

**God Will Lead You Through:
“To Healing Refreshment”
Exodus 15:22-27**

Big Idea – This world is nothing but a wilderness for the child of God.

“So Moses brought Israel from the Red Sea, and they went out into the wilderness of Shur.” This is the first time that we read of them being in “the wilderness.”

Exodus 13:18 says “God led the people about the way of the wilderness,” but we know from v. 20 they didn’t go into it yet — “And they took their journey from Succoth, and encamped in Etham, in the edge of the wilderness.”

But now they “went out into the wilderness.” The spiritual lesson is clear – It was their passage through the Red Sea which introduced God’s redeemed to the wilderness.

Israel’s journey through the Red Sea typifies the believer’s union with Christ in His death and resurrection Romans 6:3,4:

Typically, Israel was now on resurrection-ground. So we don’t miss it the Holy Spirit has been careful to tell us that “Moses brought Israel from the Red Sea, and they went out into the wilderness of Shur; and they went three days in the wilderness.”

Here, as in many other passages, the “three days” speaks of resurrection “Jesus Christ was buried and rose again the third day...” (1 Cor. 15:4) It is only when the Christian’s faith lays hold of his oneness with Christ in His death and resurrection, recognizing that he is a “new creature” in Him, that he becomes conscious of “the wilderness.”

In direct proportion to how we understand our identity with Christ, will this world become to us a dreary and desolate wilderness. To the natural man,

the world offers much that is attractive and alluring; but to the spiritual man all in it is only “vanity and vexation of spirit.”

A whole lot in the world looks pleasant and pleasing to the physical eyes; but the eye of faith sees nothing but death written across the whole scene — “change and decay in all around I see.” It has a lot that ministers to “the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life,” but nothing whatever for the new nature. So far as the spiritual life is concerned, the world is simply a wilderness — barren and desolate.

The wilderness is the place of travelers, journeying from one country to another; nobody but a madman would think of making his home there.

So is this world. It is the place through which man journeys from time to eternity. Faith makes the difference between the way in which men regard this world. The unbeliever, for the most part, is content to remain here. He settles down as though he is to stay here forever.

“They think that their houses will continue forever, and their estates to all future generations; they even call their land after their names” (Psalm 49:11).

He makes every effort to prolong his time on earth, and when at last death claims him, he is reluctant to leave. It’s far different for the believer in Jesus Christ, the real believer. His home is not here. He looks “for a city which has foundations whose builder and maker is God” Hebrews 11:10.

He realizes he is just a visitor, a pilgrim or traveler here - Hebrews 11:13. This is what “the wilderness” represents Canaan was the country which God gave to Abraham and his seed, and the wilderness was simply a strange land through which they passed on their way to their inheritance.

What made the people lose their song?

“And they went three days into the wilderness, and found no water”-v. 22

Wilderness lesson #1: nothing can satisfy a life hidden in Christ.

Colossians 3:1 “Since you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God.

- 2 Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth.
- 3 Your old sinful self has died, and your new life is kept with Christ in God.”

The pleasures of sin, the attractions of the world, no longer satisfy. The things which formerly charmed us, now repulse us. The companionships we used to find so pleasing have become distasteful. The things which delight the ungodly only cause us to groan. The Christian who is in communion with his Lord finds absolutely nothing around him which will or can refresh his thirsty soul.

For him the shallow wells of this world have run dry.

His cry will be the Psalmist's in Psalm 63:1 “God, you are my God. I search for you. I thirst for you like someone in a dry, empty land where there is no water.”

Here is the believer's Resource: God alone can satisfy the longings of his heart. Just like he took the Lord's invitation for salvation, “If any man thirst, let him come unto Me, and drink” John 7:37

He must continue to go to Jesus Christ who alone has the Water of Life. This was a real trial, a real test! Three days' journey in the hot and sandy wilderness without finding any water; and now that water is reached, it is “bitter!”

“This often is the case with new believers. We grasp at that which we think will satisfy, and only find bitter disappointment. Have you tried the pleasures, or the riches, or the honors of the world, and only found them bitter? You are invited to a party. Once this would have been very delightful; but now, how bitter to the taste of the new nature! How utterly disappointed you return home. (C. Stanley).

