

Exod 03-10-12a

So let's begin our worship this morning by taking a moment at the outset to clear our minds and prepare our hearts and seek the ministry of God's Holy Spirit as we look together at the truth of God's Word. Shall we pray? Father, thank you that you are our strength and our redeemer and that we have been delivered from a lost and hopeless condition by your grace. We thank you for the Lord Jesus Christ who sacrificed himself on our behalf, who forever changed his identity and his position and his destiny on our behalf.

He is once and for all both God and man and is forever our representative and we have been made acceptable to you in him. We thank you that our security and our righteousness and our peace, our relationship with you depends entirely upon him and not upon us. We thank you that you saw fit to save us when we had no redeeming qualities, when we had nothing to commend us, nothing to recommend us.

And we ask this morning that as we study your word together, you will use it to rehabilitate our souls and our thinking, that you will transform us and renew our minds so that we will be worthy vessels that will hold the treasure that reflects your glory. We know that you have assigned us each individually a place in your plan. There is potential, there is purpose, there is opportunity for each and every one of us.

You have gifted us, you have destined us for good works. We pray that our study this morning will help us to identify and follow that path through our lives into the eternal future. We ask your blessing on those who are not with us this morning, those who study with us at a distance.

We pray especially for our leaders in government and those in military and in law enforcement and those who secure and safeguard our freedoms. We are so privileged to live in this country and have all of the benefits that we enjoy. We ask that your hand will be upon those who maintain that structure and that freedom for us.

Once again, we ask your blessing on each one here. May each one of us exercise our spiritual gifts this morning and in the week ahead to be a blessing to others. We ask it in Jesus' name.

Amen. For our scripture reading this morning, turn with me and your Bibles to Psalm 95. Psalm 95.

We often find ourselves in the Psalms for our scripture reading. And one of the reasons is I think this was probably a feature of worship in Israel as they sang. Of course, these are the lyrics to their hymnal.

And these ideas and these doctrinal truths would have been suggested to the minds of worshipers in Israel, those who were faithful and who were paying attention and wanting to learn and grow, would be reminded of great truths of God through their music worship as they listened to the sons of Korah and the others who sang these great hymns in the same way that

Fanny Crosby and Ira Sankey and other great hymnists have contributed words to us. I'm not sure hymnists is a word. Lyricists, Isaac Watt and Wesley and the others.

We have many great contributors in this hymnal as well. Psalm 95 is not attributed to any particular author. We know the first 50 Psalms are traditionally ascribed to David.

Many of them are explicitly ascribed to him. But this is in the second part of the book. It is subtitled in Your New King James, A Call to Worship and Obedience.

If there's one thing that ought to characterize our lives, it is worship. Obedience is really an act of worship. Because it is an acknowledgment of God's place in the universe and specifically God's place in our lives.

When we are faithful, when we are obedient, we are worshiping. We are functioning in our priesthood in obedience to God. So this is an exhortation to praise God and not to test Him.

That second part begins in verse 8. Our study in Exodus, we find ourselves at Massah and at Meribah in Exodus 17. So this is apropos to our study. The psalmist says, O come, let us sing to the Lord.

Let us shout joyfully to the rock of our salvation. Let us come before His presence with thanksgiving. Let us shout joyfully to Him with psalms.

For the Lord is the great God and the great King above all gods. In His hand are the deep places of the earth. The heights of the hills are His also.

The sea is His, for He made it. And His hands formed the dry land. O come, let us worship and bow down.

Let us kneel before the Lord, our Maker. For He is our God and we are the people of His pasture and the sheep of His hand. Today, if you will hear His voice, do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion, and the word there is Meribah, as in the day of trial, Massah, in the wilderness.

When your fathers tested me, they tried me, though they saw my work. For forty years I was grieved with that generation and said, It is a people who go astray in their hearts, and they do not know my ways. So I swore in my wrath, they shall not enter my rest.

This is kind of a strange song. If I was trying to put this song together, I would have put verses 8 through 11 first, talking about the problem, and then 1 through 7 as the uplifting solution and resolution. But that's not the way it is.

