

Trustworthy

Exodus: Revelation and Redemption

Exodus 15:22-17:16

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Into the Wilderness

Last week Lucas led us through the Red Sea. The final stage of Israel's exodus is complete. But the book of Exodus is far from complete. We still have a ways to go. We come this morning to an important transition in the book. Redemption's been accomplished. God's brought his people out of Egypt, out of the house of slavery. He's proven his love for his firstborn son. And he's promised he'll lead them into the land of Canaan. But what's next? By what road will he lead them to the Promised Land?

These same questions apply to us as Christians. What comes after saving faith in Jesus Christ?¹ After we've been redeemed from our sin? We have a promise of eternal life. But on what road does God lead us from here to there? The answer for us is the same as it was for Israel.

What comes after redemption? The wilderness! We're told three times in our text. After God led them out of Egypt they came to the wilderness of Shur. And the water was bad there (15:22-23). Then they came to the wilderness of Sin. And there was no food there (16:1). Then they came to Rephidim. And there's no water there (17:1-2).

In the wilderness, their life is threatened at each turn. Was life *out of* Egypt much better than it was *in* Egypt? Why did God lead them out of the frying pan and into the fire? Why did he lead them from one place of suffering to another place of suffering? What's the reason for the wilderness?

This is a really long passage. It comes to us in three episodes, in three different places in the wilderness. (I'm not even going to cover the last part of chapter 17 where Israel fights the Amalekites.) We don't have time to cover the three episodes in their entirety. But there's a word that holds these three sections together. It gives us an answer to our question. Why does God lead his people from redemption to the wilderness? It's to test them!

We see this in the first episode, where God provides sweet water. Look at chapter 15, verse 25. "There the LORD made for them a statute and a rule, and there *he* tested them..."² We see this again in the second episode, where God provides bread from heaven. Look at chapter 16, verse 4. "Behold, I am about to rain bread from heaven for you, and the people shall go out and gather a day's portion every day, that *I* may test them..." Then in the third episode, we see a twist on this key word. Look at chapter 17, verse 7. "And he called the name of the place Massah and Meribah, because of the quarreling of the people of Israel, and because *they* tested the LORD by saying, "Is the LORD among us or not?"

So why did God bring the people into the wilderness? To test them. And how did the people respond to their time in the wilderness? They tested God. What does this mean? There's a play on words, but the words don't mean quite the same thing. Most commentators say God's testing is

¹ Philip Graham Ryken and R. Kent Hughes, *Exodus: Saved for God's Glory*, Preaching the Word

² Scripture quotations are from The Holy Bible, English Standard Version® unless otherwise noted.

more like training.³ And Israel's testing was more like a lack of trust. And this gets at the very heart of this passage. We struggle to trust God. But our struggles are designed to train us to trust God.

The New Testament talks about these same principles. Why does God allow us to struggle? Hebrews 12 lays out three reasons. One, because God loves us. The Lord disciplines those he loves (12:6). The word discipline involves training and correction. So, the Lord trains those he loves. He chastises every son whom he receives. Hebrews says that if an earthly father doesn't discipline his son then he doesn't love him; how much more our heavenly Father (12:8-9). Two, God wants us to come to maturity. He wants us to share in his holiness (12:10). He wants us to experience the fruit of righteousness (12:11). Max Lucado once said that God takes us just the way we are. We're saved by grace alone. But he refuses to leave us that way. He wants us to be just like Jesus. God wants his children to come to maturity. He uses training in the wilderness to shape us. And last, how do we come to maturity through training? It's through trusting God; he wants us to be subject to him.

The book of James says the same type of thing. "Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing" (Jas. 1:2-4).

The reason God took Israel into the wilderness was to test her. To train her. To mature her by teaching her to trust God. And the same is true for us.

This cuts against the grain of our culture's view of childrearing and discipleship. Our culture doesn't believe it's loving to make a child struggle. Jordan Green sent me an article this week on a recent book called *The Coddling of the American Mind*.⁴ It talks about the effects modern day parenting is having on university students. Today's college students are not reaching the maturity needed for the real world. They're anxious and overly sensitive. According to Keith McCurdy, over 8 million kids under the age of eighteen are on some kind of medicine for anxiety or depression.⁵

We assume our children are fragile and need to be coddled. We do everything we can to keep our children from any form of struggle. We want them to be happy at all costs. And to feel good about themselves. We want them to be safe from any form of danger. And so we bail them out of everything and micromanage them. But is it working? It doesn't seem so. Coddling doesn't bring our children to maturity.

