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Exodus 17:1-7:

Our Journey to Calvary: The Best Water

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Our Journey to Calvary: The Best Water

Exodus 17:1-7

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ,

Following his speech, *Why I Am Not A Christian*, Bertrand Russell famously responded to Christian apologists with these words in an unpublished article,

“If I were to suggest that between the Earth and Mars there is a teapot revolving about the sun in an elliptical orbit, nobody would be able to disprove my assertion, provided I were careful to add that the teapot is too small to be revealed even by our most powerful telescopes. But if I were to go on to say that, since my assertion cannot be disproved, it is an intolerable presumption on the part of human reason to doubt it, I should rightly be thought to be talking nonsense.”

He went on to argue that the burden of proof always rests on the one making the claim. In his view, belief in God belongs in the same category. It is something that cannot simply be demanded of others without sufficient evidence to support it.

This view does not withstand serious examination. Christianity is not built upon vague mysticism or private spiritual impressions. It is rooted in history, in names, places, rulers, and events. Jesus of Nazareth was crucified under Pontius Pilate, and that is not a church legend; it is a fact acknowledged even by secular historians. The resurrection proclamation began immediately in Jerusalem, in the very city where the tomb could have been examined. This is why the apostolic preaching does not say, “Believe because you feel it.” It says, “This happened.”

Archaeology, too, has not unraveled the Bible but repeatedly confirmed it. For years, skeptics questioned whether King David was merely a mythological figure, until the Tel Dan inscription referred plainly to the “House of David.” Time and again, discoveries have not embarrassed Scripture, but they have strengthened confidence in its historical framework.

And then there is the remarkable unity of the Bible itself. Written across centuries by numerous authors in different lands and languages, it unfolds one coherent story: the story of redemption. The Christian faith is not belief in an invisible teapot hidden beyond the reach of telescopes. It is trust in God who acts in history. Our God is a God who speaks through His Word, who promises, and who delivers.

I. The Problem Is Not Evidence

But for men like Russell, the evidence God provides of His love, His saving work, and His rule over creation will never be enough. This comes as no surprise to us. As it is written in the Gospel of John, “Though he (Jesus) had done so many signs before them, they still did not believe in him.” (John 12:37) Even those who saw Jesus perform many miracles to prove His identity and His teaching would reject His message regardless. It is by this that we see the problem is not a lack of evidence; the problem is a lack of faith.

We so often hear the word “faith” and think it is blind, and that could not be further from the truth. Faith is not a leap into the dark, nor is it the closing of one’s eyes to reality. Faith is trust created by the Word of God in response to what God has actually done in history. It does not invent its own object; it receives the One who reveals Himself. The crowds in John’s Gospel did not fail to believe because the signs were unclear, but because their hearts were hard.

And that brings us to Israel in the wilderness. They were not philosophers debating the existence of God. They were a redeemed people who had seen His mighty works, and yet they still asked, “Is the Lord among us or not?” The issue was never evidence. The issue was trust. And true faith is not blind; it is the Spirit-given confidence that God, who has acted, who has spoken, who has given us His Word, who is real, and who has kept His promises, will continue to be who He has revealed Himself to be.

Through their quarrelling, the Israelites were testing the Lord, demanding once more proof of His love. Demanding with threats, the Israelites showed the weakness of their faith in the One who had delivered them from slavery in Egypt. And despite their unbelief and sin, the Lord still provided evidence of His love to these undeserving people.

And before we are too quick to shake our heads at Israel, we must see ourselves in them. We may not stand in a desert threatening to stone Moses, but how often do we test the Lord in other ways? When we measure His faithfulness by our present comfort or demand fresh proof tailored to our immediate crisis, that is not merely weakness; it is sin. It is a heart that forgets, a heart that doubts, a heart that places itself in judgment over God. Instead of turning first to His promises, we turn to sinful thoughts, words, and deeds. Instead of prayer, we turn to complaint. Instead of remembering what He has already done, we fixate on what He has not yet given.