And it leaves us, this song, you can imagine, as the last notes of this died away in the mouths of the singers in Israel, that the listeners and the participants in this song would say, Well, that's ending on kind of a down note. That's kind of a dismal way to leave it. They failed and they will not enter my rest.

It's not one of those that you're going to find on the praise and worship CD, is it? It's not one of those that's going to end in a great, swelling, orchestral mountaintop. It kind of ends on a minor chord. Well, this is a likelihood for you and for me.

It is likely, statistically speaking, humanly speaking, it is likely that this is the way our lives will end. Why do I say that? Well, as we have often remarked, Jesus, in His teaching, said, Strive to enter by the narrow gate. For wide is the way and broad is the gate that leads to destruction.

And many, many, many are on that road. But narrow is the way and straight is the gate that leads to life. And few there be that find it.

So, mathematically, numerically, statistically, not many are going to find the path to God's blessing, God's inheritance. People have often said, Well, how can the Millennial Kingdom hold all of the believers of all of the generations since Adam and Eve? Because there will just be untold millions, perhaps billions of believers. How can they possibly fit into Palestine? This must just be something we're supposed to spiritualize and not take literally.

And they don't take Jesus' 1,000-year reign in Israel on the throne of His father David literally. They say it's just symbolic and representative because just look at the physics of it. You could not fit all of the believers of every generation into the historic bounds of the land that was promised to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

Well, that last statement is absolutely true. You could not fit all of the believers of every generation physically. If they stood shoulder to shoulder, they would not fit in the land.

It is not that big. There are counties in Texas that are bigger than Palestine. The difficulty is the belief that all believers are destined for that kingdom because we're not.

Those who find the narrow way and the straight gate will fit comfortably within the bounds of that promised land. All the rest of us will be resurrected and living on the earth but not in the land. There is a mistake in the assumption that everyone will play harps and walk streets of gold.

There is such a mixed up view of the resurrection that we're going to be in heaven and not on earth. That we're going to have wings and harps which the Bible never says. That all of us are going to walk the streets of gold.

Well, the streets of gold are not in the millennial kingdom. That is the New Jerusalem that has the gates of pearl and so on. Anyway, we want to know what does the Bible actually say.

The Bible actually says that we have need of endurance. We have need of faith and patience to receive that particular inheritance. Many of the rest of us are pictured by these Israelites who tested God at Massah and Meribah.

How many from this generation are going to walk through the narrow opening in the Jordan

and go across into the land? Two. Two out of two million. Those are not very good odds, are they? Well, what is the key? What should this song produce in us? It has imperatives in it, doesn't it? There are commands in this song.

And rather than dwelling on the depressing concept that God swore they shall not enter my rest, this is supposed to be a sobering song. One of my complaints with modern Christian music is that it's all happy, slappy, toe-tapping bubble of joy that is full of air and not substance. There's a lot of repetition.

There's a lot of joy, joy, joy down in my heart without a foundation. You look at the great hymns of the faith by those authors I mentioned earlier that talk about... You think of one of the most well-known hymns in the hymnal is the Old Rugged Cross. Or Rock of Ages.

Think about Rock of Ages. Cleft for me. We just looked at water from the rock.

It was struck with the rod of God, the rod of God's authority, and the rock was cloven in twain. It was cleaved, depending on which era of English you want to use. It was split.

Rock of Ages, cleft for me, broken in half for me. Let me hide myself in thee. Let the water and the blood from thy wounded side which flowed be of sin the double cure.

Now, that takes some thinking. People sing Rock of Ages all the time. And when you get to that part, it just kind of goes by and you don't really analyze it.

What does that mean? Let the water and the blood which flowed from your wounded side. Remember the spear after the death of Christ and it says water and blood came forth? And John makes the point later in his epistle that he came not by water only but by water and by blood. And water is associated with birth.

What does a woman say right before she goes into her final labor? My water has broken. There's always water associated with birth. You're born by water.

