

“Water from the Rock”

Exodus 17:1-7

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(Sunday Lord’s Day Worship, October 25, 2015)

Introduction

This passage will talk about those people in need – people who are worried about many things. It will talk about the provision of God. For those of you who are in fear of different kinds of things, this passage will talk about the protection of God. Some of you feel lonely, sometimes that’s how we feel even though we are in the midst of people, maybe some of you feel like that. We can even feel like God is not with us, but this passage will speak to us about his protection, provision and presence in our lives.

I. History – Israel’s story

The Bible is, in one aspect, Israel’s story. Genesis 1 to 11 is an introduction of human history - the creation account and how people came to being and became sinful. The rest of Genesis, chapter 12 to the end, is about four people as Israel is starting as a nation: Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph. Genesis ends with the story of Joseph. When Exodus starts, it is towards the end of 400 years of slavery in Egypt, because Joseph and his family went there. So after 400 years of slavery in Egypt's, the Israelites are now being saved by God through Moses from the slavery of sin. That's the beginning of Exodus.

So Exodus is about three things: freedom, journey, and worship - freedom from Egypt, which represents slavery of sin, and journey in life, going through that so they can go into the Promise Land - then of course they go into worship. Towards the end of Exodus they’ll receive the word of God and instruction about the tabernacle – how to worship God. Now we are studying the middle section, which is journey. Our life is like that - we are being freed from the slavery of sin, we are in the journey of life, and we are going to get to the Promised Land, worshipping the Lord forever.

When we get to his this text, they are in the midst of this journey. Several times we talked about this. The Israelites are in need and they complain. This is the third of fourth time they are complaining because they lack physical provision - just like we lack physical provision in life. First place was Marah, where the water was bitter. In the journey they lacked food, and then God sent manna, because they complained there was no food - no bread. Then in this passage, Massah and Meribah, there is no water.

Now much of Israel’s here complaint sounds similar to other complaints, but there’s one significant difference in this passage. This time, the people actually brought God to trial. It was a formal trial that the Israelites are putting God against. So they initiated a legal proceeding against him, almost like a court marshal. So if you don’t understand the cultural context of Israelites and the nations at the time, you wouldn’t understand this but, this was actually a legal proceeding of the Israelites, charging God in trial.

A. The lawsuit against God [1-4]

Verses 1-3, this is a lawsuit against God. Rephidim was supposed to be a place of testing - not for God but for his people. But they were the ones testing God, putting him on trial. How can we tell that the Israelites were bringing God to trial? You can't immediately tell, but v. 2 "Therefore the people quarreled with Moses" they were charging Moses, but because he was a representative of God, he understood that as they were quarreling, they were really testing the Lord. Therefore v.2 says "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?" So by quarreling with Moses, they were quarreling against God and testing the Lord.

C.S Lewis said "The ancient man approached God as the accused person approaches his judge. For the modern man, the roles are quite reversed." He is the judge, and God is in the dock of the trial.

Now, verse 2 "Why do you test the Lord". Test the Lord, means trial and the same concept is used in v.7 it says "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?"

-Exodus 17:7

Because twice the episode is called test, which means 'trial by ordeal'. Both Massah and Meribah, two names, are legal terms, - masa means to test, Meribah means to strive, to argue, to dispute, to contend, it is basically participles derived from the Hebrew word that means 'covenant lawsuit' - legal proceeding. So we can see that it's happening. In v.3 what are they charging Moses and God of? Basically murder - to kill them, genocide because they thought God was trying to kill everyone. Verse 3 says "But the people thirsted there for water, and the people grumbled against Moses and said, "Why did you bring us up out of Egypt, to kill us and our children" - murder and genocide. And in those days what do you do if you kill someone? You stone them to death, v. 4 it says, you can see that Moses and God was charged with capital offense, legal death by stoning, that's why v.4 said "So Moses cried to the LORD, "What shall I do with this people? They are almost ready to stone me." Stoning was the conventional way to carry out the death penalty. It is mentioned here gives further evidence that the Israelites were conducting some kind of trial. So we can see people were charging God with covenant unfaithfulness, a legal charge against God and we see the trial in verse 5.