In sin, we may be living as though the cross were insufficient evidence, as though the empty tomb were not enough. Like Israel, we grumble while standing on the far side of the Red Sea. We thirst, not because God has failed to provide, but because we refuse to trust the provision already given. The problem is not that God has been silent or inactive; the problem is that our hearts so quickly drift from confidence in His Word. As written in Deuteronomy and quoted by Jesus, “You shall not put the Lord your God to the test.” (Deuteronomy 6:16; Matthew 4:7) If we have fallen into a pattern of thinking that God, who has already delivered us from sin and death, must continually re-earn our trust, we have missed the mark entirely.

II. A Shower of Grace

And so, on this Third Sunday in Lent, we continue *Our Journey to Calvary* by standing with the Israelites in the wilderness. We stand not as spectators of Israel’s failure, but as fellow sinners in need of mercy. We come thirsty. We come convinced that in our sin, we have tested the Lord with our demands for more provision or proof than God has given. And yet, as our journey leads us closer to the cross, we discover something astonishing: the Lord does not answer rebellion with wrath. He answers it with a provision. He does not silence the grumblers with judgment. He strikes a rock and pours out life.

The text states,

“So Moses cried to the Lord, ‘What shall I do with this people? They are almost ready to stone me.’ And the Lord said to Moses, ‘Pass on before the people, taking with you some of the elders of Israel, and take in your hand the staff with which you struck the Nile, and go. Behold, I will stand before you there on the rock at Horeb, and you shall strike the rock, and water shall come out of it, and the people will drink.’ And Moses did so, in the sight of the elders of Israel.”

The people had disrespected their deliverer, put Him to the test, and sinned in doing so. Yet God, in His mercy, despite their doubt, places Himself in the position of the one to be struck. The blow that rightly belongs to grumbling and faithless people falls instead upon the rock where the Lord stands, and from there, water flows abundantly in mercy and grace for the people to drink. This is a God who answers sin not with annihilation, but with life-giving provision.

This wilderness scene is no isolated miracle. The apostle tells us plainly,

“For I do not want you to be unaware, brothers, that our fathers were all under the cloud, and all passed through the sea, and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea, and all ate the same spiritual food, and all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank from the spiritual Rock that followed them, and the Rock was Christ.” (1 Corinthians 10:1-4)

At the cross, the Son of God stands in the place of His murmuring people. The blow of divine justice, which our unbelief has earned, falls upon Him. And just as water flowed from the rock in the wilderness, so from His pierced side flows blood and water, the cleansing and life that sustain His Church. It is God providing for sinners at the cost of His own Son. The striking that should have crushed us becomes the means by which grace pours out upon us.

This is why the water from the rock is **The Best Water**. It is not merely physical relief for a thirsty people; it is a sign of the greater provision to come. In Christ, God does not merely satisfy temporary thirst, but He quenches the deepest thirst of the soul. Here we see how God responds to our testing and to all our sin, not with destruction but with a shower of grace. He responds with grace that flows from a struck Rock, grace that flows from a pierced Savior, grace that is sufficient for thirsty sinners like us.

III. The Water That Still Flows

At Calvary, the Rock was struck once for all. The grace that poured from Christ’s side flows still. It flows wherever the Gospel is preached. It flows in the waters of Holy Baptism, where sinners are washed, not because they have finally gathered enough evidence or mustered enough trust, but because God has attached His promise to water and Word. It flows at this altar, where thirsty souls receive not mere symbols, but the very body and blood of the One who was struck for them. It is now, by the Word, that the benefits of that once-for-all sacrifice of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ are delivered again and again to thirsty sinners.

We do not sustain ourselves spiritually by clever arguments or accumulated proofs. We live by what God gives. We live by promises spoken into our ears, by absolution declared over our heads, by water that marks us as His own, by bread and wine that give the forgiveness won at the cross. The best water is the water God provides and the grace that answers our grumbling with mercy and our doubt with steadfast love.

Today, we give thanks and praise for the one true God who does not abandon His people when they test Him, who does not withdraw when faith falters, and who stands before the rock and bears the blow Himself. And because He has been struck, life flows. Because He has been pierced, forgiveness is certain, and the well will never run dry. The Rock was struck for you. The water flows for you. And as Jesus declared to the woman at the well,

“...whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never be thirsty again. The water that I will give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life.”

Drink deeply of the grace of Christ and thirst no more.

Amen.

Pastor Lucas Abbott