Jesus tells Nicodemus in John 3, except a man be born of water and the spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom. You've got to be born physically and you've got to be born spiritually. It takes both components to enter the kingdom.

Of course, it goes without saying you've got to be born physically. But Nicodemus is talking about physical birth. He says must I enter my mother's womb a second time and be born? And Jesus says no, you've got to be born physically and be born spiritually before you can see the kingdom.

Born of water and of blood. So when the hymn writer says let the water and the blood from thy wounded side which flowed be of sin the double cure. Save from wrath and make me pure.

The blood saves us from wrath. The washing of water and renewing of the Holy Spirit makes us pure. So we have our salvation which is the first part of the cure for sin.

The blood takes away our penalty, enters us into life with God. And the water which represents the ministry of God's Holy Spirit as he washes us with the word. That is our sanctification, our purification, our progress down the narrow road.

So there's a lot of meat in those songs that we can reflect on and we can remember. The same thing is true here. The imperative begins in verse 7. He is our God.

We are the people of his pasture and the sheep of his hand. What does this mean? God is our authority. We need to listen to him because whether we like it or not, whether we are a black sheep or a wayward sheep or not, he is our shepherd.

So today, if you will hear his voice. Jesus talked about the fact that his sheep know his voice and they listen to it. If we are truly disciples, we will listen to what the Lord tells us in his word.

Today, if you will hear his voice, do not harden your hearts as in the Meribah, as in the day of Massah in the wilderness. And we are enjoined, we are commanded to look back at this chapter 17 in Exodus that we're studying right now. We should remind ourselves, it ought to occur to us on Tuesday or on Friday morning, that there is the possibility and the real potential for failure on our part if we do not hear his voice.

What are the two alternatives here? If you go one way, you hear his voice. If you go the other way, we harden our heart. Hear his voice or harden our heart.

It's one or the other. If we do not heed the voice of the Lord, we are in fact hardening our hearts, just like Israel did. And we look at them and we say, how dumb, how silly that is.

Here's the pillar of cloud and the pillar of fire. Here is, in their recent memory, the parting of the Red Sea, the destruction of the Egyptian army. Just that morning, they went out and gathered manna from the ground.

And yet, it's like the disciples in the garden. Could you not watch with me one hour? Could you not remain faithful? Could you not pay attention for an hour? Have you already fallen asleep? Have you already lapsed back into the darkness of this world? That is our challenge. Do not harden your hearts, as in the Meribah, as in the day of Massah in the wilderness, when your fathers tested me.

Now, I want to move right back to Exodus chapter 17, at the end of the chapter, and take a look at something that Moses says. Remember in verse 15? Actually, it's before that. It's right before, it's in verse 7. Moses named the place where the rock was struck and water came forth in the sight of the elders, Massah and Meribah, because of the quarrel of the sons of Israel, and because they tested the Lord, saying, Is the Lord among us or not? Now, in Psalm 95, it says, Your fathers tested me.

Just as it says here in verse 7. But he's named the place Massah and Meribah. Massah means testing, and Meribah means grievance, or challenge, to have someone come up short, in other

words. And this sequence is reversed.

The people become dissatisfied, and so they put God to the test. God tests the people, and after the test, He is dissatisfied. You see the difference? People don't really have an issue or a quarrel with God until they become dissatisfied.

We get unhappy with the status quo, and then we are tempted to put God to the test, as Israel does here. God, on the other hand, brought Israel into the wilderness for the purpose of testing them, and having tested them and looked at the results, God is dissatisfied. It reminds us of Daniel chapter 5 and verse 27.

Remember the handwriting on the wall? Mene, mene, tekel ufarsin. Which means, you have been weighed in the balance and found wanting. God has weighed Israel in the balance and found them wanting.

This is why 99.9998% of this generation will not enter the land. So, which is it? Do we test God because we are dissatisfied, or is God testing us? And when He tests us, is He satisfied or not? We make that choice. So, Massah and Meribah are the names.