Israel now felt the bareness and bitterness of the wilderness. They started out with light hearts, unprepared for what lay before them. To go three days and find no water, and when they reached some to find it bitter! How differently had they expected from God! How natural for them, after experiencing the great work of deliverance which He had done for them, to count on Him providing a smooth and easy path for them.

It's often the same way with new Christians. They have peace with God and rejoice in the knowledge of sins forgiven. So often they don't expect the troubles which come. Why would we expect things would be agreeable here? Haven't you sought to make yourself happy in this world? And haven't you been disappointed and discouraged, when you found "no water." and then what there is was "bitter?" See, we enter the wilderness without understanding what it is! We thought, if we thought at all, that God would screen us from sorrow.

My friends, it is at God's right hand, and not in this world, that there are "pleasures for evermore."

As we have said, the "wilderness" accurately symbolizes and portrays this world, and the first stage of the journey forecasts the whole journey! Drought and bitterness are all that we can expect in the place that won't acknowledge Christ. How could it be otherwise? Does God want us to settle down and be content in a world which hates Him and which cast out His beloved Son? Never!

Wilderness lesson #2 - expect nothing but difficulty on the journey.

"And when they came to Marah they could not drink of the waters of Marah, for they were bitter; so the name of it was called Marah" (v. 23).

Corollary principle – if you have no expectations you can't be disappointed.

Give all your expectations/rights to God!

Result: You can be content/happy with whatever you receive.

A mature Christian will testify most of his failings in the wilderness came from starting out with a wrong view of what the wilderness is. There's no ease or rest and the more we look for these, the greater our disappointment. The first stage in our journey should tell us, as it did Israel, what the true nature of the journey is. It is Marah. Like the gospel Song says, "It's not an easy road, we are traveling to Heaven, for many are the trials on the way..."

Two mistakes God's people made:

Looked at their circumstances

Forgot God and what He had done

He had brought them through the Red Sea and had lead them to this point. He had brought them here.

“...the people murmured against Moses, saying, What shall we drink?” (v. 24).

Different responses to the bitter waters

The people complained.

A serious big time problem! Three days ago these folks had been singing, now they are complaining. Praising before the Red Sea gives place to complaining at Marah! This experience was a real test, but how sadly Israel failed it.

Just like before, when they saw the Egyptians bearing down upon them, so now once more they berated Moses for bringing them into trouble.

They appeared to have overlooked entirely the fact that they had been led to Marah by the Pillar of Cloud (13:22)! Therefore, their murmuring against Moses was, in reality, murmuring against the Lord. It's the same thing with us. Every complaint against our circumstances, every grumble about the weather, about the way people treat us, about the daily trials of life, is directed against Jesus Christ, the One Who “works all things after the counsel of His Own will (Eph 1:11) .

Remember, what is here recorded of Israel's history is “written for our admonition” (1 Cor. 10:11). There is the same evil heart of unbelief and the same rebellious will within us as were in the Israelites. Therefore we need to earnestly seek grace that the one may be subdued and the other broken.

What was the cause of their “murmuring?” Took their eyes off God. After the miracles which they had witnessed in Egypt, and their glorious deliverance at the Red Sea, it ought to have been unmistakably obvious to

them that He was for them! But instead of recognizing this, they forgot Him! They speak as if all this had to do with Moses only.

But too often we are the same way! When we reach Marah, we blame some other person with being responsible for our hard lot! Some friend in whom we trusted, some counsellor whose advice we respected, someone we leaned on has failed us, and we blame them because of the “bitter waters!” We need to do what Moses did!

Moses cried out to God - “And he cried unto the Lord” (v. 25).

Moses did what Israel ought to have done — he took the matter to God in prayer. This is what our “Marah’s” are for — to drive us to the Lord. I say “drive,” for the tragic thing is that most of the time we are so under the influence of the flesh that we become absorbed with His blessings, rather than with the Blessor Himself.

Now it’s now that we are entirely prayer-less, but rather that there is so little heart in our prayers. It is sadly true, that it takes a “Marah” to make us cry unto God in earnest.

James 5:16b “The earnest prayer of a righteous person has great power and produces wonderful results.”

