

Exodus 15:22-17:16

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Date: 29 November 2015

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[0 : 0 0] Well, what do you preach on? On the day that day, what do you preach on when we have news of someone who has been in this church since the very beginning?! I'd love to know whether he was him and Lesley. I think Lesley was probably the first convert, like he's the old giant.

But somebody who's been so much a part of our church and such a support to so many of us. And I think you preach on what you're going to preach on, really. And we believe in the power of God's words, don't we?

We believe that God speaks to us as we open his word as the people of God. And I hope, and I pray, and I expect that you'll do that again this morning. We're in the middle of a 40-year journey.

They haven't arrived yet. And they've been saved, but they're not yet there yet. They're on the journey from slavery to the promised land. And there are lots of hurdles, aren't there?

And there are lots of tests. We know that from our journey from slavery to the promised land. We're not there yet. And there are lots of hurdles.

[1 : 0 9] And I don't know about you, but one of the questions that I ask about the Christian life is, why does God make it so difficult? Why is it often so hard? Why does God bring so many troubles into the path of those that he loves?

Getting out of Egypt was really simple, wasn't it? Relatively so. Pharaoh told them, get out. And they crossed the Red Sea. It was a very exciting experience as the sea parted. And now the people find themselves in the desert.

It's what one commentator quite helpfully calls the desert university. And the question that we always ask when we come to this passage is, is we mustn't run too quickly to ourselves.

I'm very prone to do that. We often ask the question, it's very appealing, isn't it? What does this have for me? What is in it for me? What is the take-home value?

But first of all, I think particularly when you come to the book of Exodus, we need to ask, what is God doing? Because if we get the original point, we'll get the real point, which will become our point. And so we need to be careful, I think, about devotionalising these passages.

[2 : 1 6] So you can imagine the preacher standing up here. It would be very easy for me to say, are you in a desert this morning? Do you feel like you're in a desert? Got a bit of a battle on your hands? Well, let me give you certain strategies for the desert.

And certain strategies for the battle. That isn't the way you're going to handle the Bible. What we need to do is we need to ask, what is God doing here? And so from today's section, which is 15, 22, to the end of chapter 17, there's a series of tests.

Let me give you the test. The first test is in chapter 15 and verse 22. Where people begin the desert walk and they find they've got undrinkable water.

The second test is chapter 16 and verse 3. You have undrinkable water in 15, 22. In 16 and verse 3, they are hungry. What's the second one? They're hungry.

They've got no adequate food. The third test is they've got no water at all. It's not just undrinkable water. There is no water. And then it's chapter 17 and verse 8 is the fourth test.

[3 : 1 9] Where the hostile enemy, the army, comes up to them. And instead of following those events, one after another, I want to try and draw around what I think are the three key themes that apply to all four tests.

I think there are these characteristics in each of them. So that we will see what was God doing? And what is God doing? And what will God do? And the first thing this morning is that God is teaching us His sufficiency.

God is teaching us His sufficiency. That these events are designed to show His people that God is committed to proving to His people that they do not have all the answers.

Do you know that? God is committed to proving to His people that they do not have all the answers. And that might come into the shock to you because we think, don't we, that we have got all the answers.

Or we know someone who's got all the answers. This room is full of so many talents and so many gifts and so many abilities. And we can find someone who can solve the problem.

[4 : 25] But God is committed to proving that we do not have all the answers. And so He will take His people as He does to impossible places that they will learn that He is not only the rescuer who will get them out of Egypt and across the Red Sea, but He is the one on whom they must have depended for the journey.

So the rescue, we know the rescue was all of God, wasn't it? They couldn't have gone out without God. God was the one that caused the plagues which caused Pharaoh to open the door.

God was the one who blew with his nostrils. Do you know that? He blew with his mouth to open up the Red Sea and without God, swelling wouldn't have happened. It was all of God.

And now they've learned the journey is all of God as well. And the Israelites are not just being left out of Egypt in order that they would certainly run and say, we are free for me.