Now, let's resume where we left off last time in verse 8 and following of chapter 17, the battle with Amalek. We saw Moses sitting on the rock, Aaron and Hur on one side and the other, the great symbolism there that is reflected in who those men are and what they represent. I'm not sure I pointed out last time that Hur, I mentioned his ancestry in the tribe of Judah, but his name, as best they can figure out, is a very, very ancient root.

We think it comes from the same root as the Horites. But the best attribution they can come up with is that it means white or bright, bright one, white one. And it would speak of righteousness.

You remember Judah, which is the tribe he is from, when Jacob pronounces the blessing, talks about him tying his donkey to the vine and his teeth are white, talking about his health and his glory and so on. You get the idea that if you had to choose sides, which side of Moses was Aaron on and which side of Moses was Hur on, if I was going to guess, I would say that Hur was on the right and Moses had Aaron at his left. Because, I will strengthen thee, yea, I will help thee, yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness.

And Hur, whose name means white or bright or pure, I think, it doesn't say, but I think he would be on the right because that is the hand of righteousness. And you have the pure and the bright on the right. Just my guess.

At any rate, we saw that the battle depends entirely on whether or not the symbol of God's authority, the rod, is held high. Any time it is brought down, the people begin to fail. This is on a hill, it is raised up in view, it is a picture of Christ as we saw.

At the end of this battle, God says something in verse 14. He says to Moses, write this in a book

as a memorial and recite it to Joshua. Recounted in the hearing of Joshua, I will utterly blot out the remembrance of Amalek from under heaven.

This gives me some pause for thought because, of course, it hasn't been entirely eradicated, has it? We know from this story, among other things, that Amalek existed. If it was utterly blotted out, this story wouldn't even be in the Bible. The Amalekites are going to continue all the way down into the time of Hezekiah.

And there will be some men from the tribe of Judah who will go and fight some Amalekites down in Kings. And will put an end to their account in the Bible. So what does it mean, I will utterly blot out the remembrance of Amalek from under heaven? Well, what do memorials do? A memorial, this is similar to the curse that God pronounces in other places where Ahab, for example, will not be buried in the tomb of his fathers.

The dogs are going to lap up Jezebel's blood and Ahab will not be buried with his fathers. Many times the worst curse you can pronounce on someone is not only will they be killed, but they will not be entombed. They will not be memorialized and remembered afterward with any marker, with any tombstone or with any place of remembrance.

Someone dies, we put them in the cemetery, we have a marker, we go there on Arbor Day or on Memorial Day or whatever and place flowers and things. We remember those who have gone before. One of the ancient Near Eastern curses was to have no memorial and have no mark that you were ever here.

And, of course, in the Word of God we will always know about Amalek eternally. The Word of God, one jot or one tittle, will not fail until it's all fulfilled. The Word of God lives and abides forever.

So in what sense is there no remembrance of Amalek? It says from under heaven. If you went through the Ecclesiastes study, you should know what under heaven means. It means in human terms, on this earth, under the sun, right? There is no city, there is no stela, there is no monument, there is no physical evidence of the Amalekite civilization.

They don't have any physical archaeological evidence. All they have is inscriptional evidence. They have finally found a few mentions of them.

For a long time they thought they were mythical and didn't even exist at all. And they have since found some mentions of them in the documentation of other cultures. But you can't go like you can with the Hittites and others and dig up their city or show their king's palace or their library.

There is no memorial. They have been blotted out from under heaven. However, I think this is talking about more than just Amalek.

Why? Take a look at verse 16. Moses built an altar and called its name, the Lord is my banner, for he said, because the Lord has sworn the Lord will have war with Amalek from generation to

generation. If you step back and think about your unfolding of Revelation in the Bible, what's the first time we have a pronouncement of this nature? It's all the way back in the garden, right before Adam and Eve leave, when they're standing there with their little fig leaf apron and God pronounces a curse on the serpent and he says, I will put enemy ship, enmity, talking to the serpent, between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed.

