the people thirsted there for water and the people grumbled against Moses and said, why did you bring us out of Egypt to kill us and our children and our livestock with thirst?

[ 6 : 37 ] So Moses cried to the Lord, what shall I do with this people? They are almost ready to stone me. And the Lord said to Moses, pass on before the people taking with you some of the elders of Israel and take in your hand the staff with which you struck the Nile and go.

Behold, I will stand before you there on the rock at Horeb and you shall strike the rock and water shall come out of it and the people will drink. And Moses did so in the sight of the elders of Israel and he called the name of the place Massah and Meribah because of the quarreling of the people of Israel and because they tested the Lord by saying, is the Lord among us or not?

Let's pray. Lord, we come to you this morning. Thank you for this word.

Thanking you for the way that you have recorded throughout history your actions so that we might know what kind of God you are. Lord, I pray you would give us, Lord, attentive minds and soft hearts.

Lord, help us to hear from your word from you this morning by your spirit. Help me, Lord, to speak your word or that we may know what kind of God you are.

[ 8 : 05 ] We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. How does God want us to face the wilderness? I think there are two major things in these passages, these accounts that I want to focus on this morning and then we'll talk a little bit about the implications for us.

The two things are the heart of God and the heart of the people. We want to see what is it that we see in these stories about the heart of people and then we want to see what it is about how God's heart meets those people in the wilderness.

So first, let's look at the heart of the people. Obviously, in both of these stories, the very clear situation is they were thirsty. But they were not only thirsty, they were afraid.

We need to recognize and be sympathetic to them. It's easy for us sometimes to read the Old Testament stories and to think, gosh, Israel just didn't get it very well.

They just didn't. How could they forget so quickly? Right? How could they forget so quickly? Because think about what had happened right before both of these stories.

[ 9 : 19 ] In chapter 15, what had come right before? God had parted the Red Sea to deliver his people through them and then brought a triumph over the Egyptian army that was trying to chase after them.

So God had delivered his people powerfully. And then before the story in chapter 17, in chapter 16, what did we see? God gave manna to his people, food in the desert that they didn't know anything about.

And it's very easy for us to sit back and think, golly, these Israelites, they really didn't get it, did they? How could they be so obtuse? But friends, recognize what it means to be truly thirsty.

Have you ever been truly thirsty and not had access to water? Maybe for an hour or two, maybe for a half a day, rarely for longer than that in this modern world.

Thankfully, that's true in many places. However, real thirst is a scary thing. It is frightening to face no water as your body cries out for it more and more.

[10:32] Look, the Israelites were not asking for a new iPod. They weren't asking for a BMW. They weren't asking for a new wardrobe. They weren't asking for luxuries and accessories. They longed for something that was real and necessary for them.

And think about what happens in the story in chapter 15, too. They're traveling, they're thirsty, there's no water, and then they get to Mara, and there's water, there's a pool, and suddenly they think, finally, we're delivered.

And then they go and taste it. And instead, it's bitterness, not sweetness. Bitterness. Probably it was full of minerals.

If you've ever had mineral-filled water, it's really undrinkable. It's like being a thirsty man in the middle of the ocean where you can't drink the water.

And so, their thirst, augmented by fear, is now tainted by disappointment. False hope was dashed.

[11:40] Like climbing a mountain. If you've ever been hiking and you come around the corner and you think, hey, there it is, there's the top. And you go a little bit further. No, it's not. It's a false summit.

There's another one yet to come. How disappointing that is. Friends recognize living in the wilderness is hard. When you face a need like thirst and you don't know how to solve it and you don't know where to go and there's no, you begin to feel trapped and you begin to feel desperate. It's very easy for us in that time to then see what our heart is really made of. And so, we see that in these stories, God gives names.

It's always fascinating that whenever God gives something a name, you want to pay attention to it in the Old Testament. And God gives names to these places because they reflect the heart of the people. The first name is bitter.

The people become bitter towards God. We thought there was a pool there but then we couldn't drink it. The second one is called masa which means testing.

[12:47] They doubted God's presence with them. They demanded, God, give us water now. And they asked, God, is your plan really good for us? Because it seems like you've just let us out here in the wilderness to die.

It's not the first time they thought that. They thought that back in chapter 16 but again in chapter 17 they say it. Why did you lead us out here just to die? What's the point? They doubted that God was good and that God had a plan and that God was with them and that God would care for them.