I'm free to do whatever I want. But then they would find that they are being led out of Egypt and they find that they are free for Him. It's not the Christian gospel that you are free, but you are free for Him.

[5 : 38] That you are free to look to Him. You are free to serve Him. And you are free one day to see Him. And that is the theme of the scriptures. You see, we believe in freedom, don't we?

But the freedom in the Bible is not freedom from yourself. But it is freedom from death. And from sin.

And from judgment. And it is for Him and for His glory and for His praise. The thing is this, we don't learn, do we, that God is sufficient.

We don't learn that God is sufficient if we think that we are self-sufficient. Do you get that? But when a person is self-sufficient, it is very difficult for them to learn the sufficiency of God.

When we said that, it's natural, isn't it? And it's good for us to provide. You are meant to go and work. You are meant to support your loved ones. And in those interim times, we are to support one another.

[6 : 46] We are to encourage one another. We are to pray for one another. We are basically, the Bible teaches, to be good providers. The man that doesn't work doesn't eat. But you see, there are some things we just cannot provide.

And the Israelites, they are unable to provide water, they are unable to provide food, and they are unable to provide victory. It is beyond them. Let's think quickly about this. You can imagine, can't you, getting out of the Red Sea, and you think, this is fantastic.

We've been delivered from the greatest superpower of the world. And God is going to solve everything, every bit of all the time. And then suddenly, they come to this time where there is no water.

And they suddenly see what looks like an oasis, and they run to the water. They run to it, and it is disgusting. And undrinkable. Salty water.

Bitter water. And this huge disappointment would come. And they would say to themselves, this is wrong. This is nonsense. This is stupid.

[7 : 50] God has forgotten. He's gone on holiday. Something has gone wrong. And the only person to ask is Moses. Can we see that in chapter 15, verse 25?

He cried to the Lord. And the Lord showed him a log. He threw it in the water. And the water gave sweet. He says to God, would you do something, please God?

And God, effortless, effortlessly, uses something at hand, which is a piece of wood. And he gets it to throw it into the water, and the water is suddenly drinkable.

And God is proving himself so simply that in the sixth week of their journey, chapter 16, in verse 1, do you see that they are extremely hungry.

They're extremely hungry. And they're thinking about all the foods that they used to have in Egypt. There are no takeaways anywhere. There's a million of them.

[8 : 55] And again, it's only God who was able to provide. It's very simple. And it is God who this time initiates and says to Moses, I am going to provide you meat and bread, quail and manna.

And we know this story so well, don't we? It's not a sound thing. There's no water. It's not just there's undrinkable water. There's no water at all. And they must have thought if God could divide the sea, well surely couldn't he make a sea?

Couldn't he make a log? Couldn't he do something? And so effortlessly God asks Moses to go up to something that is right there in the desert, which they themselves could never be told.

And he brings out the water that is needed. He brings out the water that is needed. Then there's the Amalekite armies in the chapter 17 and verse 8.

They come and fight. And just in case anybody's missed the point, God is making this we read the scriptures. Joshua leads the army off to fight the Amalekites.

[10:00] But what is going to cause the victory? We didn't read it. But it is, isn't it? It is Moses who is praying with his arms in the air. And he's asking God to solve the problem.

You see, it is God from start to finish. And this section is teaching you and I the sufficiency of God. It does not teach us that the people of God travel magically with an instant solution.

It doesn't teach us that there are shortcuts and easy answers that fix things. It just goes on teaching that there is one who is able to look after us.

It's sad, isn't it? There are some people that they never, ever learn this. And their eyes are on the ground for themselves the whole time. And they go on like that for years and for decades and they never actually look up to God.

And they never recognise that everything, everything that they are dealing with has come from him.

That in him they live and move and have their being. And so because they ignore God and they avoid God and they forget God and they even insult him he breaks up their party.

[11:14] And he breaks up their party not because he doesn't love them, he breaks up their party because he wants them to recognise that they must call to him and that they must look to him. And when they call to him and they look to him they begin to live life with a capital L to live eternally.