He shall bruise your head, you will bruise his heel. There is a perpetual enemy ship, a perpetual warfare between the seed of the woman and the seed of the serpent. This has similar overtones.

Amalek here represents the force that does battle against the people of God. We saw last time the nature of this attack, that they started by getting the stragglers and the slow and the weak. They're faint from thirst.

And so they're kind of kicking them when they're down. And this is the way Satan operates. This is the way the principalities and powers that oppose us in this life operate.

They look for a crack in the armor. They look for an Achilles heel. Does everybody know the story of Achilles? Why we talk about an Achilles heel? Very quickly, his mother dips him in the water of a river.

The patron God says if you dip him in the water, he'll be invincible. He cannot be harmed. So she takes him as a child and dips him in the river, but she's holding on to him by the heel.

So the one part that doesn't get dipped is his heel. And of course, later on when he's fighting, forget if it's the Battle of Troy or whatever, somebody shoots an arrow kind of at random, and it hits the heel that his mother was hanging on to when he was dipped in the waters of invincibility. And so the arrow in his heel kills him.

That's why he's not still around today. So ever after, the one weakness that you find is called the Achilles heel. It's the place of vulnerability.

That's what Satan looks for. He roams the earth like a lion seeking whom he may devour. What do lions do? You've seen the National Geographic things.

Here's the little herd of gazelles, and they wait for the dumb gazelle, the slow gazelle, the limping gazelle, the one that raises his head one second too late. That's what the lion gets. The lion doesn't get the swiftest and the strongest.

He gets the, you know, this is what they call natural selection, survival of the fittest. So the Lord has sworn he will have war with Amalek from generation to generation. Amalek here, this is the first warfare that the new nation of Israel engages in.

God did not take them by the way, the Philistines, because they weren't ready for war. When are they ready for war? When does God tell Moses to dispatch Joshua out to fight the

Amalekites? Well, here's a clue. They are now eating the bread from heaven, and they are drinking the water from the rock, aren't they? Now that they have got sustenance from God, they're ready to fight.

Where before, even though they came out under the blood, even though they were miraculously guided by God, they weren't ready for warfare. But now, they are eating bread from heaven, and they are drinking water from the rock. We are ready for warfare.

We can defend ourselves. We can go on the offensive in the invisible war when we are nourished by that which God provides. Water speaks of the ministry of God's Holy Spirit with the Word in our souls.

Jesus said, The one who comes to me, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water. This he spoke of the Spirit. The Spirit doesn't say anything from himself.

He takes the words of Christ and ministers them to us. So you have that water. And then we also have the bread, the nourishment.

Jesus said, This bread is my body which is broken for you. It's his life. It's his example.

It is the life that he lived to God. He put God first. So it is a commitment.

It is a following of Christ on a daily basis. Self-denial. If any man will come after me, Jesus said, let him take up his cross, deny himself, and follow me.

We make a choice. Am I going to live for myself today? Or am I going to live to please God? It is easy, easy, easy to live for ourselves. Anybody can do it.

Just do what you feel. If it feels good, it's probably not self-sacrifice. Now, I want to point out something here.

The Hebrew in verse 16 is difficult. Exceedingly so. It literally says, For he said, Because a hand against the throne of Yahweh, or hand upon the throne of Yah.

It doesn't even say Yahweh. It just says Yah. And this gives us some difficulty because it doesn't have the word here for swear.

It doesn't have... And so you can see that the New King James translators have put a colon after the word sworn. They're taking hand on the throne as the idea of taking an oath, like hand on the Bible type of thing. But it is a difficult thing to sort out.

I will tell you personally, after looking at this in Hebrew, I think what was originally here, there has been a substitution of a letter. And instead of one word, it is another. And basically what Moses is saying here is the word hand is there, and the word that is translated upon, A-L, is actually a short form for the word Allah, which means to raise up.

And you have the idea of a hand being raised up. And that this is the Nis. It's translated banner here.

When it says the Lord is my banner, the word that they're translating, throne, or hand upon the throne, has a cuff, which looks like a backward letter C. Well, the letter N is the very same shape, but with shorter stems pointing to the left. And they're often confused. I can show you dozens of examples in the Hebrew text.

