

The March Through the Wilderness (Part 2 – Water from the Rock) (See P. Fairbarin *Typology of Scripture*)

Exod. 17:1-7: **“All the congregation of the people of Israel moved on from the wilderness of Sin by stages, according to the commandment of the LORD, and camped at Rephidim, but there was no water for the people to drink. Therefore the people quarreled with Moses and said, “Give us water to drink.” And Moses said to them, “Why do you quarrel with me? Why do you test the LORD?” 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?” 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. 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?”**

Today we come to another great miracle in the life of God’s people. As Israel continues to complain and grumble about their lack of provision, they find themselves with very little water. In fact, there is not enough water to survive in their current situation. And as we saw last week, there is a great and urgent need. And if God does not act, they will die in the desert. So, God instructs Moses to take his staff and strike a rock. And when he does, abundant water comes flowing from the rock. God provides nourishment for his people, which they cannot do for themselves.

Now, we must not confuse this story with another incident just like it almost 40 years later at the end of their desert exile when Moses strikes another rock and water also comes forth. But in the second incidence Moses does not strike in faith, but in unrighteous anger. And because of this sin, both he and his brother Aaron are not allowed to enter the promised land. But this is not our concern today. I want to focus on the first and see how God’s miraculous provision of water from a rock pictures the Gospel of Christ. I have 3 truths with some applications that will certainly be helpful to us today. But before looking at these truths, I want to show briefly from the NT that the ROCK Moses struck is meant to picture the true ROCK who is Christ. I have 3 examples.

The most obvious is found in John 4 which I mentioned last week. Jesus meets a woman at a well. And what is a well? It is a place where you get water. Throughout history entire villages and even civilizations are built around the availability of water. And Jesus uses this picture of physical water to show that there is a more important water, a “spiritual” water that is needed for eternal life. He says to her: **“Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, but 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”** (vv. 13-14).

Another example is found in the reality of the temple, particularly water flowing from it. I believe the Garden of Eden was the first temple. And, water flowed from Eden as the source of the four great Rivers. Ezekiel’s vision of the temple sees water flowing from the temple (Ezek.

47). And when we come to the NT, Jesus refers to himself as the temple. And when we come to the end of the Book of Revelation we see that water flows down from the river of life that will never cease. And where does this river begin? Rev. 22:1 says it comes from the throne of God and from the Lamb.

Probably the most direct statement about Christ being pictured in the rock is found in 1 Cor. 10:1-4: **“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.”** Though the OT saints did not have the full revelation we have now, still, by faith, they drank from the same source which is Christ.

With these in mind, let's turn now to 3 ways the Gospel of Christ is pictured in the rock that gives water.

1. Christ ministers to his people an abundance of spiritual refreshment in this life. When Moses struck the rock, abundant water flowed to provide for the people. They drank. Their flocks drank. All of them found refreshment in the desert. Brothers and sisters, until the Lord returns we are in the desert. Life is short and full of troubles. Yes, our position is in Christ, who now sits in the heavenly places. There is therefore now no condemnation (Rom. 8:1). Now, we have peace with God. Now, by faith the righteousness of Christ is ours. Hebrews points out that in Christ, we have come to **“Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem”** (Heb. 12:22). This has already happened if you are a Christian.

But, we still wait for our faith to be made sight. And we are still in a war. This world is still evil. We still have to deal with all the sin around us. Others sin against us. We still battle with our own sin and our own temptations. Satan is still working in this world. Though ultimately defeated, he is still pictured as a roaring lion seeking his prey (1 Pet. 5:8). And we can still say “heaven awaits us.” We can still say in a manner of speaking that we are on the “road to heaven.” It is interesting that the first Christians were often described as following the “way.” We are certainly on the “way” to a better setting, a better place, as we await the final coming of Christ and the consummation of all things.

But, in the meantime, there is a rock that gives water. His name is Jesus Christ! As God gave substance and refreshment from the rock at Horeb, so Christ gives his people an abundance of spiritual refreshment in this life. I think of a good glass of water after hours working outside in the heat. How refreshing it is! How nourishing it is for your body! Even the taste is good! Such is Christ to the Cristian!