God is not teaching his people in some kind of ugly, sadistic, hostile way that they must look to him and trust him. He is seeking to teach them isn't he?

The greatest privilege of being his people. Alec Mateo says in his commentary he says this In a way the trials of the pathway may take us by surprise but not him.

The trials of the pathway may take us by surprise but not him. What do we feel today? We feel absolute shock don't we?

Absolute shock yet God does not. The trials of the pathway may take us by surprise but not him.

God knew that we would meet like this this morning.

[12:21] God knew that he would take David to glory yesterday. And left to ourselves life would be more than we can bear but we are not left to ourselves.

And that is what God is teaching us here in the provision of food and water and victory. And they are very very wonderful essential provisions. There is nothing more essential than water and food and safety.

Now the man of bread is going to say just look chapter 16 verse 14 it is the most famous. And we should take note of what this is about because the man of bread first of all is supremely supernatural.

This is not natural. It is not supernatural. They say in chapter 15 what do they say about this? They say in chapter 15 we've now seen anything like this.

It is supernatural. The second thing is it is provided daily isn't it? It comes on days one to six and then on days they can have twice as much and so they can have a rest.

[13:22] They don't have to go out and search for food on the Sabbath day. But it comes every day six days or provided day by day. It is supernatural.

It is daily. The third thing is sufficient for everyone. Look at verse 18. But when they wrote nicely with an oma whoever gathered much have nothing left oma and whoever gathers little has no lack. Each of them gathered as much as he could each. There wasn't too much there wasn't too little it was just perfect. And then we see it's continual don't we?

It comes from the day Moses is told of it right to the day they enter the promised land. It is a continual supply from God. It is supernatural. It is provided daily.

It is sufficient. It is continual. And God knows what he's doing. It is supernatural.

[14:23] It is daily. It is sufficient. It is continual. And lastly it's symbolic. It's a very instructive supply of food. It's so instructive that they're actually told to put something in a jar and eventually it

will go into the ark which travels with them wherever they go.

So wherever they went there was a number of things and one of them was a little jar with manna bread. And it's a reminder that the God we depend on the God who saved us is able to keep us. and the God who has brought us this far will look after us. Of course ultimately you know this that the man of bread points ultimately to the Lord Jesus who stepped into this world and said your father gave the bread from heaven the man of bread I am that bread that comes down from heaven. Jesus says if a person looks to me and believes in me and then he said to them he shocks them he said eat sleep if any man keeps me in they will live forever.

The man of bread did you for a day but I will do you for eternal life. And so as we come to the table there's all these questions in John 6 it seems to me you've got to be mad if you can't see communion at the Lord's table in John 6.

[15 : 49] The sustaining Lord Jesus Christ the Lord Jesus Christ the Lord Jesus Christ who is what? I've found the pigeon on the side of the side he is this isn't he?

He is continual he is supernatural he is provided daily he is sufficient for everyone. It's there it's a great picture of the Lord Jesus. There's a vital connection our needs being met by God water bread victory victory and again interestingly the Lord Jesus picks it up on each one of them doesn't he? John 7 come and I will enable you to drink come to the waters John 6 I am the bread of life John 10 I am the shepherd who will protect and provide all the way from start to finish we need you don't we?

we need him today says to us he says to Leslie he says to that family I am sufficient second theme is the theme of testing testing God's people it's a very important theme that comes up look at chapter 15 verse 25 God's tested them God tested them to see if they would listen chapter 16 verse 4 it's there again God tested them to see if they would follow his instructions now what we know about testing it is where God stretches his people he stretches his people out of a loving concern that they would grow and it comes from the love of God to stretch and test and grow his people and behind that desire behind that testing is a desire to bless his people so we would expect when it says there was no water that it would go on to say that is because he was testing them or there was no food because he was testing them and an army came because he was testing them but it doesn't say that it says

