

TURNING BITTERNESS INTO SWEETNESS

Exodus 15:22-27

THE WILDERNESS & ITS BITTER WATERS

- *A Leading Shepherd*

"Then Moses led Israel from the Red Sea and they went into the Desert of Shur" (15:22). I believe there are 2 main reasons why God would lead Israel into the wilderness before getting them into the Promised Land.

First, the trials and testings of the wilderness would expose their inherent sinful nature and the incurability of it. Israel was full of rebellion in Egypt; she needs to be healed of her distrust and livid spirit. Read Deuteronomy 8:2.

Trials and testings are designed to humble us. To prove to us that there is no good thing in us. And to enter into the Promised Land is strictly a matter of sovereign grace, not someone's goodness (*James Smith*).

Secondly, when God leads His people into the wilderness He goes with them and makes His presence and His love apparent among them. His purpose was also to display His power in saving them from the consequences of their failures, and therefore make their need in the wilderness, His opportunity to lavish upon them the riches of His grace.

When the trials are over, when our faithful God has supplied our "every need," all the honor, praise, and glory will go to Him.

The "wilderness," then, gives us not only a revelation of ourselves, but it also manifests the merciful ways of God.

"Then Moses led Israel from the Red Sea and they went into the Desert of Shur. For three days they travelled in the desert without finding water" (15:22). Here, as in many other passages, the "three days" speaks of resurrection (1 Cor. 15:4). They're on resurrection ground. This means Israel walked in newness of life, as it were a resurrected people. They had died to the old life of Egypt, having been baptized in the Red Sea.

It is only when the Christian truly knows what it means to be one with Christ in His death and resurrection, and recognizes that he is a "new creature" in Him, that he becomes mindful of "the wilderness." So far as the spiritual life is concerned, the world is simply a wilderness—barren and desolate.

"For three days they travelled in the desert without finding water" (v. 22). This is the first lesson which our Christian, wilderness-life is designed to teach us. Absolutely nothing can be found in this world to satisfy the spiritual thirst of a man or woman who is in Christ.

"When they came to Marah they could not drink its waters because it was bitter. That is why the place is called Marah" (v. 23). This was a real test. It's a call to "deeper faith." Three days' journey in the hot, shadeless and sandy wilderness without finding any water; and now that water they find is "bitter!"

It must have been a great disappointment! They thought they had the water problem resolved. But the water they found was undrinkable. Drinking it meant getting sick.

Because the water was bitter, Israel became bitter. The bitter water acted like a mechanism for the bitterness of Israel's soul. Israel was now made to feel the barrenness and bitterness of the wilderness. Israel did not expect to be brought to Marah, they expected to go from the Red Sea straight into the Promised Land.

Newly saved Christians expect a "Red Sea" miracle every day, and an easy and smoothly paved road to heaven. When they come face to face with the hardness of the wilderness they become disappointed, dismayed and even angry. They gripe and whine and say, "We don't deserve this."

- ***A Grumbling Flock***

"And the people grumbled against Moses, saying, 'What are we to drink?'" (v. 24). Just three days earlier the entire nation was celebrating, praising and singing a redemption song by the Red Sea. Now they are murmuring and rebelling. They have so quickly forgotten God's miracles in Egypt. Having begun by faith they now tread by sight.

The main cause of their murmuring was that their eyes were no longer upon God. This complaint against Moses was really directed to God Himself. They were inferring God is not faithful. God is not trustworthy. Moses, who was a mature and godly leader, did not take offense at their whining. In anguish of soul he turns to the Lord.

"Then Moses cried to the Lord" (v. 25). Moses didn't join the complainers. He did what Israel ought to have done—he took the matter to God in prayer. This is what our "Marahas" are for—to drive us to the Lord. The Marahas call into play the full forces of prayer.

God uses the "Marahas" in our lives to remove all our false securities one by one so we will trust in Him alone. If we have trusted Him for the salvation of our souls, how is it that we have a hard time trusting Him for everything else, which is less?

THE CROSS & ITS TRANSMUTING POWERS

- ***A Cry For The Thirsting***

"Then Moses cried to the Lord; and the Lord showed him a piece of wood. He threw it into the water, and the water became sweet" (v. 25). Moses did not cry unto God in vain. Because Moses turned to God with fervor and passionate prayer, God heard him and responded. The prayer of a righteous man availeth much, the bible says.

