



**Third Sunday in Lent**  
**March 19, 2017 - 10:15 a.m.**  
**Rev. Todd Goldschmidt, Pastor**

**Theme: Satisfaction Guaranteed!**

**Sermon Text: Exodus 17:1-7** (NIV)

**17** The whole Israelite community set out from the Desert of Sin, traveling from place to place as the LORD commanded. They camped at Rephidim, but there was no water for the people to drink. <sup>2</sup>So they quarreled with Moses and said, “Give us water to drink.”

Moses replied, “Why do you quarrel with me? Why do you put the LORD to the test?”

<sup>3</sup>But the people were thirsty for water there, and they grumbled against Moses. They said, “Why did you bring us up out of Egypt to make us and our children and livestock die of thirst?”

<sup>4</sup>Then Moses cried out to the LORD, “What am I to do with these people? They are almost ready to stone me.”

<sup>5</sup>The LORD answered Moses, “Go out in front of the people. Take with you some of the elders of Israel and take in your hand the staff with which you struck the Nile, and go. <sup>6</sup>I will stand there before you by the rock at Horeb. Strike the rock, and water will come out of it for the people to drink.” So Moses did this in the sight of the elders of Israel. <sup>7</sup>And he called the place Massah<sup>[a]</sup> and Meribah<sup>[b]</sup> because the Israelites quarreled and because they tested the LORD saying, “Is the LORD among us or not?”

*Footnotes:*

- a. [Exodus 17:7](#) *Massah means testing.*
- b. [Exodus 17:7](#) *Meribah means quarreling.*



Being a Christian isn't always easy. In some ways, you'd think it'd be more glorious. After all, doesn't God tell us in His Word that we are "a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation" and His "special possession" (1 Peter 2:9)? And yet our day-to-day lives seem so indistinguishable, in many respects, from the lives of those who don't trust in the Lord. "What's so special about being a Christian?" we wonder at times. "Is it really all it's cracked up to be?" We have the same aches and pains, heartaches and disappointments that unbelievers do. On top of that, if we honestly assess what drives us, the thoughts that fill our minds, how we use our time and the way we deal with life's frustrations we don't look a whole lot holier than them either. Life can be pretty discouraging from time to time.

Flashback some 3,500 years to the events of our text. The Israelites had lived in Egypt for generations. Their stay began with Joseph. He was made pharaoh's right-hand man. His family was welcomed with open arms and given the best grazing land in Egypt—the Nile delta region. But their time in Egypt under later kings was anything but a stroll in the park. They were enslaved and forced to construct massive building projects. So God took it upon Himself to intervene in their behalf. He called Moses to command pharaoh, "Let My people go!" But he refused—repeatedly. God had had enough of his hard-hearted insolence. After 430 years in Egypt, He gloriously rescued Israel from bondage and from pharaoh's tyranny. On that dramatic Passover night, they ate a lamb and marked their doors with its blood. The angel of death passed over their homes, sparing their firstborn children, while claiming the lives of every firstborn of Egypt's flocks and families.

Pharaoh's hard-heart was broken. So he let God's people go. Under the leadership of Moses, they set out to return to the land of Canaan—the land God had promised to Abraham and his descendants. Little did they know as they set out that it would be an arduous journey of 40 years and would claim the lives of every single adult that strapped on their sandals that night, save Joshua and Caleb. A final dramatic showdown with pharaoh and his forces took place at the Red Sea. On God's order, Moses struck the waters with his staff, parting them so that the Israelites could pass through on dry ground with Egypt's army in hot pursuit. When the last of God's people stepped out of the seabed, He commanded Moses to strike the water again. And when he did, massive walls of water came crashing down. Every last soldier and their mounts drowned that day—laid to rest in a watery grave.

The Israelites sang joyfully, "I will sing to the LORD, for he is highly exalted. Both horse and driver he has hurled into the sea" (Exodus 15:1). They were God's people—rescued from their sins, saved from their enemy and headed to the Promised Land!

What came next for the Israelites? Well, their trek got off to a pretty outstanding start. They camped at a place called Elim, where there were 12 springs of pristine water—one for each of the 12 tribes of Israel—and 70 palm trees that offered food and much needed shade from the scorching desert sun. Some thought they'd reached Canaan already! They were euphoric!



“So this is what God had in mind for us all along,” they exclaimed. “Outstanding job, Jehovah!” But just like life has its ups and downs, triumphs and tragedies, good times and bad, so it was for the children of Israel.

Elim wasn’t the end of their exodus—not by a long shot. So they set off, guided by God’s pillar of cloud by day and His pillar of fire by night. Their first crisis came with gnawing hunger. They’d been on the road for weeks, and their supplies had run out. They were on the brink of starvation! They began to long for Egypt, where at least they’d had enough to eat despite their severe hardships. God had mercy on them, and rained down daily bread in the morning and quail in the evening. Problem solved; crisis averted!

