

Lesson 3
Blessing and Bitterness
Exodus 15:1-27

God brought into existence the nation of Israel at the time of the Passover Feast when the sons of Israel put the blood of the lamb on their doors, and they were redeemed so that the death angel passed over them in that none of their first-born sons were killed in the tenth plague in Egypt. Pharaoh let Israel go, and the nation of two million Jews moved out into the desert wilderness. God promised the Jews that they would enter the land of Canaan, and every Jew knew this promise and had to claim it by faith if he was to enter into the Promised Land.

“Say, therefore, to the sons of Israel, ‘I am the LORD, and I will bring you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians, and I will deliver you from their bondage. I will also redeem you with an outstretched arm and with great judgments. Then I will take you for My people, and I will be your God; and you shall know that I am the LORD your God, who brought you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians. And I will bring you to the land which I swore to give to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and I will give it to you for a possession; I am the LORD’” (Exodus 6:6-8).

God then led Israel into the desert and into what seemed to be a military trap. The Israelites were led to the Red Sea with mountains on the north and south and the Red Sea on the east. Their western flank was vulnerable, and Pharaoh, knowing they had no weapons of war and no trained soldiers, pursued them with vengeance to attack them on the western flank. Israel was in a hopeless situation. With arrogant confidence in his soul and the smell of a bloody victory, Pharaoh took his elite troops against Israel. When the Israelites saw the Egyptians coming, they panicked and failed to trust God. Moses, their leader, said, ***“Do not fear! Stand fast and see the salvation of the Lord.”*** God then did a mighty miracle. He opened the Red Sea and the children of Israel went across on dry land. The Egyptians pursued them through this long, narrow corridor of water, and when in the middle, the water came crushing in on them, and Pharaoh and his army were defeated. When the Israelites saw all the dead bodies on the western shore, and realized God gave them a complete victory, Exodus 14:31 says, “. . . ***the people feared the LORD, and they believed in the LORD and in his servant Moses.***” At that moment, the Israelites were convinced intellectually that God is God.

However, Israel was an infant nation and needed to have a strong faith to enter the land of Canaan, the promised land. Whether that generation of Jews entered the land depended entirely on whether they had the faith to believe God that He would give them the land against overwhelming odds. They needed training in faith so God took them out into the desert to train them in the art of faith. They would be tested by God through problems, crisis and pressure situations to cause them to develop their faith in order for them to fight and win future battles. The Jews were not ready to enter the land after the Red Sea incident. They needed preparation and training to fight and win future spiritual battles and to conquer the giants in the land of Canaan. They could not fight the giants physically until spiritually they believed God would fight the giants for them. Therefore, God sent them into the desert to test them.

“And you shall remember all the way which the LORD your God has led you in the wilderness these forty years, that He might humble you, testing you, to know what was in your heart, whether you would keep His commandments or not. And He humbled you and let you be hungry, and fed you with manna which you did not know, nor did your fathers know, that He might make you understand that man does not live by bread alone, but man lives by everything that proceeds out of the mouth of the LORD”
(Deut. 8:2-3).

God had redeemed Israel through the Passover from the bondage of Egypt, and Egypt is a picture of the world. God supernaturally took Israel across the Red Sea, which is a picture of regeneration involving a

total break from the world. God then set the Israelites on the road to Canaan, a picture of heaven. Yet, God took them to Canaan by way of the desert so that they faced crisis after crisis in order to get prepared to enter the Promised Land.

God has redeemed the Christian from the slavery of sin in the world, and He has brought the Christian the new birth that separates him positionally from the world. The Christian is now on his way to spiritual Canaan, which is heaven. Yet, the Christian goes there by way of the desert where there is crisis, heartache, pressure, frustration, and problems. These things are all designed by God to develop the Christian's faith so as to prepare him to enter heaven.