B. The trial of God [5]

And you can see that elders are involved - witnesses. Verse 5 says "And the LORD said to Moses, "Pass on before the people, taking with you some of the elders of Israel," That's why God tells Moses to specifically bring elders. At the time, elders were used as witnesses when there is trial. "some of the elders of Israel, and take in your hand the staff with which you struck the Nile, and go" In ancient times, an assembly of elders would pass judgment on disputed matters. Therefore,

when Moses gathered them together, he was convening a court by forming a jury. Then in v.5, “take in your hand the staff with which you struck the Nile ...” so God had given Moses the staff back in the Red Sea, when there was a curse upon the Egyptians. God had given him the staff at the burning bush as proof of his presence. It represented God’s power and authority as a judge. And striking the Nile was an act of judgment against Egypt. For Moses to strike the rock was another act of divine judgment. When all the evidence are considered, the scene of Rephidim easily recognized as a court room. And we see the execution through verses 6-7.

C. The execution of God [6-7]

In v.7 they call the place Massah and Meribah because of the quarrelling of the people of Israel. So again, Massah and Meribah, both legal terms which mean is a technical term for covenant lawsuit. Then in v.6 it says behold “I will stand before you there on the rock at Horeb, and you shall strike the rock,” So the picture is God on the rock, and when Moses strikes the rock, Moses is striking God on the rock, so it was a picture of execution. You can see the lawsuit against God, trial of God, and God being executed in this passage.

As we read this portion of the Old Testament, it’s hard for us to understand because we don’t know the background, but understanding the background it is obvious that there is a ruling going on. Israelites when they heard it at that time were able to easily understand that is what was happening because they knew the background and language they were using. At the time, the Israelites were so used to this type of language, they understood it was a passage.

If they were to read this passage as Moses wrote it, they would have easily said ‘Wow, we are so sinful. How can we put God on trial? This is pathetic. This is absurd’ If they were to come out of this story, they could easily see how sinful they were, and they could have easily seen how patient God was, and is, and always will be as he still gives in the midst of this unfaithful people-water that comes from the rock. This passage would have been a warning against sin for the Israelites, and hope of coming of Messiah because they could have easily seen the idea of substitute. They should have been on that rock but God himself is there on behalf of them taking this punishment upon himself. We can see this idea of substitute picturing of the gospel. For example in passages throughout the Old Testament but a passage we all know:

-Isaiah 53:4-5

*“Surely he has borne our griefs
and carried our sorrows;
yet we esteemed him stricken,
smitten by God, and afflicted.
But he was pierced for our transgressions;
he was crushed for our iniquities;
upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace,
and with his wounds we are healed.”*

We don’t exactly know how much they would have known this was about Jesus. But all the component of the gospel - Israelites, as they were experiencing this, as they were reading this,

would have understood this passage a lot more than we think. This is Israel's history. Israel's lawsuit against God.

II. Redemptive History – Jesus' story

Secondly, this is part of redemptive history. This is the story of Jesus. Jesus said as he talks about the Old Testament, 'It is about me' according to Luke 24. How can we see Jesus in this passage? Why does water come out of the rock? Why didn't God just provide rain and make a puddle? Or why didn't water just come out of the sand in the wilderness, or from the ground? Or from some human being? This is the historical illustration of Jesus Christ. One way to understand the framework of the Old Testament, if we don't have an objective stance on how to read the Old Testament, is just saying everything is Christ, but we can't interpret it like that. Only when we look at the New Testament, and as the New Testament talks about the Old Testament, it gives us the framework that we can see that there are certain things by the intent of the author – God's thought through the intent of the author's mind as he writes the scripture without error that we can see that that's about Christ. For example:

-1 Corinthians 10:1-4

Look how Paul, as he's thinking about the Old Testament passage, and at that time, the New Testament writers only had the Old Testament most of the time. So they are thinking about the Old Testament and they're thinking about the Israelites passing through the red sea, and having a journeying in the wilderness, Paul is talking about that rock is talking about the rock, which represents Christ at that time.

"For I do not want you to be unaware, brothers, that our fathers were all under the cloud, and all passed through the sea, and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea, and all ate the same spiritual food, and all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank from the spiritual Rock that followed them, and the Rock was Christ."

So thinking that what we see in Ex 17 is the physical illustration, historical illustration, of Jesus that is coming, we will be going back to Exodus 17:6 "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." There are three parts to this verse and we will see how Jesus is our rock and how he is pictured in this passage. Three things about Jesus here:

A. Jesus was tried in our behalf [6]

v.6 say "I will stand before you there on the rock". 'I'll stand before you' is the language of an inferior standing before a superior.

-John 19:6 "When the chief priests and the officers saw him, they cried out, "Crucify him, crucify him!" Pilate said to them, "Take him yourselves and crucify him, for I find no guilt in him."