I am going to test them to see if they follow my word I am going to test them to see if they can follow my instructions and that is God testing his people and it raises the question that God is not just testing us by giving us a difficult situation but he may be giving a difficult situation but what God is doing is he tests us to see if we will depend on his word to see if we will depend on his promises to see if we will depend on his commands are you prepared to go with what he has said it's always the way he's worked in Genesis 1 Genesis 2 Genesis 3 I don't know what is exactly on your plate and you don't know what is exactly on my plate but I expect that every single person here this morning if you are like everybody else in London there is something that you are quite stressed about and there will be things in your life that you are nervous about and there are things in your life and in my life that you are fearful about and yet you know enough of the promises of

[18 : 57] God to hold onto one and work with it and you know enough of the commands of God to be able to hold one and walk with it the testing of God the testing of God is his question can you walk with the word there are difficult circumstances with which you might test us but the question is he's asking is I want to test you by whether you will hang with my word you will hang with the word the other testing is in chapter 17 you can see verse 2 and verse 7 can you see it why do you test the Lord and then verse 7 they tested the Lord it's not God testing the people it's the people testing God and it's incredible isn't it people test God there is nothing nothing honourable about testing God because we don't work out do we you don't work out do you need to work out whether God needs to grow we don't get to see whether

God can be stretched and whether God can make progress that is insulting and the testing of Exodus 17 is that attitude which is basically saying to God here is my sentence God you do this and I will approve you you do that and I will trust you you do this God and I will obey you and that in the Bible is testing of the worst possible kind we read in verse 7 is God among us or not is the Lord among us or not if he turns up and he tells what we do to tell him to do we'll give him the tip and that is to test God God if you get me out of the situation I'll believe in you do not put the Lord to the test so the difference is this isn't it God tests his people to refuse their progress by giving them promises that you can trust but we test God in an insulting kind of way by asking him to perform or cooperate

according to the words he has laid down

C.S. Lewis famously said this about God in the dark he wrote a book called *God in the dark* and in that book he says that ancient man approached God as the accused approaches the judge but he said in our day modern man the roles have been reversed the modern man is the judge and God is in the dark and modern man we're not quite a kindly judge aren't we that if God should have a reasonable defence for his behaviour that would not accept it but the important thing is that it is God who is on the bench it is God who is in the dark and it is God who must prove himself and that is dreadful that is a dreadful attitude which is never going to work our God is going to make sure that people are never going to go forward with that kind of distortion and one of the marks of being in the desert is that it's a place where you are the master can you find out that God is going to teach the truth that he is the master and he is the provider and he is the judge and it's all bound up with him so we need to know what

God is doing here he is testing the people he puts them in a difficult place for a certain amount of time but he gives them a word to see if they will go with it and we of course are able to test God in our foolishness in our various ways and sometimes we are just reckless because I don't really care what God says I don't care what God thinks this is what I want and this is what I will do or sometimes we think my friendship with God is pretty secure and I'm going to perhaps stretch it a little bit I won't break it but I'll do this God will be ok sometimes we test God by thinking we can manipulate it I'm sure this is true in your hearts it's certainly true in mine that we think we just put a few coins into the God slot machine and then God is obliged to do dot dot dot for us and all that testing of God is a big mistake sometimes we test God by saying things in a very inappropriate and offensive way we need to be very careful there are books around there are proper speakers around who are very very good speakers and they will say to you you can tell God anything you want and I think we need to be very very careful with that it is possible to speak to