Psalms 119:67 “I used to wander off until you disciplined me; but now I closely follow your word.

71 My suffering was good for me, for it taught me to pay attention to your decrees.”

Notice what it says about Israel in Psalm 107:

“They wandered in the wilderness in a solitary way; they found no city to dwell in. Hungry and thirsty their soul fainted in them. THEN they cried unto the Lord in their trouble, and He delivered them out of their distresses.... Therefore He brought down their heart with labor; they fell down, and there was none to help. THEN they cried unto the Lord in their trouble, and He saved them out of their distresses.... Their soul abhorred all manner of meat; and they drew near unto the gates of death, THEN they cry unto the Lord in their trouble, and He saves them out of their distresses... They reel

to and fro, and stagger like a drunken man, and are at their wits' end. THEN they cry unto the Lord in their trouble, and He brings them out of their distresses" Psa. 107:4, 5, 12, 13, 18, 19,27, 28

What did God do? He gave them:

A tree

"And he cried unto the Lord; and the Lord showed him a tree, which, when he had cast into the waters, the waters were made sweet" (v. 25).

Moses did not cry unto God in vain. The One who has provided redemption for His people is the God of all grace, and with infinite long-suffering He bears with them. The faith of Israel might fail, and God's response was deeply significant.

He showed Moses "a tree."

The "tree" had evidently been there all the time, but Moses didn't see it or at least was unaware of its sweetening properties. It was not until the Lord "showed him" the tree that he learned of the provision of God's grace. This shows how dependent we are upon the Lord, and how blind we are in ourselves.

Of Hagar we read, "And God opened her eyes, and she saw a well of water" Genesis 21:19

In 2 Kings 6:17 we are told, "And the Lord opened the eyes of the young man, and he saw; and, behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire round about Elisha."

And what was it that the Lord "showed" Moses? It was "a tree." And what did this "tree" which sweetened the bitter waters, typify? Surely it is the person and work of the Savior — the two are inseparably connected. There are several Scriptures which present Him under the figure of a "tree."

Psalm 1 says, "He shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that bringeth forth His fruit in His season, His leaf also shall not wither; and whatsoever He doeth shall prosper" (v. 3).

Again, in Song of Solomon 2:3 we read, "As the apple tree among the trees of the wood, so is my Beloved among the sons. I sat down under His shadow with great delight, and His fruit was sweet to my taste."

One more great lesson of our wilderness-life — nothing can sweeten the bitter cup of our earthly experiences except resting under the shadow of Christ.

Sit down at His feet, dear friend, and you shall find His fruit “sweet” unto your taste, and His words sweeter than the honey or the honey-comb.

But the “tree” also speaks of the cross of Christ: “Who His own self bare our sins in His own body on the Tree” 1 Peter 2:24

“The cross of Christ is that which makes what is naturally bitter sweet to us. It is the fellowship of His sufferings, Philipians 3:10

Remember that the sufferings we’re referring to are sufferings which are peculiar to us as Christians. This ‘bitterness’ of death in the wilderness is not simply the experience of what falls to the common lot of man to experience. It is not the bitterness simply of being in the body — of enduring the ills which, they say, flesh is heir to. It is the bitterness which results from being linked with Christ in His own path of suffering here. ‘If we suffer with Him we shall also reign with Him.’

Marah then is sweetened by this ‘tree’; the cross, the cross of shame; the cross which was the mark of the world’s verdict as to Him — the cross it is that sweetens the struggles. If we endure shame and rejection for Him, as His, we can endure it, and the sweet reality of being linked with Him makes Marah itself drinkable” (Mr. Grant).

Great illustration of this is found in Acts 16. Paul and Silas were beaten, their backs were bloody and they were put in the inner dungeon of the prison. That was “Marah” for them indeed. But how did they respond? They “sang praises,” and sang so loudly that the other prisoners heard them (Acts 16:25).

There we see the “tree” of Jesus Christ sweetening the bitter waters. How was it possible for them to sing under such circumstances? Because they rejoiced that they were “counted worthy to suffer shame for “His name” Acts 5:41

This, then, is how we are to use the Cross in our daily lives — to regard our Christian trials and afflictions as opportunities for having fellowship with the sufferings of the Savior.

