

Exod 03-09-07a

Let's begin our Sunday morning worship this morning. We have many different aspects of our worship. We are foregoing our musical portion this morning because I just can't get motivated to try it when Dan's not here so we will do extra next time.

Maybe we'll sing three hymns next Sunday. But whenever we think about the different aspects of our worship and we are going to be picking up this morning in Exodus chapter 16, it always strikes me what a wonderful gift we have been given in having the presence of God's Holy Spirit. When God said I will never leave thee nor forsake thee, He was speaking originally to national Israel and it was God's presence on behalf of the nation and corporately that was in view.

We have an individual manifestation and fulfillment of that promise. Whether we ascend into the skies on an airplane or go to the depths of the sea in a submarine, whether we go to a far-flung corner of the earth, whatever our circumstances may be, God is ever with us. He is not only omnipresent throughout the universe but He is singularly present in our souls, in the person of His Spirit and in the presence of His Word.

And there is never a time when we cannot receive His ministry, even when we sin and when we fail, God does not abandon us. Instead He goes from the blessing, encouragement and training mode into the discipline, correction and instruction mode. But He is ever-present.

I was taught in my younger days that when I sinned I would be quote out of fellowship and when I was out of fellowship God could really do nothing for me and it was incumbent on me to get myself back in fellowship by confessing my sins. Acknowledging our sin is an exceedingly important part of our responsibility. God does not leave us when we sin.

A very simple piece of logic tells us that if spiritual things are spiritually discerned and we cannot comprehend them or apply them apart from God's Holy Spirit then how could we identify a sin and apply the promise of God's cleansing and forgiveness unless God's Holy Spirit was there to aid us. Parents do not clam up and walk away the first time their child or any other time that their child fouls up and disobeys. We just move into a different form, a different aspect of our parenting responsibility when there is a disobedience or some other kind of malfunction.

But we never lose our love, we never lose our relationship, we never abdicate our responsibility in a relationship of that nature and of course God does not either. So in thinking about all of that when we do come to a time of nurture and nourishment and intake of God's Word for our souls we recognize that it is all of grace, it is all God's gift. We don't get a star by our name for assembling ourselves any more than you get credit for responding to the cow bell or the call to the mess decks on a ship or the fact that a meal has been laid out on the table in a household or in a cafeteria or restaurant, wherever it is we may eat.

It is a need and it is a need that has been met by the Lord God and we are grateful for the opportunity to have our souls fed and nourished by God's Word in the ongoing ministry of His Spirit. We acknowledge that at the outset of our study of the Word of God because we know that otherwise we're basically wasting our time. It is not going to profit us unless God's power is present and operating.

So at the outset of our worship in the Word this morning let's pray. Father you are our strength, you have brought about our redemption, you are our refuge in time of trouble, you are the source of every good and perfect gift that comes from above, we were given life by you, we have been given new life by you, our steps have been ordered by you and every turn in the road and every new vista, every new part of the path has been crafted in your perfect plan long before we were born. We thank you that our life has a destination, we have a place where we will arrive, we have a future and it is all because of your grace and because of the faithfulness of the Lord Jesus Christ who came in love to rescue us from a hopeless situation and enter us into relationship with you and into a bright future that is full of potential and full of opportunities.

We thank you for the gift of your Word, we thank you for the presence of the Spirit and we pray this morning that as we study and fellowship in it that you will minister it to our hearts so that we can be thoroughly equipped for every good work, we can recover to the maximum extent possible the image in which we were originally created. We pray for those who have the rule over us, we pray for our president and our national leaders, those in the judiciary and legislative branches and there are those who honor you and who are a part of the household of faith who function in those areas, we pray especially for them that you will sustain them, strengthen them, guide their hearts and their minds in such a way that they can not only see the right path but prevail in causing it to become our national policy and not be deterred or discouraged or thwarted by those who are not oriented to your plan and purpose who have their own selfish interests at heart. We pray for our nation with regard to our international relations and our presence on foreign soil.

We pray for those in the military both at home and abroad who work in ways both large and small to guarantee our freedom and perpetuate our American way of life. We thank you that we have the opportunity to study in freedom and in safety and we ask that the Spirit will lead us and guide us in our worship this morning. We ask it in Jesus' name.