BLESSING JEHOVAH Exodus 15:1-21

“Then Moses and the sons of Israel sang this song to the LORD . . .” The Jews had just witnessed a mighty miracle. They believed God, and, perhaps for the first time, really got a glimpse of the glory of Jehovah-God. They were happy and relieved, and in their excitement, broke out spontaneously into a song. They had been delivered from Pharaoh and his armies and had crossed the Red Sea. It was pure grace that God took them through the Red Sea because they certainly did not deserve it. When they saw the Egyptians, they panicked and began to grumble at Moses, but God is gracious and longsuffering with His people, especially when they are babies spiritually. This is a beautiful song. It is a song which exalts God, for the title “Lord” is used eleven times and personal pronouns referring to God are used thirty times. Moses’ name is not mentioned, for only God was to get the glory for this mighty victory over Egypt. This song is divided into three parts and perhaps the chorus, ***“The horse and his rider He has hurled into the sea,”*** was repeated after each stanza.

“. . . and said, “I will sing to the LORD, for He is highly exalted; The horse and its rider He has hurled into the sea. The LORD is my strength and song, And He has become my salvation; This is my God, and I will praise Him; My father’s God, and I will extol Him. The LORD is a warrior; The LORD is His name. Pharaoh’s chariots and his army He has cast into the sea; And the choicest of his officers are drowned in the Red Sea. The deeps cover them; They went down into the depths like a stone.” The Israelites understood that Jehovah saves His people. They grasped that He is the almighty God who wars on behalf of His own people. Therefore, they exalted and worshiped Him.

“Thy right hand, O LORD, is majestic in power, Thy right hand, O LORD shatters the enemy. And in the greatness of Thine excellence Thou dost overthrow those who rise up against Thee; Thou dost send forth Thy burning anger, and it consumes them as chaff. And at the blast of Thy nostrils the waters were piled up, The flowing waters stood up like a heap; The deeps were congealed in the heart of the sea. The enemy said, “I will pursue, I will overtake, I will divide the spoil; My desire shall be gratified against them; I will draw out my sword, my hand shall destroy them. Thou didst blow with Thy wind, the sea covered them; They sank like lead in the mighty waters.” The sons of Israel understood that Jehovah judges His enemies. They saw that God was sovereign and a God of wrath who opposes all who oppose God’s people.

“Who is like Thee among the gods, O LORD? Who is like Thee, majestic in holiness, Awesome in praises, working wonders? Thou didst stretch out Thy right hand, The earth swallowed them. In Thy loving kindness Thou hast led the people whom Thou hast redeemed; In Thy strength Thou hast guided them to Thy holy habitation. The peoples have heard, they tremble; Anguish has gripped the inhabitants of Philistia. Then the chiefs of Edam were dismayed; The leaders of Moab, trembling grips them; All the inhabitants of Canaan have melted away. Terror and dread fall upon them. By the greatness of Thine arm they are motionless as stone; Until Thy people pass over, O LORD, until the people pass over whom Thou hast purchased. Thou wilt bring them and plant them in the mountain of Thine inheritance, The place, O LORD, which Thou hast made for Thy dwelling, The sanctuary, O LORD, which Thy hands established. The LORD shall reign forever and ever.” The children of Israel came to understand that Jehovah rules over all. They saw His holiness and loving kindness as never before. Above all, they realized that God had redeemed them by purchasing them out of Egyptian bondage. They even got a little glimpse into the future in that God would defeat the enemies in the Promised Land, and God would bring them into the land as He

promised. They had, as an infant nation, come to grasp (at least superficially) that ***“The LORD will reign forever and ever.”***

“For the horses of Pharaoh with his chariots and his horsemen went into the sea, and the LORD brought back the waters of the sea on them; but the sons of Israel walked on dry land through the midst of the sea. And Miriam the prophetess, Aaron’s sister, took the timbrel in her hand, and all the women went out after her with timbrels and with dancing. And Miriam answered them, ‘Sing to the LORD, for He is highly exalted; The horse and His rider He has hurled into the sea.’” Even the women sang, played their tambourines and danced because they were so happy with their God who had delivered them from Egypt and Pharaoh. Apparently Miriam, a woman prophetess, had a big part in organizing and encouraging the women to cross the Red Sea and believe God. ***“Indeed, I brought you up from the land of Egypt and ransomed you from the house of slavery, and I sent before you Moses, Aaron, and Miriam”*** (Micah 6:4).