A command

“There He made for them a statute and an ordinance, and there he proved them and said, If thou wilt diligently hearken to the voice of the Lord thy God and wilt do that which is right in His sight, and wilt give ear to His commandments, and keep all His statutes, I will put none of these diseases upon thee, which I have brought upon the Egyptians” (vv. 25, 26).

It is very important to mark the context here. Nothing had been said to Israel about Jehovah’s “statutes and commandments” while they were in Egypt. But now that they were redeemed, now that they had been purchased for Himself, God’s claims are pressed upon them.

The Lord was dealing with them in wondrous grace. But grace is not lawlessness. Grace only makes us the more indebted to God. Our obligations are increased, not cancelled thereby. Grace reigns “through righteousness,” not at the expense of it

Romans 5:21 “Sin once used death to rule us, but God gave people more of his grace so that grace could rule by making people right with him. And this brings life forever through Jesus Christ our Lord.”

A test or a principle

This principle runs throughout the Scriptures and applies to every dispensation: Obedience to God’s Word brings blessing; disobedience brings conflict.

Israel was to be immune from the diseases of Egypt only so long as they listened diligently to the voice of the Lord their God and obeyed, did that which was right in His sight!

But don’t misunderstand and think that keeping the law has anything to do with our salvation. Israel here was already under the blood and had been, typically, brought through death on to resurrection-ground. Yet now the Lord reminds them of His commandments and statutes. How far off then, are those who say that the law has nothing to do with Christians?

True, it has nothing to do with your salvation. But it is necessary to regulate their walk.

Believers, equally with unbelievers, are subject to God's government. Failure to recognize this, failure to conform our daily lives to God's statutes, failure to obey His commandments, will not forfeit our salvation, but it will bring the chastening of a loving Heavenly Father.

A new name for Himself - "Jehovah-raphé"

A separate word is in the closing sentence of verse 26:

"For I am the Lord that heals thee." This has been lifted out of context by certain well-meaning people whose zeal is "not according to knowledge." They have detached this sentence of Scripture and "claimed" the Lord as their Healer.

This has even spawned the term "name it and claim it!" This raises the question:

(What about doctors, medicines, and other human means?)

Those who say that this means God heals everyone believe that by their faith God recovers them from sickness without the use of herbs or drugs. They then deduce the principle that it is wrong for a believer to go to the doctor or use medicine. The Lord is their Physician, and it is distrust of Him to consult an earthly physician.

But when this scripture is examined in its context, it will be found that instead of teaching that God forbids the use of means in the healing of His people, He uses them. The bitter waters of Marah were healed not by a peremptory fiat from Jehovah, but by a "tree" being cast into them! Thus, in the first reference to "healing" in the Bible we find God deliberately choosing to employ means for the healing and health of His people. Similarly, did He bless Elisha in the use of means (salt) in healing the waters at Jericho (2 Kings 2:19-22). Similarly God instructed His servant Isaiah to use means (a fig-poultice) in the healing of Hezekiah. Furthermore, God gave the apostle Paul Dr. Luke to go with him on his journeys.

A place of refreshment

“And they came to Elim, where were twelve wells of water, and 70 palm trees, and they camped there by the waters” (v. 27).

Elim is the complement to Marah, and this becomes more evident when we observe their order.

First, the bitter waters of Marah sweetened by the tree, and then the wells of pure water and the palm trees for shade and refreshment.

Here is the interpretation: when we are walking in fellowship with Christ and the principle of His cross is faithfully applied to our daily life, not only is the bitterness of suffering for His sake sweetened, but we enter into the pure joys which God has provided for His own, even down here.

“Elim” speaks, then, of the satisfaction which God gives to those who are walking with Him in obedience. This joy of heart, this satisfaction of soul, comes to us through the ministry of the Word — hence the significance of the twelve “wells” and the seventy “palm trees”; the very numbers selected by Christ in the sending forth of His apostles. Luke 9:1-10:1

Jeremiah 15:16 “Your words were found, and I ate them, and Your word was to me the joy and rejoicing of my heart; For I am called by Your name, O LORD God of hosts.”