Only the books in heaven's library will disclose how many bitter places, bitter people, bitter marriages, and bitter societies of the earth have been sweetened by prayer.

- ***A Tree For The Healing***

God shows Moses "a tree or wood from a tree." Moses then takes it and casts it into the bitter waters, instantaneously the water became sweet.

The tree cast into the water is a beautiful type of the cross of Christ applied to the bitter experiences of life and making them sweet. The cross of Christ transmutes the bitter into sweetness. The cross of Christ has a powerful sweetening influence. O wondrous cross! Glorious cross!

Let us remember here that when we suffer, or struggle on account of His name, it is the cross that sweetens our suffering and struggles. A beautiful illustration is furnished in Acts 16.

The tree was near the waters. His grace is always at our disposal. God supplied their need in spite of their complaints. That's the love and goodness of our God!

THE VOICE & ITS DILIGENT LISTENERS (VV 25b-27)

- ***Jehovah's Will Is Decreed***

There the LORD made a decree and a law for them, and there he tested them. He said, "If you listen carefully to the voice of the LORD your God and do what is right in his eyes, if you pay attention to his commands and keep all his decrees, I will not bring on you any of the diseases I brought on the Egyptians, for I am the LORD, who heals you." (vv. 25, 26).

The whole focus of what happens at Marah is on the effect of obedience to God's word. When Moses follows God's instruction, the result is sweetness. The sign indicates the blessing and healing that comes from being obedient to God's commands (*David J. Klein*).

- ***Israel's Health Is Promised***

The decree conveys that exact same message: if you are obedient to God's commands, God will be your healer—your Jehovah Rapha.

Note here the relationship of works to blessing. This is not evangelical obedience. This is "do this and live" obedience of the OT. If Israel is not obedient, God threatens them with the diseases of the Egyptians, the marks of divine curse (*David J. Klein*).

The people are being led to Mt. Sinai where they will receive the yoke of the law and will themselves ratify the law covenant. They are at this juncture being prepared for the God's theocratic form of government. If the people want to retain the blessings of God, if the people want God to be their healer, they must follow his Torah.

Today he deals with us in grace. But grace is not lawlessness. Grace only makes us the more indebted to God. Our obligations are increased not cancelled through grace. Grace reigns "*through righteousness,*" not at the expense of it (Rom. 5:21).

Once we were slaves of sin, slaves of the Pharaoh and Satan, and were at his service, now that we have been purchased by Christ we are His slaves, His bond-servants, and are required to render Him service. The obligation of obedience can never be done away with, so long as God is God.

This principle runs throughout the Scriptures and applies to every dispensation: blessing is dependent upon obedience. Israel were to be immune from the diseases of Egypt only so long as they carefully, diligently listened to the voice of the Lord their God and did that which was right in His sight! (*Arthur W. Pink*).

Failure to recognize this, failure to conform our daily lives to God's statutes, failure to obey His Word to us, will not forfeit our salvation, but it will bring down upon us "the chastening hand of our righteous Father(Heb.12:6).

"And they came to Elim, where there were twelve springs of water, and seventy palm trees, and they camped there near the water" (v. 27). God brought them to Elim in the wilderness. Marah led to Elim. Elim is the complement to Marah.

The 12 wells and 70 palm trees represent rest and refreshment which is ours after we have been in contact with the cross. The Israelites were at this stage—happy campers. They have a green spot in the desert, shade from the sun, water for their souls in a peaceful milieu .Truly the Lord God is the Great Shepherd of His flocks!

Dear friend, Jesus alone can provide the spiritual healing your sinful heart needs. ***"He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed"*** (1 Peter 2:24).

Jesus, our Lord drank the bitter waters of sin on the cross, he endured the bitter wrath of God, and he tasted the bitterness of death, that you might know the sweetness of the forgiveness of sins, the sweetness of sonship, and the sweetness of communion with the Father.

Moses cried out to the Lord and the Lord *showed* him a tree. No one can ever see the cross of Christ for what it truly is until they cry out to God. Turn to Him in faith and let Him apply the sacrifice He made on cross to your life. The sweetness of heaven comes to us by the work of the cross of Christ.