

Rev. Dan Welch 6-25-23 Text: Exodus 17:1–7 Week 2 Sermon Title: Water from the Rock

Last week, we studied Adam and Eve’s fall into sin and God’s promise to raise up one of their descendants to crush the serpent’s head. This would restore the relationship between God and all those who believe in that descendant, Jesus Christ. Jesus accomplished His mission on the cross, where He took our sins upon Himself and won our complete and free forgiveness through His innocent suffering, death, and resurrection. When Jesus returns on Judgment Day, He will restore His perfect creation, and all of us believers will live with Him in glory forever.

Today, we look at the results of the fall into sin and the curse it brought upon the earth. When Adam and Eve were driven out of the well-watered Garden of Eden, they found themselves in a world where water supplies are often unreliable. They and their descendants quickly learned to build their homes near reliable water sources, like lakes and rivers. That’s why their descendants, who lived in northeast Africa, built the ancient civilization of Egypt along the Nile River. If you lived anywhere in that region and experienced a severe drought or suffered any catastrophic famine, you went to live in Egypt until conditions improved.

It was one of those famines that brought the descendants of Abraham, the twelve tribes of Israel, to live in Egypt. They ended up staying there for four hundred years. During the last eighty years or so, the Egyptians turned against their Israelite guests and made them slaves. God called Moses to lead them out. Of course, Pharaoh, the king of Egypt, was not eager to release his slave labor, so he refused to obey God. In response, God displayed His power over Pharaoh by sending ten plagues upon Egypt, each progressively more powerful and destructive than the one before it. Finally, when God struck down every firstborn male in Egypt, Pharaoh drove the Israelites out.

God led them through the Red Sea and into a dry and desolate wilderness. He was leading them to Mount Sinai, where He had first called Moses in a burning bush and sent him to Egypt. God promised He would reveal Himself to the entire nation at that mountain. Exodus chapter 17 takes place on the way to Sinai. Verse 1 reads: “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.”

That shouldn't have been much of a problem, right? After all, the Israelites had seen God do incredible things, amazing things in Egypt. Not only had they witnessed God's ten plagues of judgment against Pharaoh's mistreatment of the Israelites, but the people also rejoiced when God protected them from the rapidly advancing Egyptian army as they approached the Red Sea and appeared to be trapped and doomed.

In that moment they watched Moses lift up his hands and stretch his staff over the waters. And God caused a strong east wind to part the waters into walls on the left and right. In awe and amazement, they passed through the sea on dry ground. Then, when the Egyptian army tried to follow in after them, God released the water and drowned every one of the Egyptians. Their enemy was gone for good, and they praised their God, who rescued them.

Now, just a few days later, they are in the heart of the wilderness and there is nothing to drink. But that was definitely not a problem for the God of Israel, the Creator of the heavens and the earth. Surely, the people knew by now to trust their God and call upon Him to give them water.

Unfortunately, the Israelites let their panic drown out their faith. In Exodus 17, verses 2–3, we read: “(T)he 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 up out of Egypt, to kill us and our children and our livestock with thirst?’”

That leads me to wonder, “How do **we** react when we find **ourselves** in need?” When money is tight, or we are having health problems, do we quietly wait in unshakable confidence for God to provide, or are we more likely to quarrel, gripe, and complain to Him? And even if we are patient at the start, how long do we hold out when days pass and the stress remains, or even increases? It's very understandable why the people of Israel cried out in their thirst. But that shows just how sinful we are and so often fail to realize it. How **should** the Israelites have reacted in the

wilderness—how should **we** react during challenging times in our lives? The answer: Look to the holy, and sinless Offspring of Adam and Eve: Jesus Christ, the descendant God raised up to crush the serpent's head.

Toward the end of Luke chapter 3, Jesus has been baptized and His public ministry is beginning. Chapter 4, verses 1–2, tell us how that ministry begins: “And Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the wilderness for forty days, being tempted by the devil.” Did you notice where Jesus was? In the wilderness - just like the Israelites. Israel **failed** their test in the wilderness. But how did Jesus do when the Holy Spirit led Him into the wilderness?