My sermon isn't about parenting. It's about trusting God. And God knows that we need to struggle to come to maturity. And so, because he loves us, he trains us to trust him through struggling and suffering, not through coddling.

Friends, our God is trustworthy! We need to trust him for redemption. He's the only one who can save us from our biggest problem. Not only slavery in Egypt, but slavery from sin and Satan. He teaches us to know him through redemption. But if he can be known through salvation and we can trust him to redeem us, then he can certainly be known in our daily lives and we can certainly trust him to provide for us our daily needs (cf. Ex. 16:6, 12). This is what we learn in Exodus 15-17.

This morning we're going to talk about three things—our struggle to trust God, how God uses our struggles to train us to trust him, and God's trustworthiness.

³ W. Ross Blackburn, *The God Who Makes Himself Known: The Missionary Heart of the Book of Exodus*, New Studies in Biblical Theology

⁴ [The Coddling of the American Mind](#)

⁵ [Keith McCurdy: Raising Sturdy Kids](#)

WE STRUGGLE TO TRUST GOD.

Let's begin with our struggle to trust God. The main way we see Israel struggling to trust God is in their incessant grumbling. Look at chapter 15, verse 24. "And the people grumbled against Moses, saying, 'What shall we drink?'" Look at chapter 16, verse 2. "And the whole congregation of the people of Israel grumbled against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness, and the people of Israel said to them, 'Would that we had died by the hand of the LORD in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the meat pots and ate bread to the full, for you have brought us out into this wilderness to kill this whole assembly with hunger.'" Look at chapter 17, verse 3. "But the people thirsted there for water, and the people grumbled against Moses and said, 'Why did you bring us up out of Egypt, to kill us and our children and our livestock with thirst?'"

How does all of this grumbling reveal a lack of trust in the LORD? After all, the need for food and water is a legitimate need. Without it their very lives were threatened. Well there's nothing wrong with *acknowledging* their need. The problem is they don't *trust* God with their need.

In each episode, Moses cries out to God on their behalf (15:25; 17:4). But they don't cry out to God. Instead they gripe to Moses and Aaron. And they blame Moses and Aaron. They don't even acknowledge God!

Moses brings things into perspective. He tells them repeatedly that their beef is not with man; it's with God. Look at chapter 16, verses 7-8. "He has heard your grumbling *against the LORD*. For what are we, that you grumble against us? Your grumbling is not against us but *against the LORD*." Look at chapter 17:2. "Moses said to them, 'Why do you quarrel with me? Why do you test *the LORD*?'"

They don't see that their struggles are from God. And they certainly don't trust him to provide for their needs. The heart of the issue in the wilderness is not their *external* conditions and circumstances. The heart of the issue is their *internal* condition; it's their heart.⁶

In Psalm 95, the Psalmist alludes to our passage in Exodus. Look at verses 7b-9.

"Today, if you hear his voice,
do not harden your hearts, as at Meribah,
as on the day at Massah in the wilderness,
when your fathers put me to the test
and put me to the proof, though they had seen my work."

Although the Israelites had seen God's work against Pharaoh in Egypt, they didn't trust in God in the wilderness. Why? Because their heart was hard! Where did we last hear this language? Pharaoh had a hard heart. God had saved them from Pharaoh, but now their heart toward God was like Pharaoh's.

It's interesting to me. In the first part of chapter 15, we see Israel praising God for their deliverance from Egypt with their lips. But now their lips reveal hearts that don't trust God to deliver them from hunger and thirst. Out of the same mouth come blessing and cursing (Jas. 3:10).

What do your lips reveal about your heart? Do you have a heart that trusts God and sings his praises? Or do you have a heart that's hard toward God? Out of the overflow of the heart, the

⁶ Ryken

mouth speaks. What are the words on your lips? Prayers for deliverance, like Moses? Or grumbling about your circumstances, like Israel. Remember that complaining doesn't really come from *external* conditions; it comes from an *internal* condition. A heart condition.

Your current struggles are there for a reason. God put them there. Whatever they are. Money issues. Health issues. Relationship issues. They're designed to train you to trust God. And that leads me to my next point.

OUR STRUGGLES ARE TO TRAIN US TO TRUST GOD.

If you were God, what would you do in the face of all this complaining? I know what I'd do! But God doesn't come down hard on Israel. Instead, he provides for their needs. He provides bread and water.