This is a trial. This is an official proceeding, and Jesus appeared himself as man was tried. We see in John that he goes through 6 trials - , 3 Jewish and 3 Roman trials, and died, which signifies that he died not only for the Jews, but also for the gentiles - to show that he died for all humanity - tried in their behalf. We see that Jesus was tried on our behalf.

B. Jesus was stricken for our sins [6]

v.6 “will stand before you there on the rock at Horeb, and you shall strike the rock,” God is right on it; God is being hit.

-John 19:1-2, 18

v.1-2 “Then Pilate took Jesus and flogged him. And the soldiers twisted together a crown of thorns and put it on his head and arrayed him in a purple robe.”

v.18 “There they crucified him, and with him two others, one on either side, and Jesus between them.”

So he was stricken on our behalf. God is smitten for our sin. The covenant keeper is smitten by covenant breakers on behalf of convenient breakers.

And I think we see an even more vivid picture insinuated in

-Psalm 105:41

*“He opened the rock, and water gushed out;
it flowed through the desert like a river.”*

So it doesn't exactly specify in this passage how the water came out. Did the water just come out of the rock as the rock stayed in its shape? Seem like the rock was somehow broken because it say in v.41 “He opened the rock, and water gushed out; it flowed through the desert like a river.” It seems like the rock was split. How? We don't know, but we know that it was split.

Just like body of Jesus was broken, the blood of Jesus Christ poured out for the forgiveness of our sin. Putting these things together, what spiritual eye can fail to see here a portrayal of our substitute being smitten by the rod of divine justice held in the hand of the governor of the universe - God did hits in the person of his own son, Jesus Christ. The rock was Christ, because like the rock Christ was struck with divine judgment on our behalf. This is what happened to him on the cross; Christ was bearing the curse for our sins, so God struck him with the rod of his justice.

C. Jesus gave us eternal life in the Spirit [6]

Third thing, Jesus gave us eternal life in the spirit. Not only was he stricken, but it says “water shall come out.” Jesus was stricken so that we can receive life.

-John 19:34 “But one of the soldiers pierced his side with a spear, and at once there came out blood and water.”

John is very vivid when talking about the trial, water, and blood coming out, and it is very intentional. Soldier was checking if Jesus really died or not, because when you die, blood and water come out together, and that’s exactly what was happening. Verifying the death of Jesus, but John specifically mentions not only blood but water came out. John is very intentional as he uses that picture. He’s very intentional about water representing something significant.

Blood was the blood that he shed for our sins. That means he’s cleansing us. But John also mentions water, not simply to prove that Jesus died physically, but also to show that his death gives life – water of life.

-John 7:37-39

“On the last day of the feast, the great day, Jesus stood up and cried out, “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.’” Now this he said about the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were to receive, for as yet the Spirit had not been given, because Jesus was not yet glorified.”

So when we are cleansed in Jesus Christ, we come alive, we have spiritual life and Holy Spirit in connection to that spirit pouring grace into or spirit. So that water represents the life that the Holy Spirit gives into our spirit.

-Acts 2:4 *“And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance.”*

Why that word fill? Not places or puts you, but it says fills you. It’s that water language, just like living water filling us. He gives us spiritual life - and all because of Christ, our rock. Similar in Matthew 16:18, he uses the ‘water’ language.

-Matthew 16:18 *“And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.”*

He’s talking to Peter, but he’s talking about himself. I don’t know if Jesus did this, but he was saying that, I am the rock, pointing to himself. Jesus Christ on Christ, we are built on him as the church of Jesus Christ; the Kingdom of God is built on Jesus Christ. Nothing will stop the progressing of Jesus Christ. He is our rock. When we fail, the lowest place we can fall is our rock solid foundation of Jesus Christ. Nothing because he is our rock. Even if we fall, we can only fall on the rock of Christ. But we don’t stay there we build on it – we keep progressing, we grow, we march on, we will conquer the world with his love, with his forgiveness, with his blood, with his water, with his spirit.

That's what life is about. That's what we are living for. It's about Jesus. It's about him as our foundation; he's our strength; he's our forgiveness. Life is about Jesus. We are living for Jesus, living in in Jesus, living on Jesus. That's what life is about.

Whether you play sports, work in your office, study, or preach, that's what life is about. Christ is our rock, and we build our life on that rock for God's glory.

III. Story – Our story

There are three lessons from the three questions the Israelites had on their doubts about God.