They wondered, has God abandoned us and has He left us? We are going to die. Not only were their hearts bitter, not only did they doubt God's presence but also meribah.

Quarreling is the way our Bible translates it. I'm not sure that's a good thing because if I had a fight with Greg, we'd be going at it. A quarrel would be going back and forth. Thankfully Greg and I don't fight. But I think that the word here is not, there's not like there's a back and forth between Moses and the people or between the people and God.

In fact, it's more probably of a protest. God, you've got to be kidding me.

[14:03] God, this is too much. God, you have to change this. God, you couldn't really want this for me, could you? That's the cry that comes out of the people.

God, deliver us. It's the same cry that you heard back in chapter 3 when they were crying out to be freed from slavery. God, deliver us. Help us. It's not very hopeful though.

It's more accusatory. How could you do this? That's what quarreling means. Friends, when we're in the wilderness and we face these times where we become desperate, where we feel like something we absolutely need is beyond our control and unattainable, let me ask you this question.

What name would God give to that place in your heart and in your life? Would he call it bitter?

Would he call it doubtful? Would he call it protest?

How much we need to see the heart of God in those moments. And that's what this passage does.

It shows us the heart of God towards his people. What we see fundamentally in this passage is that as God's people are facing the wilderness and these things are coming out of their hearts as they come out of our hearts, God comes and God comes with grace.

[ 15 : 34 ] In chapter 15, that grace looks like healing. God instructs Moses, take a log, probably better translated a tree, take this thing and throw it in the water.

Doesn't make any sense to us, but God used that symbol and that action to turn the bitter water into sweet water.

The people drank and they were satisfied. God met them in their need and in meeting them he provided for them exactly what they longed for.

And do you see that he didn't just do it in that way but then he sort of, he went over the top. Look with me in chapter 15, verse 27. Then they came to Elam. Now that God gave them the water that was bitter made sweet and then he said, oh and now I'm going to take you to Oasis Resort.

Welcome to Hyatt Oasis Resort at Elam where you have not only 12 pools of water with all that you could drink but you have shade which is really nice in the desert.

[ 16 : 39 ] 70 palm trees for you to encamp. Everything you long for are needed. God graciously gave it to them. Then in chapter 17, they're in the wilderness again facing the same thing, having seen God provide just before in the same ways and yet they still grumble and doubt.

God, are you really with us? They ask. And friends, don't forget they're asking that question when before them there is a pillar of cloud and fire that has gone before them during the day and during the night.

There is a visible manifestation of God's presence with them and in the middle of that their hunger and thirst was so great. Their desire and their need for water so filled their screens.

They could not see the very physical manifestation that God was with them and so they questioned. And God meets them and says, I am with you.

He tells Moses, take your staff, the same staff that I used down in Egypt. Take that staff and take the elders so that there will be witnesses to what you will do and go and I will stand before you and you will strike a rock and from that rock will flow water.

[ 17 : 55 ] The same staff that made the Nile River undrinkable in judgment upon the Egyptians will come to you and that staff will bring water out of a rock.

I don't know if any of you are geologists but there is not much water in rocks. God miraculously brings water to provide for them.

And friends, I want you to see something important here. God meets them in their complaining, doubting, questioning hearts and in that what he does is he shows them grace.

He doesn't rebuke them for unbelief. He doesn't berate them. He doesn't punish them. He will do that at one point, right? Go ahead and read the book of Numbers.

As they've seen God more and as they continue in their unbelief, there will be a point where God will bring a corrective response but not here.

[ 18 : 53 ] Here, what they show, what this passage shows is God's grace to his people. You don't deserve this. Anyone who's a parent knows this. Your kids having a whiny day.

Wah, wah, wah, wah, wah. Disobedient, slow, complaining over and over again. And there are times when we as parents have the joy of just showing them grace.

And it's a beautiful thing. You've experienced it from your parents, most likely. And this is what God does with his people.

These places are named Mas and Meribah to remind them of their heart condition, to warn them in the future, do not harden your heart in the same way.

But here, the first time, God responds is that of grace. To give them something that they didn't need or didn't deserve and to meet their deepest need.