Why? Deuteronomy 8:2-3 tells us why. "And you shall remember the whole way that the LORD your God has led you these forty years in the wilderness, 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 hunger and fed you with manna, which you did not know, nor did your fathers know, that he might make you know that man does not live by bread alone, but man lives by every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD."

The reason God provided for them was to test them, to train them. To train them that the main thing they need is not bread. The main thing they need is the God who gives bread. The main thing they need is to live in a relationship with God. And that relationship should be defined by trust. And that trust should be proven by obedience to God. Our struggles are designed to train us to trust God.

This is exactly what we see in chapter 15, verses 25-26. Right after God provided sweet water for them at Marah, look at what he said to them. "There the LORD made for them a statute and a rule, and there he tested them, saying, 'If you will diligently listen to the voice of the LORD your God, and do that which is right in his eyes, and give ear to his commandments and keep all his statutes, I will put none of the diseases on you that I put on the Egyptians, for I am the LORD, your healer.'"

God provides for his people. But he wants us to trust him to provide. And we prove that trust through our obedience. How do we live by God's word? We listen *and* do. We give ear *and* keep.

So, in the second episode of our passage, where God provides bread from heaven, he also provides three sets of instructions. If the people will listen to these instructions and follow them, they will prove their trust in him and he will provide for them. I'm going to cover the first two this morning.

God Provides Enough

The first set of instructions begins in verse 16. "This is what the LORD has commanded: 'Gather of it [speaking of the manna], each one of you, as much as he can eat. You shall each take an omer, according to the number of the persons that each of you has in his tent.' And the people of Israel did so. They gathered, some more, some less. But when they measured it with an omer, whoever gathered much had nothing left over, and whoever gathered little had no lack. Each of them gathered as much as he could eat."

That's the first part of the first set of instructions.

But there was a second part of this first set. Look at verse 19. “And Moses said to them, ‘let no one leave any of it over till the morning.’ But they did not listen to Moses. Some left part of it till the morning, and it bred worms and stank. And Moses was angry with them.”

The command was simple. Gather what you can eat. And don’t leave any over till the morning. Some of them trusted God and proved their trust by obedience. And some didn’t trust God and didn’t obey. But why did they not trust him?

Some of you who’ve had foster kids know what’s going on here. Sometimes kids hoard food if they’ve ever lived in a home where they weren’t sure where the next meal was coming from. They don’t trust that there’ll be enough. The Israelites experienced hunger in the wilderness. And so they didn’t believe they’d have enough. So they stashed some extra manna in their cargo shorts for later.

Do you trust God to provide your daily bread? Or are you hoarding resources? Are you stockpiling your money? I know we don’t live hand to mouth like the Israelites, but the principle still applies. And thankfully Paul gives us a way to evaluate whether or not we trust God. He says it has to do with generosity.

In 2 Corinthians 8 he calls the Corinthians to give generously to other Christians in need. I can’t cover his whole argument. I’ll just deal with the part where he uses Exodus 16 to make his point. In verses 13-15, he says, “For I do not mean that others should be eased and you burdened, but that as a matter of fairness your abundance at the present time should supply their need, so that their abundance may supply your need, that there may be fairness. As it is written, ‘Whoever gathered much had nothing left over, and whoever gathered little had no lack.’”

His point gives insight into what must’ve been happening in the wilderness. It seems that the faithful Israelites were sharing with each other; they were being generous. Some gathered more, some less, but everybody had enough.

There’s nothing wrong with saving money. But your willingness to share is one way to test whether or not you trust God with what he’s given you. Are you generous, sharing with others? Or are you stashing your stash away for yourself?

Sabbath

The second set of commands begins in verse 23. “This is what the LORD has commanded; ‘Tomorrow is a day of solemn rest, a holy Sabbath to the LORD; bake what you will bake and boil what you will boil, and all that is left over lay aside to be kept till the morning.’ So they laid it aside till the morning, as Moses commanded them, and it did not stink, and there were no worms in it. Moses said, ‘Eat it today, for today is a Sabbath to the LORD; today you will not find it in the field. Six days you shall gather it, but on the seventh day, which is a Sabbath, there will be none.’ On the seventh day some of the people went out to gather, but they found none. And the LORD said to Moses, ‘How long will you refuse to keep my commandments and my laws? See! The LORD has given you the Sabbath; therefore on the sixth day he gives you bread for two days. Remain each of you in his place; let no one go out of his place on the seventh day.’ So the people rested on the seventh day.”

Again, the command is simple. For five days only gather enough for one day. But on the sixth day, gather enough for two days. Because on the Sabbath there will be no manna. It’s a day of rest. God

gives us a pattern in creation. And a pattern here in Exodus. Six days of labor. One day of leisure. Six days of work. One day of rest.