Amen. For our scripture reading this morning, turn with me to the Psalms. I think that the Psalms are an endless source of great commentary and insight and a different perspective on the things that we find throughout the Word of God and I think that God uses the hymnal of Israel much as He uses our own hymnal to supplement and complement the things that we have in our book type studies.

The psalm we want to focus on this morning is Psalm 89. Psalm 89. This is a contemplation of Ethan the Ezraite.

I don't know a lot about Ethan. But this psalm falls into two sections and we're going to look at the second portion because it parallels something that we're studying this morning in Exodus chapter 16. The first half of this psalm acknowledges the mercies of the Lord and His ministrations to Israel through the Davidic Covenant.

It is a celebration of God's power and His blessing, His provision of a king and beginning in verse 30, that provision and that mercy and those graces that have come to Israel from God create and are a part of a responsibility in the nation. It is not just a one-way transfer. Israel should respond.

Israel, the nation, should remember the God who has done these great and wonderful things and not forget. We talked Friday night about the fact that the power of God is implemented for a purpose and it should cause a positive response in us just as it should here. So we begin in verse 30 and he's talking about the seed of David.

He says that these kings, these leaders, will endure forever and the throne like the days of heaven. That's in verse 29. But if his sons forsake my law, these are those who have been given much.

They've been given opportunity and responsibility to lead Israel. If his sons forsake my law and do not walk in my judgments, if they break my statutes and do not keep my commandments, then I will punish their transgression with the rod and their iniquity with stripes. Nevertheless, my loving kindness I will not utterly take from him nor allow my faithfulness to fail.

So there is a difference between being utterly cast off, cut off, rejected and forever separated from God and departing through disobedience and receiving chastisement as a result. This puts us in mind, keep your finger in Psalm 89 and turn back to our passage in Exodus chapter 15. Right at the end of the chapter, what did we see last time? We saw God placing an obligation on his people.

He says in verse 26 of Exodus 15, if you diligently heed the voice of the Lord your God and do what is right in his sight, if you give ear to his commandments, if you keep all his statutes, I will put none of the diseases on you which I have brought on the Egyptians. For I am the Lord who heals you. Well, the obvious implication there is if they do not heed the voice of the Lord, if they do not do what is right, if they do not give ear to his commandments, if they do not keep all his statutes, he will afflict them as he afflicted the Egyptians.

And it is a sobering thought that the perils and the tribulations that come upon the godless, hell-bound category of people can come upon God's people. There is no distinction in the level or severity of affliction. It is not as though there is some threshold below which we do not fall in terms of discipline and judgment from God.

It can be very severe, as severe as what happens to the unbelievers. You find the same principle in Romans chapter 1 and 2. Well, we have the same idea here. God's favor, God's love versus

God's hate, if you will.

People think, well, if you're, you know, Jacob have I loved and Esau have I hated, that must mean you're an unbeliever and you're going to the lake of fire for all eternity. Not so. Love and hate in the Semitic mind, in the ancient Near Eastern world, is policy, not emotion.

Love and hate are policy. What is my policy toward those who are obedient? It is a policy of favor and that is called love. What is the policy toward those who are disobedient, who do not keep the statutes, who do not keep the commandments, who do not walk in God's judgments, those who forsake his law? The policy is disfavor.

The one who does not honor me, God says, I will lightly esteem. This is disfavor. It is called hate in the ancient Near Eastern world.

This is covenant language, by the way. It had nothing to do with emotion. The suzerain-vassal treaty form was used for hundreds of years in this area of the world.

A king would subjugate an area and he didn't necessarily destroy everything and everyone. He would make them a vassal state, much as the Roman Empire would do later on. And he said, if you will subject yourself to my laws, if you will pay your taxes, if you will provide the conscripts I need for my army, I will love you.

And this is covenant language, meaning I will protect your borders. I will take care of you when there's a disaster. I will implement building projects.

I will do irrigation and canals. I will send people to build your ports. I will take care of you like I take care of my own people.

I will love you was the term for that sort of positive policy toward the vassal state. But if you rise up in rebellion against me, if you refuse to pay your taxes, if you don't provide your conscripts, if you ally yourself with those who are my enemies, I will hate you. And this is a policy where I will not spend tax dollars on your public facilities.