-Exodus 17:2-3

Give us water to drink? You brought us to kill us our children...?

-Exodus 17:7

Is the Lord among us?

A. God will provide for us [2]

The three questions the Israelites have are: Are you providing for us? Are you going to protect us? Are you present in our lives?

First of all, God will provide for us. v.2 "Give us water to drink". He provides not only water, bur everything - spiritual water, bread, meat, everything. Demanding of God's provision these Israelites are spoiled, just like us. Not asking for it, not waiting, but insisting on it, as if they deserve it. They were telling God he has to give them what they wanted or else there was no telling what they might do. In our rebellion we often do the same thing. We insist on having our own way. What God does not do for us, what we think he ought to do, in the way we think he ought to do it, we complain about it – at home, at work, at church – we demand God's provision on our own terms, the way we want it; when that doesn't work, we worry. Remember, life is a wilderness. We are in a journey, we just came out of Egypt. We are on the way to the Promised Land – which is a picture of our salvation.

There is decisive aspect of salvation, and there is process aspect of salvation. Getting the Israelites out of slavery was a decisive act through the Red Sea account, but getting the slavery out of the Israelites was a process aspect. It takes some time for us to become sons from slaves. We have freedom in principle as Christians, but it takes process to be in persons. The problems in our life in this journey are part of the process.

So how does a person go through the wildernesses experience of life? As suffering comes, hardships come, and as we sin and fail, we can trust that God is faithful, God is patient - we can see the long sufferings of God that he constantly provides and how he loves us. Now the reason why we can easily see that the Israelites had spoiled heart and are sinful is because we are seeing a few pages of Scripture what the Israelites went through in forty years. So sometimes when we

have a birds eyes view, from the perspective of God, we can see how God is faithful. We can go through our wilderness. We can see that God will always provide for us, but we worry because we see from our perspective. We are like little kids complaining to parents. As little kids, we sometimes thought that our parents were doing something wrong, when they wanted something better for us.

We can see in this passage, as well as last passage, God provides differently at times. If he always provided in the same way, we could easily see better, but sometimes he provides in different ways. Like the first time when water was bitter, he changed the nature of the water. This time he generates water. There's so many different ways that God can provide, but God will always provide. Therefore we can go through the wilderness in life, because there is rock in the wilderness. Sometimes God provides us in the unlikeliness places in the wilderness in life. On top of the large rock water comes out. Sometimes when we are in a hard place, there is water in the wilderness. Water may come out of the rock. Until then, you will get water from the other places; that's the problem. We need to get it from the Lord. God is all we need, and we need the fresh water that He provides from the rock of Christ. You don't know God is all you need until God is all you have. Sometimes we are like that. Sometimes only when we are in a hard place, we can see that God is all we need, and he will provide us all we need. We can trust him even in the harder places.

And we fail so many times that there is the question of failure in a journey. When we fail, we question, can God still provide, it God really with us? We doubt all these things. The questions the Israelites have, we have in our mind. Well it's better not to fail, but even when you do God can help you, God will provide and good can come out of it. Often in hard places you can find the soft heart of God. Remember this is a journey. It's not about perfection – never falling down. It's about the process, of how God is leading you and helping you to grow.

Falling into temptation, you can find a wiser person afterwards. Even when you are discouraged, you can find encouraging older person as you grow. Why? Because there's always the rock in the wilderness. God will provide water in the wilderness. Because there's always the grace of God, we can always go through our wilderness and keep on progressing, even after we fall down, even after we fail.

B. God will protect us [3]

The second lesson here is that God will protect us. 'Are you going to kill us our children our livestock with thirst?' they were denying of his protection. The Isarelites assumed the worst, and they usually did as they conclude that God abandoned them to the point of death. Although their words were directly against God's prophet Moses, they were really accusing God of trying to harm them. Again we often commit this same sin. We complain about what God is going in our lives, especially when we think the suffering we endure is not good for us, but actually harmful. This is denying God's protection. So we fear hardships and difficulties. An overwhelming situation happens, and we fear, but the bibles says God is for us.

There are the times we question if. What if God is not real? What if God is not really good? What if I am wasting my life? If God, the omnipotent, almighty, all-loving God is with us, who can be against us. I love many 'if's' in the bible, and I love this if:

-Romans 8:31 *“What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us?”*

And those are the times I go through all types of things, but I choose to believe in this if. If my God who gave his one and only son to die for me is for me, what can I worry about? Who can be against me? Tell me who - if this is true - can be against you that you have legitimate fear of the situation, people? If God is for us, and the bible is overwhelming saying God is for you, God will provide for us. God will protect us.