Through the words of this song, we know that the Israelites reached some very high concepts of God. Yet, in Exodus 15:24, just three days later, they were grumbling against Moses because there was no water, and their grumbling was ultimately against God, for they doubted His ability to keep His promises and meet their needs. The lyrics of this song are wonderful, but the sons of Israel had only an intellectual understanding and an emotional experience. The truth that God is God had not yet reached their lives in a practical way. They had an emotional experience, but it was superficial, and the words they sang had not reached their wills. The people did not really lay hold of what they were singing. They believed intellectually. They were sincere and on an emotional high, but when the pressures of life came, they crumbled. They were full of emotion but empty of faith. This whole hymn is filled with how powerful the Lord is, how wonderful the Lord is, how holy the Lord is, and yet the Israelites would go out in a few days, face a crisis, and fail miserably.

Beware of emotions. Emotions can deceive us. Emotions can trap us into thinking that Christianity is one big “party” experience. God has given us emotions to love Him, but emotions alone cannot sustain us in a time of crisis. We must have the promises of God and doctrine in our head so we can operate on faith when the pressure is on. The key to stability and progressive victory over crisis and pressure is the Word of God applied by faith--not emotions, not sincerity, not jacked-up feelings, but faith, faith, faith in God’s Son and God’s Word.

BITTER WATERS Exodus 15:22-27

Testing

“Then Moses led Israel from the Red Sea, and they went out into the wilderness of Shur; and they went three days in the wilderness and found no water.” The Israelites left their camp near the Red Sea and moved southward. Initially, they probably left with high expectations because they were on an emotional jag. After three days of traveling, they not only were suffering fatigue, but also suffering from lack of water. No water for two million people! This was a desperate situation.

How did they get into this predicament? God, through Moses, led them into this situation to test them. God put them in the desert with no water so they would learn to trust in Him, for He had promised to meet every need they had in the desert. It is as if God said, “Let’s put you out in the desert and find out whether you Jews have a dynamic faith or just emotionalism. Is your faith based on temporary thrills and frills and excitement or is it based on the solid promises of God?” God sent them out to do spiritual combat as their first test in boot camp so as to toughen them up to fight bigger battles later. God sent them into this situation to teach them total dependence upon Him for everything. They were not to rely on themselves but on God.

God sends difficult experiences into the Christian’s life to teach him not to depend upon himself and carnal means to solve problems but to trust wholly in God for the solution.

Surely the Israelites must have concluded that since they were redeemed and God’s chosen people,

saved by the blood and power of God, that God would now make their journey smooth for them. They reasoned that they would now have an easy road for God was on their side. What they did not realize was that initial salvation just begins the life of faith, and God wants all of His children to grow deeper in faith. In order for a believer to grow, God brings crisis into his life.

Many Christians, especially new Christians, think now that they are saved they will have no more problems and difficulties, for God is with them. How wrong they are. They may well have more problems because God will test them so as to train them and develop their faith. How sad it is that some who are saved are completely unprepared to accept the testings of life.

More Testing

“And when they came to Marah, they could not drink the waters of Marah, for they were bitter; therefore it was named Marah.” We are not told this but perhaps the scouts for the Israelites reported back that there was a waterhole ahead, and this news buzzed through the people. This was a natural waterhole, but it was not necessarily God’s waterhole for them. God had promised to meet their needs, and they figured any old waterhole would do. But when they got to the water, it was bitter, impregnated with niter, and unfit for drinking. They had trusted the natural rather than the supernatural, and this experience brought bitterness to their mouths and to their souls. The Lord could have easily made a stream or lake in the middle of this dry desert, or He could have made it rain or met their thirst need in hundreds of ways. The people, however, trusted their own wisdom and natural reasoning, and the result was bitterness. They depended upon human expediency rather than God.