[ 20 : 03 ] He wants them to know that grace is the shape of his heart. He wants them to know that he will not leave them but he will be with them. He wants them to know that he will provide what they really need.

and he wants them to know that they will be satisfied as they trust in him and wait for him. He will satisfy their hearts.

The heart of God meets the heart of his people in the wilderness. Friend, what might happen to us if we saw God's heart clearly, if God met us?

We would find ourselves satisfied. We would find ourselves knowing that God will meet the deepest needs of our heart. We would find contentment.

We would find freedom from being controlled by our appetites. We would know that he will slake our thirst and feed our hunger and he will meet our soul with love.

[ 21 : 04 ] What might happen to us, we would become more trusting. Having seen God be faithful over and over and over again, the next time there was uncertainty, the next time we felt desperate, we could turn to him and trust him.

Say, God, I don't know how you're going to do this. This looks impossible to me but I trust you. And the third thing is that I think we become more obedient.

This is really interesting. Look with me in chapter 15. It struck me as a very odd part of the passage and it took me a while to see this but chapter 15, verse 25, God brings this miraculous provision of making the bitter water sweet.

And then he turns around and he starts talking about if you will obey me and my commands and my statutes and my laws. And I think what he's describing here is when God's grace meets us and frees us from our desperate desire to provide for ourselves, our desperate drivenness that comes from appetites within us that we think it is up to us to solve, God meets us in that and he frees us from those things so that we can instead submit to God to believe that God's ways are good for us, to trust him when we don't understand why he would say, don't do this, this is a path that leads to death, not life, that we would trust him in those things.

Grace doesn't actually provide, give us license to do what we want. what grace does is it rescues us from our desperate hearts so that we can actually trust and obey God.

[ 23 : 05 ] This is what 1 Corinthians 10 reminds us of, reminds us that having experienced this grace of God in our lives, we can pursue then lives that please him and are good for us, that we are never beyond help no matter how hard it gets.

But of course, the 1 Corinthians passage also reminds us of the most important thing and that is that how God meets us in our wilderness when we are desperate for our need is he reminds us of the greatest need that every human being has for he says that the rock that was struck is the Christ, Jesus Christ and that what God has given us in Christ is the thing that we most need for water and manna are simply signposts looking at our physical desires and meeting those physical desires to remind us that the greatest need for humanity is actually a knowledge of God and a relationship with him.

What we were made for is not food and water and sex and success and career and companionship or all the things that we tend to think of are necessary for being human and being alive.

What we were made for first and foremost is to know God and to be rightly related to him. and yet we know how often our hearts are like the hearts of the Israelites.

How we grumble and complain. How we doubt. How we question. How we are bitter towards him. How we don't believe in his goodness. How we refuse to submit to his ways.

[ 25 : 00 ] And Christ comes as God's greatest expression of grace to us. While we were still sinners Christ died for us.

Christ uses these Old Testament stories to prepare or God uses these Old Testament stories to prepare us for the coming of Christ. That Jesus is the rock that is struck and from which streams of living water flow.

At the cross Jesus tasted the bitter water for us so that we might by faith receive from him not bitterness and judgment but sweetness and the life giving power of the Holy Spirit that will well up to eternal life in our hearts and from us to those around us.

Jesus Christ is the rock who is broken from his broken body that died that died for us would flow life-giving power forgiveness and eternal life.

This is the greatest gift of God that he has given to us. Grace because we don't deserve it. Grace because we don't think we need it. Grace because we don't believe that God is the one that we were made for.

[ 26 : 27 ] and he comes and he meets us and he says come come ye sinners poor and needy bruised and broken by the fall come to him believe and trust in him and find in him in the midst of your wilderness grace grace that is greater than all of our sin grace that meets us in the worst of your wilderness grace that speaks words of assurance of provision of presence and of hope.

At the end of the day that's what this passage invites us to is to come to the rock that is Christ. Let's pray. Lord thank you for this word.

We do pray that you would Lord bring us lead us Lord show us how great your grace is to us in Christ.

Lord help us to come knowing that we have nothing to bring except our need and yet that is enough for us. Lord we pray this morning that you would remind us of your satisfying grace for us. We pray this in Jesus name. Amen. Well friends as we continue in our service we have a baptism. [ 28 : 05 ] that we ourvi church has been bearing us and the we have a presence. Father make us see you we have a well find as we acknowledge this country and that we we have a photograph of the stage and as we can you see you know