God honestly it is I want to encourage you that but we can go to God and say I am angry and I am patient and I am frightened we can say basic honest things to God we can tell him what is going on please help me that it stays reverent it is not insulting it is not abusive it is not inappropriate so there is the testing of God and you know two things God is teaching his sufficiency and when Jesus came of course he expanded all this in the sermon on the mount he says to his listeners if God cares after the birds and the flowers and he is just their creator he is not their father how much more will he if he is your father look after you his children that's the logic I've always found it very frustrating when I listen to sermons and people say to me don't worry don't be anxious you have found it very frustrating when I preach sermons to you don't worry and don't be anxious because you and [24 : 59] I do worry and we do get anxious don't we Jesus is not so simplistic Jesus is not so foolish what he basically says to you is use your logic use your mind if God your creator is running the world yes that God he is your father yes he is will he treat you worse being your father than the creator does his creation probably not and so therefore focus on his goodness and his wisdom and his power and keep trusting him here's this other section that God is testing his people and being tested by his people because when he tests his people it is because he loves us it is because he wants to bring us up to him but when we test him it is to drag him down to us lastly the other theme we see is trusting God soon and this is the third theme in the last one it's very easily missed and that is the Israelites are tragically horizontal and in their thinking they just grumble at the side and they grumbled to the people who were in their sights so they grumbled and they grumbled in 1524 they grumbled in 1602 they grumbled in 1703 they grumbled and after every sentence they grumbled against Moses things got difficult and they are too faithless to lift up their prayer to God so they take a swipe at the leader and that is what they do they don't see that you relate to

God they don't think I'll bring it to him they do what is easy which is go and find someone so they can speak to him Moses takes it very humbly he tells the people that he is a nobody and that he really is a nobody but he also tells them that they're grumbling at its root is a criticism against God when they go and speak to him and they say you have failed us what they're really saying is God you have failed us or there isn't a God and he doesn't care and God doesn't have power and God doesn't have love and God doesn't have wisdom and it is just you Moses says whether you realise it or not you're insulting God and the great point I think is how blessed these rights are to have Moses I was thinking about this passage this week I do working on it's not an easy passage these three they go from no water to the name water this army to the victory of for hours I didn't know what to say they had no water they had a battle they got the victory one was inside one was outside

both of them were carefully looked after

I didn't know what to say I was on the E1 bus on Thursday it suddenly struck me I suddenly thought where would the Israelites have been without the mediator there wasn't a single person in the crowd apart from Moses who seemed to remember that God was good and great and it struck me they wouldn't have made it through the hunger they wouldn't have made it through the battle if it hadn't been for Moses thinking God I'm not pretending Moses is the saviour one will remember him and that is why when we come to the New Testament the New Testament teaches us you are like the Israelites but we don't have someone who is like Moses who is our guru or our great one we have someone who is sensationally better than all Jesus we have someone who is not only able to call for food but someone who is able to give the food we for us this morning we have somebody who is not only able to point us to

God but who is able to link us to God who is the mediator through God and man through his work on the cross and building reconciliation so that it is possible for you and I to be in a relationship with God this morning not just think him up there we have the greatest mediator the universe has ever seen or will in Jesus Christ and we couldn't be more grateful we couldn't be more blessed we have someone who begins the escape for us who sees us through on the journey and who will carry us home and will make sure it happens so do not forget him Christopher Hitchens is the kind of legendary atheist he died a couple of years ago he's got a brother some of you will know this Peter Hitchens who's a strong Christian and Peter Hitchens is just as smart but he's come back to faith in Christ two brothers one bashing on about there's no

God and the other one calling people back to have faith in Christ Peter Hitchens has written a little book called The Rage Against God where he exposes a lot of the anger and a lot of the stupidity that comes from the kind of angry atheist movement at the end of the book he says the 21st century man is being driven by homeless utopians they are sure that there is no heaven and they are coming to fear that there may be no earthly paradise either but they continue to find all their previous failures to hope for one holding tightly to the idea that what science cannot explain does not need explaining they are still ready to slander the kingdom of heaven while mistakenly praising the fanciful utopias of man what a dreadful position to be to turn your back and mock everything that God has put in place and then to actually vainly try and put something else in place contrast that with Exodus 15 to 17 where we're told that there's a real escape that God supplies there's a real hope home that

[31 : 06] God will give us and we are separated from escape and home by a journey which we're on and there is a very real God our heavenly father who repeatedly tells us in the Bible again and again and again he is our saviour and he is our provider and he gives us his word his commands his promises to walk with his son and he guarantees we will travel safely and we will arrive just as David Barnes travels safely and arrives and has arrived let's pray