

Midweek Meditation April 13, 2022

Exodus 17:1-7

It is interesting, for the last three or four meditations, the turning point in the discussion has been that the Israelites are in the desert and they either don't have food to eat or they don't have water to drink. And their reaction to that problem is always the same. Where has God gone? Why has God abandoned them? Instead of asking for God's help in their time of need, they came to Moses and start grumbling to him about the fact that they had no food or drink. And God's reaction to their grumbling is the same every time. If you just trust in me, I will provide for your water and food. In their grumbling they said repeatedly, we could have stayed in Egypt and died there. At least then we had plenty to eat and drink.

They start with the assumption that God is somehow not able or willing to provide for them even though he has told them repeatedly that he would provide for them if they would believe and obey his commands and decrees. I have to wonder, what would have happened to them if instead of grumbling to Moses about how God has not provided for their needs, they gave thanks for God's provision and prayed to God themselves for his continued care for them in the wilderness. In that way they would be acknowledging God's authority. Instead, they were asking Moses to solve their problem of being thirsty, rather than asking God to provide.

Did Moses part the Red Sea in order to protect them from Pharaoh? Did Moses provide the water at Marah when he threw the block of wood into the spring there? No! That was God's hand providing for his chosen people. Was it Moses who provided manna and quails in the desert? No! That was God providing for his chosen people as he had promised to do. So today, here we are again. The people are thirsty as they journey through the desert. They have seen no water to go with their daily manna and quails. So they once again come to Moses and grumble about their thirst. And again, Moses goes to God and advocates for the people.

This time, God tells Moses to take the elders of the people ahead. Perhaps God thinks that the elders will see this miracle and then convince the people to be better at trusting God. He says that Moses should take his staff and strike it on the rock and then water would come out of the rock for all of the people to drink. God specifically says here what the nation has done wrong. They quarreled about having no water. And in their quarrelling, they blamed Moses for their thirst instead of understanding that it was their own lack of faith that was causing the problems. God says in the last verse of this passage that he named the place where water came from the rock in part because the people had tested the Lord saying, "Is the Lord among us or not?"

So the reason for their thirst is because of their doubts in the Lord. The reason for their thirst is because they were not even sure enough that God was walking with them in the wilderness, to cause them to ask for God's provision. They did not ask when God was going to provide the water he promised them. They asked where is God? They believed that God had abandoned them, when in reality all they needed to do was ask for God's help. And by the way, in asking for God's help they would then acknowledge that they needed God to sustain them in their journey. But that is what God wanted from them. By grumbling to Moses, they were pointing the finger of blame, which is not consistent with God's plan for his chosen people. And they are also not acknowledging their own need to trust their life into the hands of God.

Part of trusting God is acknowledging that He is there with you even when times are tough, and then to continue looking for His help to sustain you. At this point, if the Israelite nation was not traveling on easy street, they just made the assumption that their God had abandoned them, rather than considering that God might be preparing them for the journey ahead of them. If the Israelite nation was not traveling on Easy street, they did not make an effort to remember how God had walked with them and saved them and preserved them in the past so many times. They just assumed that God had left them. I think that it is easy for us to translate this message from Exodus, chapter 17, into our own personal journeys.

How often do we shape our prayers in ways that do not allow for God's purpose, but instead, we try to impose our ideas onto God about how our life should be? We often live our lives impatiently waiting for life to go exactly the way we imagined instead of allowing for the wondrous possibilities of God's plans for our lives. And when our lives are driven by impatient faith, perhaps we limit what God could accomplish with our lives. Perhaps, we miss the joy that comes from walking with God and God alone. Perhaps we miss the possibilities of Joy and peace that could have been if our attention was completely focused on God's plan for our journeys. Like our savior in the garden said, "Not as I will, but Thy will be done."

Perhaps the Israelite nation could have benefited by that simple phrase. Perhaps we could benefit from those simple words too, "Not as I will, but Your will be done." Let us Pray.