He ate nothing during those days. And when they were ended, He was hungry. Verse 3 continues: “The devil said to Him, ‘If you are the Son of God, command this stone to become bread.’”

Jesus spent forty days praying in that wilderness. At the end of those days, He felt His hunger. That is when the devil tempted Jesus to take matters into His own hands. The Israelites tried to do just that. They were ready to stone Moses and head back to Egypt where at least they knew there was plenty of water. Jesus could have taken matters into His own almighty hands. He could easily have done what Satan proposed, making those stones change into bread. But Jesus did not doubt, did not waver. We read in verse 4: “And Jesus answered him, ‘It is written, ‘Man shall not live by bread alone.’”

That is true faith. The Bible tells us Jesus was hungry. Was He thirsty too? It was the wilderness after all. Whether He was hungry and thirsty or just hungry doesn't matter. When Jesus felt the deep pangs of hunger, He did not lose His composure. He did not take matters into His own hands. He did not become distrustful, quarrelsome, or rebellious against God His Father. As Matthew writes it, Jesus told Satan, who had tempted Adam and Eve, “Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God” (Matthew 4:4).

The Israelites quarreled with Moses; you and I quarrel and complain against God. But Jesus listened for every word that came from the mouth of God His Father. When the Father said it was time to eat, Jesus would eat. Not a moment before. That's perfect faith! That's complete trust!

The Israelites failed the test, but God did not abandon them to their fate. Listen to God's answer in Exodus 17, verses 5–7: "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?'"

God had not forgotten His people. He had let that time of thirst go on for just a little while so they would learn to cry out to Him when they were in difficult situations. In their prayers, He would teach them to trust Him and look to Him to save them. Out of a dry rock in an inhospitable wilderness, God made water come gushing out and satisfied their thirst and watered all of their livestock.

In 1 Corinthians 10:1–4, St. Paul reminds us what God was doing behind the scenes: "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."

God sometimes lets us suffer for a little while. Satan tries to convince us God has abandoned us, but our Lord is faithfully watching over each of us as He promised. There is a reason Jesus taught us to pray, "Give us this day our daily bread"—so we would remember Israel's lesson in the wilderness when God miraculously sent water gushing out of a rock.

How did Jesus' story end? He held out for forty days without eating, trusting His Father would not abandon Him to die, and God sent angels to minister to Him, to feed Him. Years later, Jesus would kneel down in a garden called Gethsemane. There, He would pour out His prayer to His heavenly Father. In Matthew 26:39, we read: "My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from Me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as You will." That cup was God's wrath at all our sins—they were laid on Jesus' shoulders so

God can pardon and forgive you and me for our sin, our disobedience, our lack of faith and trust.

Then the next day, as He hung from the cross, Jesus called out to His Father again, “My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?” (Matthew 27:46). The people of Israel thought God had forsaken them when they were thirsty. We may feel God has forsaken us when our trials and troubles linger, but Jesus truly was forsaken by God the Father, who was punishing Him for the sins of the world.

Jesus was faithful throughout His life, and during the six hours He hung on the cross. Jesus’ last words showed once again His complete and perfect trust and faith in His Father: “Father, into Your hands I commit My spirit!” (Luke 23:46).

Jesus’ perfect sacrifice on the cross is the reason God could forgive Israel’s rebellion and cause water to gush out of the rock in the wilderness. In fact, John tells us the same thing happened after Jesus’ death on the cross: “But one of the soldiers pierced His side with a spear, and at once there came out blood and water” (John 19:34). We are washed in that water in our Baptism, and we receive Jesus’ blood with His body in the bread and wine of Holy Communion. These gifts assure us that Jesus has turned away God’s wrath because He bore the punishment for all of our sins. Now we can trust Jesus, our Savior, and God, our Father, to provide every need of body and soul. We can cry out to Him in prayer in our need and patiently await His answer with confident faith. If He gave His only Son to save us from our sins, He will certainly provide all our other bodily needs as well. Amen.