These Jews found water, but it was the wrong kind of water. When they drank it, they spit it out, for it did not satisfy. They had an experience, and they responded to it negatively, for they felt as though they had been given a “bum” deal. Why did they react in bitterness? They did not see God in this experience.

Life is often bitter and frustrating for the Christian, but God has brought all experiences to develop faith. When a person lives his Christian life on emotionalism, he soon burns out and becomes bitter when problems and pressures come to him. A person, who has run on shallow and superficial experiences, even in all sincerity, will become bitter when life’s pressures are on because he does not have a divine viewpoint towards life.

Unbelief

“So the people grumbled at Moses, saying, ‘What shall we drink?’” Immediately, the people began to gripe, complain, murmur and grumble at Moses because there was no water. They expected Moses to do something, even a miracle, but they had already forgotten that it is God who does miracles, not His servant Moses. They were actually grumbling against God, for Moses was only God’s servant or instrument. The outward grumbling was the inward expression of unbelief. Israel had witnessed the ten supernatural plagues in Egypt, had experienced the miracle of crossing the Red Sea, had the pillar of cloud and fire with them at that very moment, and they grumbled. They had forgotten all the beautiful things God had done for them. Men have such short spiritual memories! The Jews, when they hit this crisis, should have said, “God has sent us here and God will get us out somehow.” But instead, they looked to themselves and their own needs, and murmured in unbelief. They panicked; they crumbled; they failed under pressure because they refused to believe God for their needs. They became disillusioned, and took their bitter, soul frustrations out on Moses. Moses was a humble and meek man, but when the sons of Israel said, “What shall we drink?” he could have said, “Where is your song of faith now? Where is Exodus 15:1-19 in your experience?” How did they get into this state of mind? They were running on emotions and not on the Word of God, and, when the chips were down, they crumbled because they had no faith in the promises of God.

There are many sincere Christians who do not care one whit about doctrine and God’s promises. They just want to have a good feeling when they come to church. Bible teaching is irrelevant to them. They love to sing, and hug and say “hallelujah,” but when the pressure is on, they are the first to come unglued.

As Christians, we cannot escape the sufferings of life. ***“In the world you have tribulation, but take courage; I have overcome the world”*** (John 16:33). In fact, we Christians will have more sufferings because God will test us so as to develop our faith. God wants us to grow strong so we may fight future battles with power. God loves us and wants us to come to the place in our lives that Job did when he said, ***“Though he slay me, yet will I trust in Him”*** (Job 13:15 KJV).

Solution

“Then he cried out to the LORD, and the LORD showed him a tree; and he threw it into the waters, and the waters became sweet. There He made for them a statute and regulation, and there He tested them.” When the people reacted negatively to their situation, Moses did not react to the people. As they griped and complained, Moses kept silent and prayed to God. Moses had learned much about the life of faith and had turned the situation over to God.

“. . . casting all your anxiety upon Him because He cares for you” (1 Pet. 5: 7) .

“Cast your burden upon the LORD, and He will sustain you; He will never allow the righteous to be shaken” (Psalm 55:22).

God gave Moses an answer and apparently told Moses to throw a tree into the water. Moses did this, and God performed a miracle by making the water turn out sweet so that it became drinkable. God did this to teach the Jews that there is no experience of life for which God does not have a solution. The solution, in this case, as in all cases of life, was to wait for God to work it out. Notice carefully the solution was not to leave Marah. They were not to jump out of this bitter experience. They were not to run from the situation but to trust God in it. God had led them there for a purpose, and they were to learn the lessons God had for them.