C. God will be present with us [7]

The last lesson here is God will be present with us. Verse 7 says, 'Is the Lord among us or not?' Again doubting of his presence - our own trials often raise the same questions. Are you really there God? If you are there, show me. When we adopt this attitude we are guilty of denying God's presence. Some of you get so lonely. Whenever I become afraid, I just picture God behind me, and I'm not mentally brainwashing myself - well I am, but I am with the truth. You can see the Israelites going through all these things. You can see the three accusations they were accusing God of - provision, protection, presence - which were all untrue. He provided for them, turning water into something sweet, feeding them in the wilderness with quail, satisfying them with manna - bread of life. He provided for them, He protected them especially deliverance of pharaoh at the Red Sea. The Israelites forget that God was present with them in cloud and the pillar of fire. How many times was God going to have to prove himself to this people? He was guiding them day and night, and providing them manna 6 out of 7 day, and even on the 7th day he was providing them spiritual manna through the blessings. And their unbelief was unbelievable. God's people were suffering from spiritual amnesia, just like us. Their memory trouble made them forget God's provision, protection, presence- that he was providing for them.

But the rock, we have our rock - that is Christ-, he's our protector because he was struck on our behalf. He's our provider; he provides water of his presence and the Spirit. He's present by his spirit. He is with us now and forever more. He God in the dark, God on the rock, God who is the rock, God who is for us with us in our times of help - every moment of our lives.

We have all these question in life, and we ask question. So did the Israelites, but God gives far more than explanations to our questions. He gave us His one and only son. That's always the answer. Look at Jesus, and all you questions will be answers.

I thought about this water, and especially this passage in John. I believe the gospel of John is really using the water analogy, possibly from this passage.

-John 4:7

I thought about John 4 when there's a Samaritan woman who committed adultery - five husbands, possibly the sixth one that she's living with. Everybody talked about her, so she had to come later when other women were not there because they gossiped about her. She came in the afternoon to draw water. She was thirsty, but more so she was thirsty for love throughout her life. And Jesus sitting there intentionally, waiting for her to come. He starts to speak to her seven times, and she speaks to him six times, and her life is never the same again. At the end of the story, she leaves the water jug, and she goes back to the town to witness to people, so that people can come to see Jesus. Which points to she was so full of water - spiritually because Jesus provided her the provision of love, provision of forgiveness, which she was seeking for all her life.

-John 11:35

Another incident I'm thinking about is John chapter 11. We see Mary and Martha. Two sisters close to Jesus. They had a brother names Lazarus. Lazarus died, and 4 days later Jesus comes, and they were just blaming Jesus: 'Why weren't you there?' Basically they were saying 'Why didn't you protect us from death?' Of course death represented the curse of sin in the bible.

Jesus provides water in John 11:35. Jesus wept. One of the three places that showed the Jesus cried. He provides the water of his tear to this family, and of course he resurrects Lazarus - water of resurrection, water of strength that he provides for us as well.

-John 20:15

I think about another story in John 20. There's a woman named Mary who was just weeping, crying so much, her eyes probably so puffed up, so dehydrated - she couldn't really see Jesus in front of her because she thought the Jesus was gone. Verse 15 says, "Jesus said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you seeking?"” Physically dehydrated with water, and probably spiritually dehydrated. But when she finds it was Jesus, who she is seeking for as soon as Jesus cries out, 'Mary' she recognizes his voice, she runs to Jesus and holds onto his legs, his body. Jesus says, "Don't hold on to me; I have to go. But as I go, as I ascend, I'll send my spirit. And at that time, I know you want me to be with you, but when I go up, I will send you the spirit. I will not only be beside you, but in you forever. Then you won't need to hold on to me, and I will hold on to you forever. I'll be present in your life in your days forever." She received the water of his presence in her life.

When Jesus cried out, "I thirst", He had the cosmic thirst so we can drink of his grace - so that we will eternally never be thirsty again. He will provide - the water of provision, water of protection, water of presence - throughout all of our lives.

Conclusion

[Pastor Min shows a video of a waterfall ten times bigger than the Niagara Falls]

There is this bridge that goes right through this waterfall. I could not help but think God's love, strength, and grace pouring upon us, those who are in Jesus Christ, as I was in the middle of this waterfall. Water of provision, protection, and presence now and forever more.