

H2No Exodus 17: 1-7

We're out of water again. It was the last thing a young father wanted to hear from his bride after a long day at work at the mill. Not only was the water from the well undrinkable because of the numerous salt springs in the area, during the hot summer months it would often run dry. It is one thing to lose electricity, as you can light a candle or grab a flashlight to dispel the darkness. But when water ceases to flow from the faucet, even for a short period of time, an inconvenience can quickly turn into a crisis. No water meant no clean clothes, no clean kids and no place to go when nature calls. It meant going to the Laundromat, carrying water to flush the toilets and perhaps even some finger pointing. But at least water was available.

It was much different for Moses and the ancient Israelites. There were no Laundromats in their day. They couldn't fill their jugs from the faucet at the house next door or buy bottled water at the nearest 711. When they ran out of water, it was no mere inconvenience but a true life or death crisis. It's understandable why everyone was screaming at Moses again. This problem of no water seemed to be happening more frequently. The first time it happened they were in the wilderness at Shur, and now just a few weeks later they were out of water once again-this time in a place called Rephidim.

So whose fault was it? Was Moses a poor tour guide? Did they get sidetracked or take a wrong turn someplace? Actually it was quite the opposite. Look at verse 1 with me- what is interesting is that they were camping exactly where God had commanded them to camp- in Rephidim. And God, being the One who created the heavens and the earth, and the One who created water, knew full well (pardon the pun) there wouldn't be water there.

The truth is that there will be times when difficult problems will be part of God's will for His people. To look at it another way, God does not bribe us to be obedient with the promise that our life will be problem free. If that was the way it worked, the whole world or at the least those millions of people seeking to live their lives on easy street would have been converted by now.

I can't tell you with absolute certainty why God allows the saints to suffer such problems, and neither can anybody else. There are some things that we will just never fully understand this side of glory. But if we were to make an educated guess, we might say it has something to do with God building character and growing our faith through adversity. When things begin to go wrong, or sometimes even very wrong, the way we respond says a lot about our character and our faith in God.

When things don't go as expected, it is easier to blame someone or something, rather than seek a spiritual answer to the problem. Look at the way the Israelites responded once their water supply was gone. The first thing they did was blame Moses. You can almost hear them. I told you we should have turned back there. I told you that this oasis was going to be dry. We never should have listened to you in the first place. At least Pharaoh gave us food and water.

It was so bad Moses believed they were going to stone him to death. In desperate times, anger and violence rule. Rather than seeking spiritual guidance, they blamed Moses for their lack of water. They had quickly forgotten that just a few weeks earlier they were in the same situation and Moses prayed to God, tossed a stick into the murky and bitter waters in the desert of Shur and presto chango- the putrid water was changed into a crystal clear pool of safe drinking water in the twinkling of an eye. Do you wonder if anyone thought about asking Moses to pray again rather than picking up a stone to toss at him?

They blamed Moses, when in fact there should not have been any blame placed at all. Did blaming Moses and threatening to stone him make them any less thirsty or otherwise solve their problem? Of course not, unless they were going to drink his blood afterwards. It wasn't Moses fault they were there-God had directed them there for a holy purpose. It was a divine learning experience, something that God would use to build their character, their faith and their trust in Him.

Reading between the lines, it seems the real reason they were blaming Moses is that they had doubts about God. Look at verse 7- it is another one of those great questions from the Bible. Is the Lord among us or not? In their minds the Lord was not with them since they were thirsty and there was no water to drink. They equated God's presence with an abundance of material blessings. To be fair, they did believe their lives were at risk and perhaps God had abandoned them. However, rather than seeking God's help in the crisis they simply did the quick and easy thing- blamed Moses for their predicament.

God had continuously met their needs until now. He allowed the plague to pass over them, He parted the Red Sea so they could escape Egyptian bondage, He gave them all the bread and meat to eat they wanted yet they still couldn't believe God would provide the water they needed to survive.

They were released from bondage to Pharaoh, where they relied upon the Egyptians to supply their wants and needs, but they failed to recognize they were now in a different kind of bondage-a holy bondage with God. Once again Moses cried out to God in prayer, this time in desperation. What shall I do with this people? God you better hurry up or something bad is going to happen.

God is good, and once again Moses prayer was heard. See that rock over yonder? Strike it with your staff and watch me make the water come flowing out. Once again God provided for their needs, despite their lack of faith. But notice that someone needed to ask.

Can we be truly obedient to God and still experience problems and heartaches? Yes. But does God abandon us during those times when we are tempted to give up and write us off? No. The question is when those things come, will we fix the blame on someone or something or will we turn to God for an understanding of His will in the matter? One is easy, and the other can be difficult. Make no mistake- it is hard to pray without ceasing. It is hard to pray for 10 minutes, let alone 10 hours or 10 days or 10 months or 10 years. Time and time again, God demonstrated that He didn't abandon the Israelites. We can take comfort in knowing He won't abandon us either. He will provide, just as He did for the Israelites.

Our attitudes affect our actions. If our attitude is like that of the ancient Israelites, questioning whether God is still with us, we will do what they did- act like He isn't. We will blame someone or something for the situation we are in, or maybe even blame ourselves rather than seeking Gods counsel and wisdom or even worse allow our anger to turn into violence. So where is your Rephridim? How are you doubting God? My prayer is that our attitude will be different than that of the ancient Israelites. God, I am not sure why this is happening- help me to understand your will. God, I don't like what is happening- help me get through this. And God, whatever happens, let me see your glory through it. Help me learn

What is amazing is the great love and obedience so many people have for God amidst of great heartaches and setbacks. Prophets like Isaiah, Stephen and John the Baptist who were all martyred because of their faith. And there is Fanny Crosby (a Methodist) who lost her sight at a young age, some believe due to medical malpractice, yet she wrote over 8000 hymns glorifying God. Dietrich Bonhoeffer gave his life for Christ standing up against Nazi Germany and Cassie Bernal, a student at Columbine High School stood firm in her faith and was murdered for doing so. We can learn much from their witness.

Will you pray with me? Father in heaven, help us to overcome our temptation to doubt you. Quench our thirst for your glory with the living water that only your Son Jesus Christ can supply. Lord, make us one with you through the power of your Holy Spirit. Amen