

Message 12: Judging God through my Circumstances

4.11.2021

Exodus Series

Exodus 17:1-7 (CSB)

WATER FROM THE ROCK

17 The entire Israelite community left the Wilderness of Sin, moving from one place to the next according to the LORD's command. They camped at Rephidim, but there was no water for the people to drink. ²So the people complained to Moses, "Give us water to drink."

"Why are you complaining to me?" Moses replied to them. "Why are you testing the LORD?"

³But the people thirsted there for water and grumbled against Moses. They said, "Why did you ever bring us up from Egypt to kill us and our children and our livestock with thirst?"

⁴Then Moses cried out to the LORD, "What should I do with these people? In a little while they will stone me!"

⁵The LORD answered Moses, "Go on ahead of the people and take some of the elders of Israel with you. Take the staff you **struck the Nile** with in your hand and go. ⁶I am going to stand there in front of you on the rock at Horeb; when you hit the rock, water will come out of it and the people will drink." Moses did this in the sight of the elders of Israel. ⁷He named the place Massah and Meribah because the Israelites complained, and because they tested the LORD, saying, "Is the LORD among us or not?"

Introduction to the Text: God has, again, led His people to a place of dependence and testing.

A. Recently, Israel has encountered the miracle of manna and quail.

1. God miraculously provided, and continued to provide, enough food for every person to eat and to be full every day.
2. God has demonstrated His power over the waters of the Nile, the waters of the Red Sea, and the bitter waters at Marah.
3. But now, Israel is thirsty again.

B. Israel is camped at a place called Rephidim.

1. Israel does not know it yet, but this is the last camping place before they come to the Mountain of God, Mt. Sinai.

2. This is the last camping place without the Torah, the Law.
3. This is the last camping place before they hear God's voice, and see God's cloud, and feel God's earthquake, and see God's fire.
4. **In essence, the next place that Israel will camp is in the presence of God himself.**
5. This is their last move in the Book of Exodus.

C. Rephidim did not look like a great place.

1. It was a wilderness place.
2. It was a place with no natural water.
3. It was a place that made Israel vulnerable to attack (that's next week).
4. It was a place where God tested Israel, and became a place of great rebellion.
 - a. In fact, Psalms, Hebrews, and 1 Corinthians all talk about this particular story.

b. The level of rebellion and unbelief that happens in this passage results in a warning for future generations.

D. I cannot stress enough the importance of wilderness places in God's plans.

1. Many who have been in church awhile hear the term "wilderness" and think of disobedience and the 40-year wanderings.

2. But before Israel's sin of disbelief, God used wilderness places to test the character and worship of His people.

3. **Wilderness places are intended to provide opportunities for God to do miracles.**

a. The wilderness strips us of our powers to provide.

b. The wilderness takes away our dependence upon self.

c. The wilderness demonstrates what is happening inside and gives us and God an opportunity to deal with those things.

4. **You cannot avoid the wilderness places that God has led you to.**

5. A pastor once said, "You can't rebuke the season God has put you in."

6. Remember, that it was God himself who led Israel to Rephidim and the rock at Horeb.

1. At Rephidim, Israel is thirsty again.

A. Water is life and death.

1. Israel did not have access to a convenience store.

a. They were not complaining because they didn't have the right kind of smart-water.

b. They were not deciding on if they should buy water bottle with the sippy kind of in or with the regular lid.

c. Before I gave up drinking soda, I would often skip the water and drink the soda because 44oz soft-drink was cheaper than a 20oz bottle of water.

2. They had no water.
3. Israel had no way of carrying enough water for everyone to drink for an extended time.
4. They were in the wilderness and could not depend upon a good rain to fill their canteens.
5. The absence of water meant death.

B. I want us to notice the miracles involving water that have already taken place in Exodus.

1. The Nile and waters of Egypt turned to blood.
2. The Red Sea parted.
3. Water healed and made drinkable at Marah.
4. God has already demonstrated His power and willingness to do miracles with water.
5. Yet, the moment the people become thirsty they rebel against God.

C. We must be careful that our discomfort does not become opportunity for rebellion.

1. Rarely do we complain in our abundance.
2. It is possible that our murmurs and complaints against God are happening while God is in the process of delivering a miracle.
3. Israel did not believe God would do what was right, so they rebelled.