I will not build schools and libraries and ports and roads and fortifications. I instead will come in and oppress you. I will send in the National Guard and have martial law and you will have curfew and you will have all other kinds of very unsavory effects because you are rebellious and unhelpful.

And this is called hate in covenant language. That's what God uses in the Bible and this is the option that he presents his people. You belong to me whether you are good or bad.

You belong to me whether you are obedient or disobedient. But you are going to determine whether the policy toward you is one of love or whether it is one of hate. Whether it is one of prosperity and provision and benevolence or whether it is one of harshness, of correction, of oppression to bring into line.

This is what we see expressed over and over again in the Scripture. We saw it at the end of Exodus 15. We see it here.

If his sons forsake my law, do not walk in my judgments, break my statutes, don't keep my commandments, I will punish their transgression with the rod whom the Lord loves he chastens and he skins alive with a whip every son whom he receives. Verse 33, nevertheless my loving-kindness I will not utterly take from him nor will I allow my faithfulness to fail. My covenant I will not break.

I will not alter the word that has gone out of my lips. Once I have sworn by my holiness I will not lie to David. His seed shall endure forever and his throne shall endure as the sun before me.

It shall be established forever like the moon, even like the faithful witness in the sky. Selah. What I find interesting as a side note there is it will endure as long as the sun and the moon.

Now how long do the sun and moon endure? Until the end of the millennial kingdom after Gog Magog after the this heavens and earth are rolled up like a scroll and the elements melt with a fervent heat as Peter says and then you have the new Jerusalem coming down out of heaven, you have the new heavens, the new earth and there is no sun and there is no moon, there is no night. The Lamb is the light in that kingdom of the Father and of course you do not have a throne of David in that new context anymore. So this is not an eternal promise it is an everlasting promise for as long as this earth shall endure, this solar system, this created cosmos.

Of course I don't know that the ancient Israelites were thinking that far into the future but in their minds that is essentially eternity and so it is with us. His promise is ever sure. Now look at verse 38, but after all of the warnings, after all of the encouragements, after all of the reminders and exhortations, you have cast off and abhorred, you have been furious with your anointed, Ethan the Ezraite says to God.

You have renounced the covenant of your servant, you have profaned his crown by casting it to the ground, you have broken down all his hedges, you have brought his strongholds to ruin. He reminds God of the history and of the promise and he says you have said oh God that the throne will endure, the seed will survive and be blessed and so on as long as they are faithful and if they forsake and do not walk then this bad stuff will come. He says well you have brought these bad things, you've broken down his hedges, that's the wall of protection, you've brought his strongholds to ruin, all who pass by the way plunder him, he has a reproach to his neighbors, you have exalted the right hand of his adversaries, you have made all his enemies rejoice, you have also turned back the edge of his sword and have not sustained him in the battle, you have made his glory cease and cast his throne down to the ground, the days of his youth you have shortened, you have covered him with shame, Selah.

How long Lord will you hide yourself forever, will your wrath burn like fire? Remember how short my time is, for what futility have you created all the children of men? What man can live

and not see death? Can he deliver his life from the power of the grave? Selah. Lord where are your former loving kindnesses which you swore to David in your truth? Remember Lord the reproach of your servants, how I bear in my bosom the reproach of all the many peoples, with which your enemies have reproached the Lord, with which they have reproached the footsteps of your anointed. Blessed be the Lord forever, amen and amen.

This psalm finds the thinking of the psalmist right at the balance point. There is always a reason for suffering. It is not always for discipline, but there are occasions where it is for discipline.

When we find ourselves in a suffering situation, we have to ask ourselves of the seven or eight different biblical reasons why Christians suffer, which one applies to me? There is suffering for the cross of Christ, where we are unjustly afflicted for the name. The Apostles in prison are an example of this. Paul receiving the forty lashes minus one.

You have suffering for righteousness sake. You do the right thing and earthly consequences are not that good. You say what needs to be said.

You own up to what the truth is and bad circumstances follow. This is related to suffering for the sake of Christ, but it is called in scripture suffering for the sake of righteousness. There is an entire doctrine that you can do, looking at the scripture, all the different ways that one is afflicted.

Look at the career of Joseph, the son of Jacob. He didn't do anything wrong and yet he went through suffering. There is suffering for growth.

