

THE BITTER, ADVERSE, WATERS OF LIFE Exodus 15:22-27

Intro: Life is full of adversity and bitter waters. We have often heard people say: "That was a bitter pill to take;" and each of us have had our share of bitter pills.

The other day someone told me that life for them was like a roller coaster, up and down! I believe that is the way that it is for most of us.

For Israel, three days had made a real difference; things had changed. They went from the mountain top, crossing the Red Sea, to the deep valley in just seventy-two hours. As the children of Israel made their way to what they believed to be an oasis of refreshment, they found it to be a bitter experience instead.

What is the reaction of the children of Jehovah to this time of testing? How do they handle it? As we see, they handle it like many if not most Christians of today handle testing, they complain. I have seen it a hundred times; when faith is tested, those who are normally obedient and faithful to God become bitter and start complain. Remember, a faith that cannot be tested is a faith that cannot be trusted!

What is it that the Israelites were forgetting? They were forgetting that God is sovereign, and that He is in control. Robert Laws in his book *A Serious Call to a Devout and Holy Life* says: "He who believes that every thing happens to him for the best cannot possibly complain for lack of something better. If you therefore, live in murmurings and complaints, it is because you lack the first principle of religion—a right belief in God. As thankfulness is an express acknowledgment of the goodness of God even so complaints are plain accusations of God's lack of goodness to you."

The Bible over and over deals with the subject of adversity and the response to it by those who believe in God, but few passages so skillfully address the issues of the believer's response to adversity.

The test at Marah is a test of faith, and Israel's response to it. For you and I, it is an example of what not to do (1 Cor. 10:10-11).

Wilderness, wilderness, wilderness-- that is a theme that runs throughout the scripture. Think about what God did for Israel. He redeemed them by the blood of the lamb, brought them out of Egypt, and through the Red Sea; and where does He lead them? Into a dry and waterless wilderness! Believer, did God redeem you by the blood of His Son, The Lamb of God? And did He lead you out of the world sparing you eternal condemnation? Where are you right now? You say preacher, I am in a dry and spiritually waterless wilderness! You may be wandering:

“What has gone wrong, why am I in this desert?” Friend, just as God had a divine plan for Israel in the desert, He has a plan for your life that will result in His getting all of the glory for what He is going to bring you through.

I. Vss. 22-23, ADVERSITY- WE WILL FACE IT

A. Vs. 22, Life is filled with ups and downs. It is filled with blessings and with bitter situations. Life is a mixture. From the praise of Moses song to no water, to bitter water, that’s life! Life has the bitter and the sweet.

1. We like to stay in our comfort zones and not be moved. The scripture says: “So Moses brought Israel from the Red Sea...” (“Brought” is the Hebrew ‘naca’, meaning “to pull out or up, to be pulled up.”) The Israelites did not want to leave the Red Sea shore; they were reluctant to move on. Are we reluctant to move forward for God?

2. “The wilderness of Shur” seems to indicate walls built by the Pharaohs for fortification. From here, the edge of the wilderness, the Israelites journeyed.

a. For three days, they traveled, and there was no water to be found.

b. All of us are going to go through dry spells spiritually. For days we will pray, and it will seem as if we have not penetrated the ceiling. We may go for days without water spiritually. What are we to do? Sit down and dry up! NO! we are to keep on walking in the spirit.

B. Vs. 23, When they got to Marah, the waters were bitter! Here is another disappointment in the journey. The Children of Israel are in a bind.

1. In the shadow of victory, there comes a great trial: a trial that breaks the spirit of Israel.

2. It was just three days ago that God had defeated the army of Pharaoh. Now, the spirit of God’s people is broken.

a. Has this ever happened to you? God really steps in and get you out of a tight that you thought you’d never get out of, and you are so thrilled. You call your friends; you post it on face book; you are so blessed.

b. Then the storm comes, and you forget what God has done for you in the past; so much so, that it is as if it never happened and your spirit is broken once again. Somehow you forget that life has a Master and that Romans 8:28 is still in the book. We are so much like the disciples on the Sea of Galilee. Jesus has just performed great miracles that they observed; He is in the boat with them; but when the storm comes,

they forget that He has ever done anything.

c. God is not just the Master in the good times; He is also Master in the bad time. He is not just God of the mountain; He is also God of the valley.

II. Vs. 24, ADVERSITY- HOW WILL WE FACE IT

A. It is not if adversity will come, but when will it hit? When it hits, how will you face it? The children of Israel responded to adversity in unbelief and faithlessness.