2. Rephidim becomes a place where Israel puts God to the test.

A. The word test here has the meaning of "trial".

1. Israel is putting God on trial.

2. What for? **He is on trial for:**

a. #1. Not protecting them.

b. #2. Not providing for them.

c. #3. And for attempted murder.

3. We know that these are false accusations, yet they accuse God of all of these crimes.

4. The names of the place, Massah and Meribah, mean testing and strife.

B. **Israel is putting God on trial for violating His covenant with them.**

1. Because they can't stone or kill God, they threaten to exercise capital punishment on Moses.

a. Later on, the descendants of Israel threaten to stone David when things appeared to not go well.

b. Much later, they attempt to stone Jesus.

c. Then they successfully stone the Deacon Stephen.

d. Even the Apostle Paul was stoned with rocks, but miraculously survived.

2. Moses understands what is happening and calls for the elders, to serve as a jury and witnesses of what God is preparing to do.

3. On this day, Israel "tested" God. Massah

4. They put God on "trial". Merribah

C. **When we judge God through our circumstances, we call into question the covenant.**

1. God had promised to provide, and He was going to.

2. God had promised to lead them, and He was.

3. God had promised to be with them, and He never left.

4. *But Israel didn't like her circumstances, and therefore questioned the covenant.*

D. **We must be mindful that our circumstances are not the final word.**

1. God is always faithful.
2. God is always trustworthy.
3. **Do not judge God through the lens of your circumstances.**
 - a. My circumstances are not the final-word.
 - b. My circumstances are opportunities for the faithfulness of God to shine through.
 - c. My circumstances are reminders that Jesus is not optional: I NEED Him.
4. **Times of abundance cause us to redefine what is optional.**
 - a. How many of you have ever bought a vehicle where Air Conditioning was optional?
 - b. How many of you would buy a brand-new vehicle today without A/C?
 - c. But if every vehicle you owned broke down and someone offered you a free vehicle but it didn't have A/C, you would gladly borrow it because you needed it.
 - d. Difficult circumstances are reminders that Jesus IS NOT optional.
 - e. He is Life, without Him we are nothing.

3. The sins of Israel at Rephidim are two-fold:

A. **First they "denied God's protection".**

1. They accused God of not protecting them in this journey.
 - a. We have the benefits of looking back and knowing what God does.

b. But when your kid is crying for a drink of water, and the cattle are groaning, and you don't know what to do, it is natural for us to cry out to God.

2. But there is a difference between prayer and rebellion.

a. We will all go through seasons and experiences that cause us to have questions.

b. Scripture teaches us that God can handle our greatest questions, as we see in the book of Job.

c. But **when we accuse God of not being good and act upon that declaration, we are entering dangerous territory.**

3. Recently, a friend of mine officiated the funeral for the Texas Highway patrolman that was killed in the line of duty.

a. It is perfectly natural and normal for that trooper's family, friends, and neighbors to wonder why bad things happen to good people.

b. The Psalms are FULL of these types of prayers.

c. *But when I allow those questions to change my heart to the degree that I no longer trust God, I am no longer walking in obedience but rebellion.*

d. **When I walk in rebellion, I declare that God is not as capable of leading me or protecting me as I am.**

4. It was at Rephidim that Israel, again, questioned God's power to protect them on the journey.

B. It was at Rephidim that Israel "denied God's presence." Vs 7.

⁷He named the place Massah and Meribah⁷ because the Israelites complained, and because they tested the LORD, saying, "Is the LORD among us or not?"

1. Each morning they looked up and saw the Pillar of Cloud, yet they denied God's presence.

- a. Each night they could see the Pillar of Fire, yet they questioned if God was there.
- b. Each morning, the women collected enough food to feed millions, yet they questioned if God was present on the journey.

2. Church, **Do not allow difficult circumstances convince you that God is absent!**

3. Jesus said He would never leave or forsake us.

4. God is with us in the joyful and the difficult places.

4. Israel's rejection of God foreshadowed their rejection of Jesus.

A. Last week we celebrated Good Friday and Resurrection Sunday.

1. On Good Friday, Israel openly rejected Jesus as their Messiah.
2. They shouted crucify, crucify to the One who had come to give them life and to give them living water.
3. The Apostle Paul interprets the Exodus story for New Testament believers in 1 Cor. 10

B. Paul warns followers of Jesus about the dangers of "testing" Jesus and putting Him on trial.

1 Corinthians 10:1-5 (CSB)

10 Now I do not want you to be unaware, brothers and sisters, that our ancestors were all under the cloud, all passed through the sea, ²and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea. ³They all ate the same spiritual food, ⁴and all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank from the spiritual rock that followed them, and that rock was Christ. ⁵Nevertheless God was not pleased with most of them, since they were struck down in the wilderness.