And now, still wandering through the wastelands of Sinai, we come to crisis number two. They camped at a place called Rephidim. Their canteens were bone dry, and there was no water for miles around. They were thirsty! That’s a big problem. Bigger than a lack of food even. If you’ve ever been really thirsty—really thirsty—you know how bad it can be. Your mouth dries out, your lips crack, your energy wanes and there’s nothing else you can think about. Add to that all of the mothers that were worried sick about their little ones. This was a big deal; a major crisis faced Moses and his fellow leaders. Insurrection was afoot. Although we often characterize the Israelites as grumblers, this time they had a legitimate concern. They wondered, “What’s God up to now? Why did He deliver us from our bondage in Egypt if we’re going to die of hunger or thirst on our way to this mythical land? Did He lead us out into this wasteland just to watch us die?”

Have you ever wondered what God’s up to with you? I have. When times are tough—*really tough*—I’ve wondered what God’s doing. Family tension, the death of a loved one, financial stress, bowing down to the same worthless idols once again. If God’s so good, why don’t I feel it? If He’s so bountiful, why am I struggling to make ends meet? If He’s so gracious, why am I overcome by so much guilt? Preachers like Joel Osteen promise a better life, saying that Christ wants His own to live an abundant life, filled with every earthly blessing imaginable, right here and right now. But that doesn’t seem to square with the way God deals with His sainted people from my experience and from the accounts He’s given in Scripture.

It’s interesting to see what with the children of Israel do next. The people—thirsty with the kind of thirst most of us have never known—ask Moses, “Why did you bring us up out of Egypt to make us and our children and livestock die of thirst?” “What am I to do with these people? They are almost ready to stone me,” he cried to God. The Lord then instructed Moses to take some elders with him and pass before the people, adding, “I will stand there before you by the rock at Horeb. Strike the rock, and water will come out of it for the people to drink.” Moses did what God commanded, water came gushing forth from the rock he struck and the people and their livestock drank the crystal clear water until their bellies felt like bursting! They’d wondered aloud, “Is the Lord among us or not?” And the answer was a resounding yes. Yes, the Lord was indeed with His beleaguered people!

What’s the lesson God wants us to take away from this account today? Should we be hard on the Israelites for their hard-heartedness? Well we could be. But then, how different are we if we’re honest about it? Is grumbling *a/ways* bad? I guess we could answer as Luther



does in his *Small Catechism* in his explanation to the 1<sup>st</sup> commandment: “We should fear, love and trust in God above all things.”

But trust can't be forced, and it doesn't develop overnight. God proves Himself trustworthy. I know parents who've adopted children who were abused or neglected. And the story is the same again and again. While the parents seek to embrace their children with unconditional love, the children come around in stages, little by little, since they've never known what that kind of love feels like.

That goes for God's people of every generation. Take the Israelites in our text. God doesn't rebuke them for griping. They'd seen God's power displayed in Egypt, and throughout their exodus they'd witnessed His redeeming love firsthand. In the oasis at Elim, they got a taste of the truth that God had their best interests at heart. But He wanted to bring them to a better, more bountiful place than Elim. Along the way, however, they'd have to endure extreme hunger and unrelenting thirst. The Lord fed them with manna and quail every single day of their 40 year pilgrimage. He repeatedly brought forth water from rocks to slake their thirst. In fact, the Bible even says that He made sure that their sandals didn't wear out! Again and again the Lord provided for His people's needs, proving beyond a shadow of a doubt that He was trustworthy, that His love for them was steadfast. In the desert, God was building a *relationship* with His people, and He was patient. He was, as the psalmist says, “compassionate and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in love” (103:8). In short, He was a God they could rely on 100%!

And the same is true for us. We would do well to expect hardships and not be surprised at the painful trials we have to undergo. So often, it's when we get snagged up that we turn to our faithful Father to get our life back in line again. In the good times, we easily grow fat and happy and lose sight that God is the Giver of “every good and perfect gift” and that he “does not change like shifting shadows” (James 1:17). No food fills our stomach that God hasn't given us. No water quenches our thirst unless it comes from Him. But even more, such times point us to a greater hunger and thirst that only God can satisfy. Jesus says, “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled” (Matt. 5:6). As Jesus told the Tempter in the wilderness: “Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God” (Deut. 8:3).

Apart from Christ, we're empty, with a God-only sized hole in our soul. We can attempt to fill it with any number of things, but we can only be truly satisfied with Christ, who is our “bread of life” (John 6:35)—God's manna from heaven. He alone provides that “living water” (John 4:10) that satisfies our spiritual thirst! When you're tired or tested, lonely or afraid, angry or overcome with grief, come to Jesus. He “is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask for or imagine” (Eph. 3:20)! With Jesus, it's always “Satisfaction Guaranteed”! Amen.