When most Christians come upon a bad situation, they want to bailout. They want to change their environment, change their circumstances, and change their location. However, this is not usually what God wants. God wants Christians to learn to trust Him in the circumstances so they can develop their faith and live as super naturalists. There are no accidents with God. God ordains every situation in life, and He wants us to learn from our experiences. We all have our Marahs, and we are all being tested. Why? Does God hate us? No, because God loves us and wants us to become strong Christian warriors. God takes us through boot-camp experiences to toughen us up to fight future battles. Faith does not develop in easy situations, in success circumstances, but in pressure situations. We must see where the Israelites failed and learn from their failures. Never run from your Marahs. ***“Do not fear; stand fast and see the deliverance of the Lord.”*** Do not do like the Jews. They grumbled; they expressed unbelief; they became bitter; they blamed Moses; they did everything wrong when they were put into the pressure cooker. Remember, God does have a solution for every problem of life.

Throwing the tree into the water symbolizes the applying of the Word of God to experience, or the mixing of the promises of God with faith. It is the application of the Bible to a bitter experience, which makes a bitter experience sweet, because then we get a divine viewpoint on the situation.

We are told that God made a “statute and regulation” for Israel at that time. This is nothing more than a law. This law to Israel was that in all seasons of need and seemingly impossible situations, the Lord would send deliverance from above. This was a law whereby God guaranteed to take care of Israel all through the wilderness wanderings.

Notice once again it says, ***“And there He tested them.”*** God sought to stretch their faith, but they refused to believe. He tested the Israelites, and they failed the test. They did not learn much from the Red Sea experience. They sang a beautiful hymn, but they did not grow one inch in faith. They grumbled and complained; they never grew up and were actually stunted in their spiritual growth.

Yet, even when the people grumbled against Moses and God, God once again showed them grace and

gave them water through performing a miracle. Notice that, when God performed the miracle at the Red Sea, the people sang. But when this miracle of sweetening the water was performed, the people did not sing. Why? We are not told, but suspicion is that their unbelief was causing them to become spiritually dull and insensitive to supernatural phenomena.

Promise

“And He said, ‘If you will give earnest heed to the voice of the LORD your God, and do what is right in His sight, and give ear to His commandments, and keep all His statutes, I will put none of these diseases on you which I have put on the Egyptians; for I, the LORD, am your healer.’” God promised excellent physical health to the Israelites if they would only obey Him. They left Egypt in perfect health, and now God promises them continued health conditioned on obedience to Him. There would be great spiritual and physical blessing for the Israelites if they would be obedient to God.

The Christian is promised great blessing from God as he keeps the commands of Scripture. ***“He who has My commandments, and keeps them, he it is who loves Me; and he who loves Me shall be loved by My Father, and I will love him, and will disclose (manifest) Myself to him”*** (John 14:21).

Refreshing

“Then they came to Elim where there were twelve springs of water and seventy date palms, and they camped there beside the waters.” Israel failed God’s first real test in the desert, but God still graciously dealt with the infant nation. God knew that babies have to have time to grow up. Therefore, with loving patience, He tolerated the people’s unbelief and brought them to luscious Elim (the place of trees) where there was abundant water and many trees. It was not an accident that there were twelve wells for the twelve tribes of Israel and seventy trees for the seventy senior elders of Israel. God brought the Israelites to a time of refreshing after a major test, and they stayed at Elim relaxing for about one month (Exodus 16:1).

God brings testings, but they are temporary and will pass. After testing, God brings the Christian to a place of spiritual refreshing where he can grow strong in the Word, prayer, and fellowship so as to get truth in the head to face another battle. When the new crisis comes, all the things which were learned while in a season of refreshing must be put into practice by faith.

CONCLUSION

Faith is the human key to Christianity. A person enters into Christianity by faith in Christ and continues to walk as a Christian by faith in Christ. Have you trusted Christ as your Savior? Have you received Him as your Lord? You must accept Christ by faith. ***“Truly, truly, I say to you, he who hears My word, and believes Him who sent Me, has eternal life, and does not come into judgment, but has passed out of death into life”*** (John 5:24).

Has sin so gripped your life that you do not want Christ as your Lord and Savior? Beware of the deceitfulness of sin, for it will rob you of salvation and heaven’s glory. The Bible says, ***“Today if you hear His voice, do not harden your hearts”*** (Heb. 4:7b). Open your heart to Christ, and He will give you salvation and the power to cope with the pressures of life.