

## Lent 3

I'd like to focus our attention this morning on our OT Lesson. Notice the passage from Exodus and our Psalm are a matched set. Together these provide the most essential insight for the Christian life. And the most practical.

If the Bible does not touch ordinary life it is not touching us at all. Because that is where we live. So, why go the Old Testament, and why to the book of Exodus? What does that have to do with us? Let's see.

Moses has led the people out of slavery, "with a mighty hand." God has demonstrated His power over Pharaoh and Egypt's gods. He has broken the back of the world's superpower.

Now God has taken the people out into the desert to engage a much more challenging enemy. More challenging because **this enemy cannot be defeated by power.**

Lesson begins: God has brought the people to Rephedim. No water. No wonder: v. 3 "Why did you bring us up out of Egypt, to kill us and our children and our livestock with thirst?" Legitimate question. What good is it to be out of slavery if we are going to die in the desert?

But there is question behind this question, and that is where the heart of the battle really lies.

This the fourth time since left Egypt something like this has happened:

Ch 14: Pharaoh at the Red Sea:

"Is it because there are no graves in Egypt that you taken us away to dies in the wilderness. What have you done to us? It would have been better to be slaves than to die in the wilderness."

Ch 15: Marah: Water supply is bitter, probably alkaline

"And the people grumbled against Moses, saying 'What shall we drink?'"

Ch 16: 15 days out: No more food:

“It would have better to die by the hand of the Lord in Egypt when we sat by the meat pots and ate bread to the full. You have brought us out to the wilderness to kill us with hunger.”

Ch 17: No water

God keeps taking the people into situations where their needs cannot be met by their environment or their circumstances or themselves.

Have you ever been in a situation like that?

For us it is not likely to be physical.

Few of us have faced starvation or the prospect of dying of thirst.

Our environment supplies food and water pretty well.

But what about other needs and desires?

Have you ever found yourself in a situation where it feels like you are dying on the inside?

Anguish of the mind and the soul is far more painful than the hunger of the body.

Few people commit suicide because they are hungry.

It is the suffering of heart and mind that drives us to desperation.

**Question: How do we respond, what do we do, when our environment or our circumstances are not meeting our needs?**

We usually try to **make some changes in our circumstances**.

Sometimes it works, problem solved, need met.

But often it **doesn't work**, or we find that the solution is **temporary**.

And sometimes our efforts only **make things worse**.

What happens after we have exhausted all of our options?

The natural human instinct is to **find someone to blame**.

And this is where things can become very ugly.

It is not difficult to find someone on which to focus our attention.

In our lesson, the people blamed Moses, naturally.  
He was the one who had gotten them into this situation.  
And so they murmured, they quarreled, they blamed.

I look back with shame over how much energy I have wasted complaining,  
and my endless detailed analysis of other people.

Who is the whipping boy (or girl) in your life? Who gets the blame?  
Whose fault is it that you are not happy, your needs not being met?  
Who do you spend your energy trying to change?

Some of us tend to **blame is our self**. Two forms:

- If I were better, stronger, braver, I could change my situation.
- I got myself into this situation. It is my fault. I am just reaping what I sowed. There's nothing I can do.

Often the one we **blame is God**.

- Others may be creating the problem, but ultimately, God is the one responsible.
- If He did not do it, He allowed it to happen.
- He could have stopped it.

So what does that say about Him?

- Does He exist, does He care, about me?

Moses tells the people.

“You think you are blaming me, but in fact you are blaming God.

“You are murmuring against Him.

Moses called the place where all this was happening by two names:

Massah and Meribah.

Meribah means quarreling – easy to understand that.

Massah means testing

Think about that for a minute: Who is being tested? What is the test?

To answer that we have to ask another question first:

Why did God lead the people out into the desert?  
It is only an eleven-day journey from Egypt to Canaan if you go directly.

Q: Why did God take them the long way through the desert?

A: God needed to teach them something they could not learn any other way.  
They thought their problem was slavery.  
God knew that was just the surface.

His purpose was to re-establish a right relationship with His people.  
Nothing less than reversing what the devil had done in the Garden.

What was that?  
It wasn't about the apple. It wasn't even about obedience.  
It was about trust.

Can you trust this God? His rules don't make any sense.  
What is He up to? What is His angle?  
What is He trying to keep you from enjoying?

When we doubt God's character, we will inevitably take matters into our own hands, and disaster follows naturally.

So God, took His people out into the desert to teach them to trust Him.

Repeatedly He demonstrated His power.  
He demonstrated His care and provision.

Now in 17 He lets them experience some thirst.  
They look around, they see no water, and they murmur.

Moses called the place was called Massah because they tested the Lord by saying: "Is the Lord among us or not?"

In other words, "Lord, we are not sure you are reliable."

Israel put this whole episode into a Psalm and made it part of their worship, so they would never forget.

Psalm 95 begins with praise and recognition of God's greatness.

- A great King above all Gods.
- His greatness is higher than the mountains and deeper than the oceans.
- He made it all .

He is powerful. But he is also our shepherd.

- He loves us, cares for us.
- We are His people and the sheep of His hand.

Then the tone shifts to warning:

Do not harden your hearts the way your forefather's did.

- They are a people who go astray in their hearts
- They have not known my ways.
- They put God to the test, though they had seen His work.

God invited them to show their trust in Him in spite of the circumstances. They said, "No. We'll TEST YOU and see if you are worthy of OUR TRUST."

What about us? Do we trust the Lord? Of course, we do...

**But can God trust us to trust Him, no matter what our circumstances?**

Some of us are right now living in circumstances where it feels like some of our needs are not being met.

If not right now, it is just a matter of time.

How will we respond?

God wants to build in us the kind of trust that says:

"Lord, I know you are here in this with me.

"And I know that you love me."

"Now, let's take it from there."

"You know my needs. You know how I got here."

"You know what needs to change my circumstances."

"Even more, you know what needs to change in me."

“I am going to bring this to you trusting that you will lead me and sustain me.”

“I am not going to murmur.

“Not going to look for someone to blame.”

“I’m going to seek your face.”

“You know what I need to learn through this.”

“Above all else, use this experience to deepen my trust in you, and whatever changes need to be made, I trust you to guide me.”

**Winning the trust of a fearful, prideful heart is far more difficult than defeating the forces of Pharaoh.**

The only place to learn this trust is in the wilderness,

- at the end of our resources,
- just beyond the range of our control.

God will take us there, but even He cannot guarantee the outcome. That is in our hands. Will we harden our hearts or look to Him?

As long as we have it all covered, we will never learn to trust. And fear and anger will always lurk just below the surface.

The school of trust is not easy. Not easy for God. Not easy for us. Is it worth it? What is the alternative?

If we do not learn to trust God, then all we are left with is our self.

I can’t think of anything more terrifying than living this life depending on me.

Except the thought of living that way for eternity.

The good news is that God can re-orient our trust, if we will let him.

It will happen in the wilderness, through circumstances that we cannot control.

But He will be with us. And that is all that matters.