

¹ Then all the congregation of the children of Israel set out on their journey from the Wilderness of Sin, according to the commandment of the LORD, and camped in Rephidim; but there was no water for the people to drink. ² Therefore the people contended with Moses, and said, "Give us water, that we may drink." And Moses said to them, "Why do you contend with me? Why do you tempt the LORD?" ³ And the people thirsted there for water, and the people complained against Moses, and said, 'Why is it you have brought us up out of Egypt, to kill us and our children and our livestock with thirst?' ⁴ So Moses cried out to the LORD, saying, "What shall I do with this people? They are almost ready to stone me!" ⁵ And the LORD said to Moses, "Go on before the people, and take with you some of the elders of Israel. Also take in your hand your rod with which you struck the river, and go. ⁶ Behold, I will stand before you there on the rock in Horeb; and you shall strike the rock, and water will come out of it, that the people may drink." And Moses did so in the sight of the elders of Israel. ⁷ So he called the name of the place Massah and Meribah, because of the contention of the children of Israel, and because they tempted the LORD, saying, "Is the LORD among us or not?"

Text: Exodus 17:1-7 A 2/13/22 1 Cor. 9:25-10:5 Mt. 20:1-16 Ps. 114 Resp. Ps.: 103
Hymns: 9, 277, 469, 422

WATER IN THE WILDERNESS

- 1. Water in their wilderness**
- 2. Water in our wilderness**

Dear fellow believers in Christ,

The "wilderness" through which the children of Israel traveled on their way to the Promised Land was no pleasant walk in the woods. It was "desert," with high temperatures and many places where there was little or no water. If we go three days without water, we'll die. Being out in the desert and running out of water is a life-and-death situation, the very situation in which the children of Israel found themselves in our text.

1

They had witnessed the ten plagues God had sent on the Egyptians, and how He had protected them and kept them safe from them all. After they left Egypt they became hemmed in by the Egyptian army on one side of them and the Red Sea on the other. God rescued them by parting the Red Sea so they could pass through safely on dry ground. Then God drowned the Egyptian army when they tried to pursue them. Three days later God's people were out in the desert where the only water was undrinkable. God changed the water and made it good to drink. A few months later they complained that they didn't have enough to eat, longing for the food they had back in Egypt (the 'good old days' when they were slaves!). God sent them manna (like bread) to eat, and kept sending it the entire forty years they traveled through the desert (Ex. 16:35).

Now, having traveled further, they once again had no water to drink. After all the Lord had done for them, did they trust Him to give them water? No. Instead they confronted Moses, "Give us water, that we may drink. ... Why is it you have brought us up out of Egypt, to kill us and our children and our livestock with thirst? ... Is the LORD among us or not?" Moses asked them, "Why do you tempt the LORD?" The idea in the original is, "Why do you put the LORD to the

test?” as though God had to prove that He cared about them and would provide for them. They failed to put their trust in God, saying that they thought they had been rescued from their slavery in Egypt only for them and their flocks and herds to die of thirst in the desert.

We’re told in Exodus 12:37-38, “*The children of Israel ... [numbered] about six hundred thousand men on foot, besides children. ... and flocks and herds – a great deal of livestock.*” The six hundred thousand were the men who could fight in war. Counting the women, little ones, and old people, the children of Israel numbered way over a million. There was no way Moses could get water for all those people and all their livestock out in the desert. But what Moses couldn’t do, God could. He told Moses, “*Take in your hand your rod with which you struck the river, and go. Behold, I will stand before you there on the rock in Horeb; and you shall strike the rock, and water will come out of it, that the people may drink.*” Moses struck the rock with his staff, as God had told him, and God made water come out of the rock. It wasn’t just a spring or little stream. Water came gushing out of the rock, plenty of water for all the people and all their flocks and herds to drink.

The Bible says, “*The things which are impossible with men are possible with God*” (Lk. 18:27). As the almighty, merciful God had been doing for His people, so He continued to do; this time making water gush out of solid rock out in the desert!