God will put us in grievous circumstances to reveal our weaknesses, to break up the rocks that are in our soil. The Lord Jesus himself suffered and he never did anything wrong. What does the scripture say about that? It says he learned obedience through the things that he suffered.

We can also encounter circumstances that test our obedience, that stretch our faith, that build our spiritual muscles, if you will. But you can be sure that anytime we encounter suffering or affliction or adversity or hard times that challenge us, there is a reason and there is a purpose. It is helpful if we can discern what that is.

Sometimes it is to reveal to us an area where we are in failure, particularly if there is an area of promise that starts to be withheld. What promises do we have? We have promises of protection. We have promises of provision.

We have promises of peace. And if those leave us, it is time to start looking for the cause, because these are wake-up calls. There are times when we are challenged, we have to do without, and we have not yet done anything wrong, but it is a time to prove whether we will or not.

That is what we find over in Exodus chapter 15 and 16, to which we now return. At the end of Exodus 15, we saw that Israel traveled for three days after singing their songs of praise, after

reveling in the victory that God had provided for them at the Red Sea, and they sang the songs and they banged the bongos and did the dancing and so on. Moses has a song, Miriam has a song, and then in verse 22, they went three days in the wilderness and found no water.

This is about the length of time that you can travel with what you can carry, three days. They run out, and just about the time they come to some water, it turns out to be bitter. So the name of that place is called Marah.

The people complained against Moses saying, what shall we drink? We looked at this last time. These bitter waters are something that are representative in our own experience, in our own lives. Water is something you have to consume to live.

It's a part of life. Our bodies are 96 point some odd percent water, right? Water is a necessity. Water is an inevitability.

Can't do without it. They've gone for three days, they've used up the supply that they brought from Egypt, and now they're out. They come over the sand dune there, the gravelly ridge, and they see a place, and there seem to be some trees and shrubs growing there, and they go down and scoop some up, and it's bitter.

It's undrinkable. It's unpotable. And they immediately complained.

Then Moses cries out to the Lord, and the Lord showed him a tree. When he cast it into the waters, the waters were made sweet. Then follows this ordinance, if you will obey, if you will be faithful, none of these afflictions will come on you.

What was the very first affliction that happened in Egypt? The water became undrinkable. Remember that? The Egyptians had to dig all around the shores of the Nile trying to find something to drink. This affliction represents the potential for the experiences that took place in Egypt for the Egyptians to fall upon the Israelites.

God says, look, you remember? It all began, those ten afflictions in Egypt began with undrinkable water. Here you are, and there's undrinkable water. What is the difference between you and the Egyptians? What do you have that they did not have? You have Yahweh Rapha, R-A-P-H-A, Yahweh the healer.

Almost all the time in a context like this it says Yahweh Eloheka, Yahweh your God, the Lord your God. But here it's Yahweh Raphaka, Yahweh your healer. And God presents himself here as the one who can turn cursing to blessing, who can take that which is bitter and make it sweet.

But the choice, God says, is up to the people of God. You have to be diligent to heed the voice of the Lord. You have to be diligent to do what is right in his sight.

You have to be diligent to give ear to his commandments. You have to be diligent to keep his

statutes. Then God is free to come in and be Yahweh Rapha.

Otherwise, you start with number one, bitter water, and you can run through all the rest of the afflictions of Egypt. They are a potential for the people of God. Now, what is the difference? There was no remedy for the water of the Nile.

There is a remedy for this bitter water. The Lord showed him a tree. Here's my question for you.

You know, we tend to just think in the ruts because we hear these stories and we've read them over and over and they always follow the same course. It's like a book that you read or a movie that you watch. The plot is always the same and sometimes we don't think about, well, what if? Or what could the alternatives have been? Sometimes we need to stretch our mind a little bit.

Here's my question to you. By what means has the power of God been reflected or symbolized up to this point? What was it that was stretched out in the hand of Moses and Aaron that was associated with the acting of the power of God? It was the rod, right? It was the staff of Moses that he had on Mount Sinai when he saw the burning bush. The rod of God is held out and plagues come and plagues go.

The water is parted and the Israelites cross. He holds out the rod again. Waters are no longer parted and the Egyptians disappear in the foaming brine.

Now they come to bitter water. Why does Moses not stretch out the rod of God? Wouldn't this be the logical thing? Every other time we had a problem, stretched out the old rod and the power of God came in and Israel receives the benefit. And the problem is resolved.

