

The Rev. Michael J. Bridge  
Sermon- Exodus 17:1-7  
Sunday, March 19, 2017

### A reasonable concern

1. The Israelites roaming through the desert after leaving Egypt are an easy group to pick on. They were regularly crying out against Moses and against God. No matter how many times God provided for them, going all the way back to providing plagues to force Pharaoh to let them go, they still seemed to question whether or not God would provide at the next step.
  - a. Usually, when I preach about these things, I am pretty hard on the Israelites.
2. In the spirit of fairness, I do want to point out that traveling through the desert without water is a cause for concern. In the previous two chapters, God had provided water and food for the Israelites. In Exodus 15 the Israelites had been traveling three days without water, which would be significant. Then they came to a place with water, but the water was undrinkable. Moses, by the power of God, transformed that bitter water into good water, and everyone was able to be refreshed and rehydrated.
3. In Exodus 17, the Israelites had come to a place with no water. This is a different situation than coming to a place with bad water. When you have likely over two million people needing hydrated and there is no water, you have a pretty big problem.
  - a. Moses wasn't concerned, because he trusted God. But there is no way to deny that this is a completely reasonable concern for the people to have.

### An unreasonable reaction

1. What wasn't reasonable was their reaction to the crisis. As it is described in the passage, the people quarreled with Moses and made accusations against him and God.
  - a. 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?" (v. 3)
2. It is interesting how they blame Moses for their predicament, but based on all they had seen recently, they knew God was behind their exodus from Egypt.
3. As people, we can be very short-sighted. We are often governed by our bellies and by our physical passions and needs. We don't like discomfort. That is why I am not in shape. I see who I want to be, but I don't want the pain, difficulty, and discomfort of getting there.
  - a. We see who we want to be in the Lord, but the process of sanctification, of mortifying sin and making changes in our lives is painful and difficult.
4. Yes, the Israelites knew about the promises being held out in front of them- that they would receive the land of Canaan and be blessed as the people of God. But the process of getting there proved to be difficult and trying.
  - a. No one would fault the Israelites, or anyone else in a similar situation, for being uneasy, weary, or afraid. The problem was that they liked to take things too far. In this case, they were accusing Moses of bringing them out to die of thirst, as if this was his plan. They were pretending like they didn't have promises from God; like he hadn't provided for them multiple times already; and like Moses was someone who either wished them ill, or had lied to them about his plan.

5. The situation was worrisome as they were in the desert without water. But their response was over the top, and, really, was blasphemous. Moses accused them of putting God to the test through their behavior.
  - a. 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?” (v. 7)

### God continues to provide

1. Despite all of this, God provided what they needed. God wasn't taken by surprise that he was going to need to provide food and water for millions of people. It also isn't beyond his power to bring forth water where there isn't any.
  - a. When God brought the great flood, it says that he opened up the springs of the earth. He brought water forth from the earth enough to flood it all. Bringing forth water for his people is not a problem.
2. The Israelites' complaints show a lack of faith, not just in God's desire to provide, but in his ability. They didn't see water, so they didn't believe they would get any; and thus, they felt justified in questioning the very plan and character of God himself.
3. God showed his power, and that the people needed to trust Moses as his chosen leader, by leading Moses to a great rock and having him strike it with his staff. When Moses struck the rock, water flowed forth in the presence of the elders of Israel, leaving no doubt about the miracle of God's power, and what the power he had entrusted to Moses.
4. This account is just one of many along the journey from Egypt to Canaan that showed how the Israelites tested God and God continually provided for them.
5. This is also where we may find ourselves in the story. God has called us. He has given us the sacrifice of his Son for the forgiveness of our sins. He is leading us on a path of change, growth, and discipleship. He has laid different calls on each of us in terms of how he wants us to serve him and his kingdom.
6. I am sure that all of you have seen the stats for pastors- how many are depressed; how many leave the ministry; etc. There are times when it is easy to wonder if God is with me, or if he really wants me to do this. Many of you may feel the same way on your own journeys of faith. It is important, in those times, to remember that God did not call us out into the wilderness that we would starve or die of thirst.
  - a. Instead, he feeds us with his Word and Spirit. He hydrates us with his living water flowing from his Son. He doesn't call us to easy paths. He calls us to difficult journeys and then walks alongside us.
  - b. Just as God continued to provide for Israel because of the call he placed on them, and the promises he made them, so he will continue to provide for you and for me. We should take the examples we see of God's faithfulness to the Israelites and hold them in our hearts so that when we get to that next difficult moment we aren't tempted to question whether God has led us on our journey to let us die of thirst; but that we will trust, wholeheartedly, that he will provide, because he who calls is faithful in all things, even when our own faith falters.