1. Notice the phrase: They drank from the spiritual rock that followed them, and that rock was Christ.
2. Moses, in Deuteronomy 32, calls God the "Rock" 5 times.

- a. God told Moses to go to the rock there at Horeb, and there God would stand before him.
- b. God wanted Israel to understand that, in their midst, was the God of the Universe.
- c. The God of unlimited supply was there with them.
- d. God was there to bring manna from heaven and cause water to flow from the rocks.

3. Paul equated this constant presence and provision with Jesus Himself.

- a. Paul understood what Israel didn't:
- b. Jesus was with Israel on their journey.
- c. He was the source of their supply.
- d. Each time Israel rejected Moses' leadership, they were rejecting the spiritual Rock that was with them.

C. Here's the hook: Paul tells the Gentiles (non-Jews) in Corinth not to commit the same sin that Israel did.

1 Corinthians 10:1-13 (CSB)

10 Now I do not want you to be unaware, brothers and sisters, that our ancestors were all under the cloud, all passed through the sea, ²and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea. ³They all ate the same spiritual food, ⁴and all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank from the spiritual rock that followed them, and that rock was Christ. ⁵Nevertheless God was not pleased with most of them, since they were struck down in the wilderness.

⁶Now these things took place as examples for us, so that we will not desire evil things as they did. ⁷Don't become idolaters as some of them were; as it is written, **The people sat down to eat and drink, and got up to party.** ⁸Let us not commit sexual immorality as some of them did, and in a single day twenty-three thousand people died. ⁹Let us not test Christ as some of them did and were destroyed by snakes. ¹⁰And don't grumble as

some of them did, and were killed by the destroyer.¹¹ These things happened to them as examples, and they were written for our instruction, on whom the ends of the ages have come.¹² So, whoever thinks he stands must be careful not to fall.¹³ No temptation has come upon you except what is common to humanity. But God is faithful; he will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation he will also provide the way out so that you may be able to bear it.

1. Paul tells the whole story of Israel's journey and wilderness experience.

2. How they consistently served idols, flaunted their sin, and rejected God's leadership.

3. Then Paul declares: These things are examples, written for our instruction.

a. So, "whoever thinks he stands, be careful".

b. Paul warns them and us to not be prideful, thinking we are better than Israel and incapable of sin.

c. And when tempted, we are not to blame God.

d. For God is faithful.

Application: Let's Apply this message two 2 levels:

A. First level: As a nation, we are rebelling against God.

1. We have moved far past questioning God.

2. Most of our nation is in open rebellion, living their life according to their own standards and cursing God to His face.

3. We are not the first or only nation to do this.

4. But each time, it has brought God's wrath and judgment.

1. Egypt

2. Israel.

3. Assyria

4. Babylon.
5. Greece.
6. Rome.
7. Beware the Nation(s) that persecute God.

5. Let us pray that our nation has a change of heart towards God.

B. Personal level: **Is it possible that you have been judging God's faithfulness through the lens of your personal circumstances?**

1. Maybe life isn't what you had dreamed it should be, so you find yourself questioning God's provision and protection along this journey.

2. Please hear my heart:

a. In no way am I minimizing what you are going through.

b. But please **Don't let your circumstances go to your heart.**

3. **When we view God's faithfulness through our circumstances, we miss the provision and presence of Jesus who has been there all along the way.**

C. There is an ancient Rabbinical teaching that Paul might have been thinking of in 1 Corinthians 10.

1. The Rabbis believed that through all the 40 years of Israel's wanderings that a Rock followed them, providing water all along the way.

2. We know about the manna, but God also had to provide water in the journey.

3. Could it be possible that, along with the cloud and the fire, there really was a "Rock", the presence of Jesus providing them with the life-giving water that only God could provide?

4. Doesn't it make sense when Jesus said in John 7 ³⁷ "On the last day of the feast, the great day, Jesus stood up and cried out, "If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink."

5. Is it feasible that the same Jesus that provided for His people in the wilderness water is the same Jesus who is calling out to you today offering spiritual drink for your journey?

6. Instead of rejecting Jesus in your difficulty, instead of questing His protection, provision, and presence, perhaps look around and see that Jesus has been with you all along.

Prayer