And what's the point of the day of rest? Later in Deuteronomy 5, we see that it's to remember redemption. They're no longer slaves. They're sons! They have to trust God for redemption. And they have to remember their redemption, to trust God for all of their needs. Keeping Sabbath is a way to trust God.

And some of them did so. And some of them didn't. But why didn't they do it? Again, they didn't trust God. They didn't take him at his word.

How does this apply to us today? I don't have time to deal with whether or not the Sabbath command still applies to us today. But at a minimum I think there's a pattern that's established in creation and repeated in redemption that we can learn from. When we establish an intentional rhythm of work and rest, we show that we trust God.

Believe it or not, you're not God! You didn't create yourself. And you didn't redeem yourself. But sometimes the way we approach work reveals that we may believe we're God.

When Pastor Ron came to First Free, he helped me to revise our work schedule. We're expected to work two to three nights a week. And we work on Sundays. Sunday can't be our day of rest. So, we need to take off either Monday or Friday.

I was all for this for the staff. But I wasn't really doing it myself. I was taking a half a day off most weeks, but sometimes I even let that day get filled up with work. Ron did what a Christian brother should do. He challenged me to take a full day off. This has been humbling for me, but it's been good. It's taught me that I'm not God. This isn't my church, it's his. He bought it with the blood of his Son. It will continue long after I'm dead and gone. It's taught me to trust God. And it's given me space to cultivate better spiritual and physical health.

I was living like Pharaoh. Work, work, work! But I'm not Pharaoh's slave. I'm God's child. I need to live like a son not like a slave. I need to trust God. And so do each of you. What does your work week reveal about your trust in God?

GOD IS TRUSTWORTHY.

The only way we'll ever come to trust God is if we see him as trustworthy. And friends, that's what I want to impress upon you this morning! God is trustworthy; therefore, we can trust him. That's my third point and my sermon in a sentence.

The Israelites are frustrating because they'd seen God's trustworthiness. God had worked in extraordinary ways, but they weren't willing to trust him with their ordinary needs. He'd proved himself by the Red Sea. He'd made the waters stand, but they didn't trust him to provide water to drink. He'd even provided bread from heaven, but they still didn't trust him, as we'll see in the rest of Exodus.

But let's not get too down on Israel. We're quite similar, aren't we? We've seen even more extraordinary proof that God is able and willing to provide for us. He's proven his trustworthiness so we can trust him. Not only in Egypt. Not only in the wilderness, but supremely in Jesus. Think about it! God has provided a perfect substitute in Jesus and a perfect sacrifice in Jesus.

A Perfect Substitute

In Matthew 4, Jesus was also led into the wilderness and tested. Not for forty years, but for forty days. When Satan tempted him with bread, he responded with God's word. "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God" (v. 4). When he was tempted to throw himself down from the temple, he said, "You shall not put the Lord your God to the test" (v. 7).

Where Israel failed in the wilderness, Jesus didn't fail. Where we fail in our sin, Jesus is without sin. He's our perfect substitute. He proved his trust in God to provide for him.

A Perfect Sacrifice

And he's also a perfect sacrifice for our sin. In John 6, Jesus provides bread in a miraculous way, like the Father before him. This was a sign that showed that Jesus himself was the bread of life. The bread God provided in the wilderness pointed to a greater bread from heaven. Jesus said, "I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst" (v. 35). "I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever. And the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh" (v. 51).

This is a reference to his sacrifice on the cross for our sins. Those who believe or trust in Jesus as the bread from heaven will have much more than redemption from Egypt, much more than manna and water in the wilderness—they'll have forgiveness from their sins and eternal life.

Like Israel, we've all failed to trust God. We've all sinned. We don't deserve to enter God's eternal rest. But Jesus has stood in our place. He obeyed where we didn't. He died in our place. Do you believe that?

If you've not yet placed your trust in Jesus, I urge you to today. Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts as at Meribah. Trust in God through trusting in Jesus. Cry out to God. Admit you're a sinner. Believe in Jesus. And commit your life to him.

To the rest of you, let me remind you of the lesson before us today. God gives us struggles to train us to trust him. But he is trustworthy. He's proven his trustworthiness in Jesus. Surely, we can trust him to provide for our daily needs. "He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things" (Rom. 8:32).

So consider it pure joy when you face trials of many kinds. God's using those to make you just like Jesus! Trust him. He's trustworthy.