

Rev. Dan Welch Lent 3 -Wednesday 3-27-19 Text- Exodus 17:1-7

The Fourth Part in the Series

Exodus: Let My People Go!

“Strike the Rock!”

When we don't get enough water we confuse our thirst for hunger. Then what happens? We eat when we don't *need* to eat! What does that mean? We gain weight!

When we don't get enough water we also become tired, dizzy, and anxious; our joints and muscles start to ache. What does that mean? A bad life! The point is we all need water—lots and lots of water!

We're in a series on the book of Exodus. This week we look at Exodus 17 using these questions, who, what, where, why, how, and when. *Who, what, where, why, how, and when.*

What's the point of this sermon? We all need water—lots and lots of water!

The first question is “Who?” Who? The Israelites! The Israelites lived in Egypt, near the Nile River, for 430 years. Even when the Israelites left Egypt they had no problems with water. Need it to form into walls? No problem! Need it to come crashing down on Pharaoh's horses and chariots? Piece of cake!

Who? The Israelites and *Moses*! If anyone deserves the title, “The Wonderful Wizard of Water Works,” it's Moses. The name “Moses” literally means to draw out of water. As a child, he is placed into water for safety and drawn out of water for salvation. In Exodus chapter 2, Moses came to the rescue of his future wife Zipporah, by driving away some greedy shepherd-bullies and drawing some water out of the well for Zipporah and her sisters' flock of sheep. In Exodus 15:25—when confronted with bitter water—Moses throws a piece of wood into the putrid pool and presto, instant purified water! That's the who—Israel and the amazing Moses!

How about the “What?” Exodus 17:1 says, “There was no water for the people to drink.” The Israelites left Egypt in chapter 14 and now they've been in the desert for a month. They've seen nothing but rocks, sand, and dirt! *Rocks, sand, and dirt!*

We all know what it feels like to have no water. Do we ever! There's **emotional** thirst. "It hurts so bad, sometimes it feels like I'm eating glass." There's **spiritual** thirst. "God, if you are so good, why do I hurt so bad? God, why do you seem so far away? God, do you even exist?" And then there's **relational** thirst. "When it comes to love, I've struck out a billion times!"

"Moses cried out to the LORD, 'What should I do with these people? They are ready to stone me!'" (Ex 17:4). What do we do when we're overcome with thirst? Just like the Israelites we want to stone people. We resort to rocks!

Do you remember the scene in *Forrest Gump* when Jennie begins throwing rocks at her childhood home? When Jennie runs out of rocks and falls down on the ground what does Forrest Gump say? "Sometimes there just aren't enough rocks!" Forrest Gump is wrong! Forrest Gump is dead wrong! We thirst so much for love, that, when we don't get it, we begin throwing rocks. Verbal missals. Nuclear words. Silent stares. Angry texts. There are always enough rocks! And this breaks God's heart.

Next Question: Where? Verse one of our text says: "They camped at Rephadim" (Ex 17:1). Where is Rephadim? No one knows. Scholars don't know. Archaeologists don't know. No one knows where Rephadim is. All people can say is that Rephadim is close to Mt. Sinai.

But you know the exact location of Rephadim! So do I! Rephadim is that place in our lives where we are burned out with fear too deep to manage, loneliness too heavy to bear, and doubts too many to number. Rephadim is that place where relationships are dehydrated, dry, and almost dead. Rephadim is where mothers are ready to throw in the towel, children don't have any friends, and husbands are working 60-70 hours a week. Others have spotted Rephadim on the job—where it's always the same ol', same ol'. *Boring!* And Rephadim is in every church. It's the place where—try as we might—everything stays dry as dust.

At Rephadim we cry with Psalm 42, "As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God!" At Rephadim we echo the anguish of Psalm 63, "O God, you

are my God, earnestly I seek you; my soul thirsts for you, my body longs for you, in a dry and weary land where there is no water.”

Why? Why do we become so thirsty? Four words, “It might have been.” That’s what the Israelites are saying in Exodus 17:3. “You brought us up out of Egypt.” Translated, “If we had stayed in Egypt, it might have been so much better.” “It might have been.”

These words were made famous in 1856 when John Greenleaf Whittier wrote a poem he called *Maud Muller*. It’s a poem about a young woman named Maud Muller who one day meets a young man. After their encounter, each of them ponders what it would be like to marry the other. But the moment passes and both Maud and the man end up in sad marriages. And both anguish over what was lost on that day so long ago. At the end of the poem Whittier writes, “Of all sad words of tongue or pen, the saddest are these, ‘It might have been.’”

Who? What? Where? Why? **How?** How can we get water? How can we get water? Well, I guess we could get a staff. *Wait! That’s it! We can get a staff!* But it can’t be any ordinary run-of-the-mill, Wal-Mart kind of staff. It has to be **the** staff! You remember! Moses’s staff! The staff that goes back and forth from a stick to a snake. The staff that struck the Nile River and turned its water into blood. The staff that stretched out over the Red Sea to divide its waters so Israel could walk through on dry land. “Take in your hand the staff and strike the rock and water will come out of it for the people to drink” (Ex 17:5–6; 1 Cor 10:4). And Moses did. And water flowed. And they lived! Paul reflects on this and connects the rock to Christ. How so?

Matthew 27:29, “They put a staff in his right hand and knelt in front of him and mocked him. ‘Hail, king of the Jews!’ they said. They spit on him, and took the staff and struck him on the head again and again.” For Jesus any ordinary run-of-the-mill staff **will** do. Any stick that remotely looks like a king’s scepter is just fine. Any piece of wood that won’t break if it’s slapped repeatedly on someone’s head.

And make sure that the piece of wood is carved to make a sharp, pointed end— because finally the Rock has to be split and opened up.

John 19:34, "One of the soldiers pierced Jesus's side with a spear, bringing a sudden flow of blood and water." *Water!*

Water flowing from the one whose lips are cracked and swollen. Water flowing from the one whose body burned under the hot Palestinian sun. Gushing water from the parched mouth of the one who cries out, "I thirst!" "Strike the rock, and water will come out of it for the people to drink." And they did. And it flowed. And *we* live!

Isaiah describes God's soul-quenching love with these words, "The burning sand will become a pool, the thirsty ground bubbling springs" (Is 35:7). Ezekiel sees it as a river teaming with life, "Wherever the river flows everything will live" (Ez 47:9.) Joel writes, "A fountain will flow out of the LORD's house" (Jl 3:18).

Who? Israel and Moses. What? There is no water! Where? Rephadim. Why? It might have been. How? Jesus, the Rock of Ages. What are we missing?

When? We're missing when. When does this water flow? When does it come to me? When does it quench my longing, aching heart? It's because Jesus loves you so very, very, very much that His living, life-giving, soul-renewing water flows from the cross for you. When? *Right now!* Amen.