And in verse 15, Moses built the altar and called its name, the Lord is my N-I-S, Nis, that which is lifted up. It means a standard, a banner, or it is used for that, but it literally means that which is lifted up. The Lord is that which I lift up.

And so what is he saying? It's not my hands. It's not even the stick. It is the Lord that was lifted up on the hill with Aaron and her on each side.

Yah is my banner. Yahweh is what I lift up. That's what he says when he names the altar.

Then in verse 16, you have a further explanation because the Lord is what was lifted up in my hand. And because the Lord will have war with Amalek from generation to generation. This is not just a battle against a bunch of outsiders who come through the desert.

The first of anything typically has significance and has meaning. This is their first warfare. And it's just like all of the other wars of the Lord.

In fact, they had a book called the Book of the Wars of the Lord. And many people think that this account was one of the first in the Book of the Wars of the Lord and was included here by Moses as well. That's why Joshua is introduced seemingly out of nowhere.

We suddenly have Joshua just coming on the scene. It doesn't say, and lo Moses selected Joshua and took him under his wing and made him the commander of the army. Joshua just appears and he's already the commander of an army and he goes forth and knows what to do.

He's got a staff and a structure and wins the battle. And it's probably because this is an excerpt from the Book of the Wars of the Lord. However, war with Amalek.

So what does this mean to us? We have battles all the time. And our battles can either have meaning or be meaningless. Everyone has struggles whether they are a Christian or not.

Don't they? Everyone has their tribulations. We live in a sinful world. We have a sinful nature.

Other people are sinful. And we're sinful right back. And so there's all kinds of problems in the world.

The world has a lot of different solutions to offer. Come to our seminar. Read our book.

Listen to our tape series. I saw a man who has a hypnosis CD. And you put on headphones and

listen to his hypnosis CD and he can help you do everything from quit smoking to lose weight to have self-confidence in social situations.

All you have to do is play his magic CD and get hypnotized. And this will change your brain and make you be able to do things you can't do. The world has all kinds of solutions, procedures, step programs, and other types of answers.

But when Israel, when the people of God here go forth into conflict, what is it that wins the battle? It is lifting up the Lord. It is putting the Lord on high. Moses sits on the rock.

The rock sustains him. It reminds me of the showbread that we're going to see later on in the tabernacle. That showbread, those 12 loaves, represent the people of God.

One loaf for each tribe. They look like kind of thick crust pizzas with nothing on them. They're round, kind of thick.

We think of a loaf like Wonder Bread, but they were flat, round, about a little smaller maybe than a pizza crust and a little bit thicker. And there were 12 of these laid out on the table of showbread. That table in the tabernacle, in the holy place, was made of acacia wood overlaid with gold.

And it represents the Lord Jesus Christ. The wood represents His humanity. The gold represents His deity.

Acacia was some of the most durable wood in the ancient Near East and valuable for that reason. And acacia wood overlaid with gold, that's what sustains the bread. The bread rests on this table that represents the Lord.

We are sustained by the rock just like Moses. Sustained, propped up, strengthened, stabilized by the rock. And then he holds the rod that represents God's authority.

He says, the Lord is what I lift up. The Lord, it's not just this stick. It's not the symbols.

It's not my church tradition. It's not my pulpits and my parking lots and my steeples. It's not my Bible with my name stamped on the front.

It's the Lord that I lift up. We can't just go through the motions. It is when we put the Lord first that genuine victory is achieved.

And this perpetual enemy from generation to generation is only defeated when the Lord is lifted up. If we genuinely want victory, if we genuinely want to have a life of significance and a life of purpose and a life that has meaning, we lift up the Lord and this perpetual enemy represented by Amalek will be defeated. Anytime we stop lifting up the Lord, that enemy is going to come swooping back and defeat us.

This is the message of Exodus chapter 17. Let's pause here and take our break. When we come

back, we're going to continue in chapter 18.