1. They faced adversity with selfishness. The Israelites were only concerned about their immediate need. They had already forgotten all the wonderful things that God had recently done for them. All the praise and the worship was over. Instead of being overwhelmed with spiritual needs, they were overwhelmed with personal ones.

2. Are we any different than the Children of Israel? How often have we forgotten the greatness of God when we have gotten into tight?

3. When hard times come, we are prone to forget the omnipotence, omniscience, and omnipresence of God.

a. When adversity comes, we seem to focus only upon the trial and not the one who can give the victory over the trial.

b. We can tighten the boundaries of our lives until we are the centerpiece and focus of every thought and motive. It can easily become all about us and not about Him!

4. God does not want us to live for self and be selfish. God wants us to live our lives for Him; and then, He will meet our every need (Matthew 6:33: "Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and His righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you").

B. They faced adversity by walking by sight and not by faith.

1. They were disappointed when the satisfaction that they sought in the world around them failed. They should have been looking to the Lord who bought them instead.

a. When their expectations failed them, they were disappointed with God.

b. How often have expectations and satisfactions failed? Some believe they will find full satisfaction in a job, a girlfriend, or boyfriend, a husband, or a wife.

2. Where can true satisfaction and joy be found? I think you know the answer whether you apply it all the time or not.

a. True peace and satisfaction can be found in the

Lord, and that as we keep our eyes and our thoughts on Him (Isaiah 26:3 “Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on thee: because he trusteth in thee”).

b. As believers, our duty is to depend on the Lord in every situation in life.

C. They faced adversity with a lack of satisfaction.

1. We are to give God the glory in every situation: good or bad. It is easy to give Him the glory when everything is going good, when we are on the mountain top. But when things go wrong, it is not easy to praise God.

2. Some folks never seem to be satisfied. Are you one of those folks?

III. Vss. 25-27, ADVERSITY- GOD’S RESPONSE TO ISRAEL’S FAILURE

A. Vs. 25, Israel was faithless, and God was and is faithful to His people. Moses, the leader of the people, did what he could do. He cried unto the Lord; and the Lord showed him a tree...

1. We need to be reminded that God was aware of their needs before the need arose, just as He is aware of our needs before we are.

a. God knew what they would face at Marah. He had planned the journey with Moses as His servant leading the way.

b. There is nothing in life that takes our God by surprise; He knows all about it. Someone said: “He is already in your tomorrow, and He knows what you will face when you get there.”

2. God is able to meet our every need. Moses is shown a tree to cast into the bitter waters of Marah. When Moses did this, the bitter water became sweet.

a. God had already prepared a tree to meet the need. When the His children got there, He was ready to meet their need.

b. God manifested His omnipotence, and they got the sweet water they needed.

3. Just as God met the need of Israel at Marah, a bitter place, He is able to meet your need and my need.

a. Back in the book of Genesis, we read about the creation of Adam, a man without sin, a man with the sweetness of God in him. All of his needs were met by God, and God even walked and talked with Adam and Eve in the garden.

b. Even with everything provided for him, man fell; he

sinned against God and plunged all of mankind into the bitter waters of iniquity. When Adam sinned, he became a needy creature, needy of the essentials of life, but importantly, needy of salvation.

c. Friend, when Jesus died on that tree, the cross of Calvary, he restored all that Adam had destroyed. He made the bitter waters of life sweet again.

d. Through Christ's death on the tree, I have my need met, the curse of the law has been removed, and I have salvation full and free. "Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us: for it is written, Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree."

e. He drank the bitter cup so that I could drink the sweet water from the cup of salvation. Psalm 116:13 says: "I will take the cup of salvation, and call upon the name of the LORD."

B. Vs. 26, Trusting and obeying the Lord is what we are to do, and this is how we are to live. It is not enough to sing, shout, and rejoice. We must listen to what He says and do it.

1. Obedience is a big part of the life of faith. Many of the movements today put very little emphasis on Christian living. They center everything on praise and worship.

2. God tells the children of Israel that they are to be obedient; and if they are, He will spare them the plagues that He brought upon Egypt.

3. God wants us to be obedient, and He wants America to be obedient to Him. "Blessed is the nation whose God is the Lord..." (Psalm 33:12).

C. Vs. 27, This verse is a testimony to God's providential provision. At Elim, there is a well for every tribe and a tree for every elder in Israel.

1. The fullness of God's provision is pictured here.

2. "My God shall supply all your need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus" (Philippians 4:19).

Conclusion: God has provided for our need in every way in Christ Jesus our Lord.

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