Why doesn't he stretch out the rod? I would suggest to you that it is the difference between life and death. The rod is a stick that was formerly alive but is now dead, representing the power of the death of Christ on the cross. His death accomplishes our deliverance out of the Egypt of sin and separation from God.

Now that we have been saved, now that we have been baptized through the waters and we are living our life unto God, remember what it says in the New Testament? Having been saved by his death, how much more shall we be saved by his life? And it is now living wood, it is a tree that has life in it, that is the means of healing and the means of sustaining and the means of providing life. That living tree imparts life to the water. The waters that were bitter and undrinkable are now drinkable.

Water was a fact of life before the exodus from Egypt and water is a fact of life afterward. And I think in the larger sense, if you think about the spiritual realm, in our lost condition, in our life without God, we had circumstances, we had history, we had issues, we had problems, we had inevitabilities that were part of our existence. Salvation comes and we now live our life as unto the Lord, but those situations have not gone away.

In other words, there is still water that we must drink and a lot of it is bitter water. And for

someone who is an unbeliever, it's just undrinkable. But God can take the bitterness of situations that belong to this world, the bitterness of history, the bitterness of past failures, the bitterness of ongoing situations that were a part of our life before salvation or apart from salvation, and make what was undrinkable, unconsumable, not only not bitter but actually sweet.

God can convert cursing to blessing. What is the condition for that conversion? It is association with the living tree. It is association with the life of Christ.

We need the life of Christ to convert what starts out as bitter in our lives into that which is actually beneficial, something that works together for good. So that is why on this occasion, God immediately confronts Israel with this choice. He says, look, you had this bitter water, kind of like the water of the Nile, plague number one.

I put the living tree in front of you. You look at the tree, you apply the tree, and that bitter water is made sweet. Now, here is your statute and your ordinance.

This is my test for you, God says. If you will heed, do what is right, give ear, keep, I will be Yahweh Rapha for you. I will take what is bad and make it good.

I will take what is bitter and make it sweet. He doesn't take away the water. He doesn't say, oh, forget that water, let me take you over here to this other pond.

He takes that water, that place. This water, by the way, had been bitter so long that the place name had become Mara. This, who knows, decades, centuries perhaps, this water had never been drinkable.

A few plants could filter it through the sand and get enough nourishment to grow. It had the promise of benefit without the fulfillment. God says, I can make this drinkable for you.

So we're presented with a choice. Obedience that leads to life and health or disobedience leading to affliction and death. Now, that is the context when you get to verse 27.

Then they came to Elim where there were twelve wells of water and seventy palm trees. They camped there by the waters. Once they are faced with this issue and the lesson, the challenge is made clear, now they leave that place and they come to Elim.

Elim means palms. In the Marine Corps, a lot of times you go out to 29 palms for training. Well, this is 70 palms.

Seventy palms. A little desert resort area. We've got 70 date palm trees and 12 wells.

If you do the math, that is one well and five trees per tribe. What an interesting geometry. Each tribe has its own well.

Each tribe has five, count them, sources of nourishment. Date palm trees were a staple provider

in the ancient Near East. Many parts of that tree were usable.

They wouldn't cut the entire tree down. It would no longer be 70 palms, but they could take the branches. They could take the leaves.

They used the leaves and branches to manufacture baskets and implements for household use. They could weave cords from the fibers. The date palms themselves were a staple.

You could live forever on these dates that came from the palms. And they have this water. One well per tribe.

And what is this a picture of? God is going to bring them to the place of sustenance. They have what they need in terms of provision in every different area of life. So there is a time of refreshing.

They have a challenge. They have this water of bitterness at Mara. Then God brings them to a place of restoration.

Let's refill the canteens. Let's get some fresh baskets and fresh cords and fresh ropes to tug the donkeys along with. And all of the different things we need to R&R and now we're ready to resume the journey.

And you can expect that God does not leave affliction upon us indefinitely. There is a time of refreshment. There is a time of restoration.

There will be a time of prosperity following adversity. Not necessarily monetary but spiritually. Well that brings us to chapter 16 where they journey from Elim and they come to the wilderness of sin.

There's a lot we have to say about the wilderness of sin. And that's what we are going to take a look at when we come back from the break.