In this morning’s Epistle Lesson from 1 Corinthians chapter ten the Apostle Paul spoke of the children of Israel traveling through the desert to the Promised Land, saying, “*Our fathers ... all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them, and that Rock was Christ*” (1 Cor. 10:1, 3). “*Christ,*” the Son of God, was there with His people in the wilderness. As amazing as His miracle was of providing water for His people in the desert, Paul is talking about something even more amazing. Without the water the Son of God gave them they all would have died. The water He gave them saved their lives. Still, sooner or later, they all eventually died. Infinitely greater was eternal life that the Son of God gave to every one of them who believed in Him!

2

It had to be frightening traveling through the desert and running out of water and thinking you might die. Still, it was wrong for the children of Israel to doubt God and complain about Him. Thankfully, as Scripture says, “*If we are faithless, [God] remains faithful; He cannot deny Himself*” (2 Tim. 2:13). God had promised Abraham that He would bring his descendants, the children of Israel, to the Promised Land. God kept His promise.

Making our way through life in the ‘wilderness’ of this sinful world can be deadly to our faith. We all have things that happen to us that are frightening, times when we wonder if we’ll have enough food to eat, or wondering if we’ll have enough money to meet all of our expenses (especially those big, unexpected expenses). There are times when we or someone we love has some serious health problem, loses a job (or might lose a job). There are things we all face in life from time to time that can really rock our world and shake us to the core. It’s a good thing that you and I never fail to trust in God, no matter how bad our problem or how great our need. We never have doubts. We never complain about God and His will for us and for others. We’re

always grateful and thankful to God for all that He does to help us and provide for us. (We know this isn't not true.)

The psalmist reminds us, *“Our help is in the name of the LORD, Who made heaven and earth”* (Ps. 124:8). God made the entire universe. He can certainly help us with whatever our problem or need may be. He tells us, *“Call upon Me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you, and you shall glorify Me”* (Ps. 50:15). God promises that if we'll just ask Him, He will always come through for us.

How could the children of Israel have failed to trust in God after all the miracles He had done to rescue them and help them and provide for them? Why did they complain so often and so much about what God was doing, and what they thought He wasn't doing, for them? What was their problem?! Sin. Their problem was that they were sinful human beings.

That's our problem, too. The Bible says that we *“all have sinned”* (Ro. 3:23, my emphasis), and that *“the wages of sin”* – what we've earned by our sins – *“is death”* – eternal death in hell (Ro. 6:23). The children of Israel faced certain death in the wilderness if they couldn't get water. And they were completely helpless to get that water themselves. We face eternal death because of our sins. And we're completely helpless to save ourselves. But Jesus died on the cross to take away our sins and save us. *“God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us”* – Romans 5:8.

Jesus says, *“Whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst. But the water that I shall give him will become in him a fountain of water springing up into everlasting life”* (Jn. 4:14). The water Jesus gave His people in the wilderness saved their lives. The *“water,”* so to speak, that Jesus gives us – forgiveness and salvation by faith in Him – gives us eternal life. After Jesus died on the cross He rose again. He assures us, *“Because I live, you will live also”* (Jn. 14:19).

God always provided water, at times miraculously, for His people in the wilderness, finally seeing them to their new home in the Promised Land. He has taken all of them who believed in Him to heaven. God always provides us, at times miraculously, with water and everything else we need in the wilderness of our sinful world. And by faith He will take us to live with Him forever in the Promised Land of heaven!

I heard the voice of Jesus say, “Behold, I freely give
The living water; thirsty one, Stoop down and drink and live.”
I came to Jesus and I drank of that life-giving stream.
My thirst was quenched, my soul revived, And now I live in Him.

I heard the voice of Jesus say, “I am this dark world's Light.
Look unto Me; thy morn shall rise And all thy day be bright.”
I looked to Jesus, and I found in Him my Star, my Sun;
And in the Light of Life I'll walk Till traveling days are done. Amen. (TLH #277:2-3)