This is one of the things that distinguishes God's people in the church from the people of this world. Listen to the words of Paul to the Corinthians. He says, **“Therefore, having this ministry by the mercy of God, we do not lose heart.”** Brothers and sisters, if Christ cannot fail, neither can you. By faith, flowing through every part of your being, Christ is producing an abundance of LIFE, overflowing to eternal life. Speaking of the Gospel of Christ, Paul continues to say: **“But we have this treasure in jars of clay, to show that the surpassing power belongs to God and**

not to us. We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed . . . For we who live are always being given over to death for Jesus' sake, so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh . . . knowing that he who raised Jesus the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus and bring us with you into his presence . . . So we do not lose heart. Though our outer self is washing away, our inner self is being renewed day by day. For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen . . . So we are always of good courage . . ." (1 Cor. 4:7-5:10).

Application: Speak to those who are not Christians and reiterate to Christians if you are in Christ, you have already drunk from the rock that is Christ! Christ does not just give us salvation, but EVERYTHING we need for life and godliness.

2. Christ will overcome all hindrances to refresh his people. When Moses and the people were camped in the desert, it is apparent this was a bad place for water. In fact, in their current state it was impossible for them to find enough water to sustain such a large group of people. Yet, God give water from the most impossible place. He overcomes all obstacles. And God has always done this with his people. Let me give some examples.

Jerusalem not being destroyed by the Assyrian army (Is 37). Gideon's army (Judg. 7-8). The disciples in the storm (Mark 4). The Sherrill family staying in Russia after the first week. I am sure you have your own stories.

I think of some beautiful words from Isaiah who prophesies of Israel's defeat and exile in Babylon. But at the same time, he says that God will bring them back to the land. And though this seems impossible, God will do it! Listen to the words of Is. 35:1-8: **"The wilderness and the dry land shall be glad; the desert shall rejoice and blossom like the crocus; it shall blossom abundantly and rejoice with joy and singing."** **"Strengthen the weak hands, and make firm the feeble knees. Say to those who have an anxious heart, "Be strong; fear not! Behold, your God will come with vengeance, with the recompense of God. He will come and save you."** **Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf unstopped; then shall the lame man leap like a deer, and the tongue of the mute sing for joy. For waters break forth in the wilderness, and streams in the desert; the burning sand shall become a pool, and the thirsty ground springs of water; in the haunt of jackals, where they lie down, the grass shall become reeds and rushes. And a highway shall be there, and it shall be called the Way of Holiness."**

These words came true with Israel. But, they are looking forward to a greater deliverance from the impossible. They look forward to Eternal Life in the Messiah. Do you remember the words spoken about John the Baptist and the coming of the Lord Jesus? Is. 40:1-3: **"A voice cries: "In the wilderness prepare the way of the LORD; make straight in the desert a highway for our God. Every valley shall be lifted up, and every mountain and hill be made low; the uneven ground shall become level, and the rough places a plain. And the glory of the LORD shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together, for the mouth of the LORD has spoken."**

P. Fairbairn says: *“If his people but thirst, nothing can prevent them from being partakers of the blessing.”* Brothers and sisters, God will make rivers in the desert. A dead rock will become a flowing stream. This is what God does for his people who are in Christ! Fairbairn also says, *“How often have the darkest providences—events that seemed beforehand pregnant only with evil—become, through the gracious presence of the Mediator, the source of deepest joy and consolation.”*

Application: The Providence of God may lead you to an “impossible” place in your life. We must remember that God was the One who led Israel to the desert with no water. In the same way, you may be in a place that seems impossible to recover from. But, know this! If you are in Christ, God may lead you to similar places. He does this so that He can provide everything you need in Christ. And sometimes, this means “deliverance” from your current situation. But, at other times things may get worse. But, as we’ve seen from Paul’s circumstances in 2 Cor. 4-5, He will provide everything you need for life and godliness. Sometimes God will let his people die (there have been many martyrs for the faith). And yes, He may leave you in a worse physical state than before. But, concerning temptation to sin during these times, 1 Cor. 10:13 says, **“No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it.”** But, most important is that Christ is with you. He will not fail you, even if God doesn’t answer as you desire. And He will provide for your greatest needs.

Application: Do not grumble and complain at the sometimes dark and difficult providences of God in your life. Ex: He’s got your back. He will do whatever it takes to save you and take you to heaven.

Application: Do not forget the provision of God in the past when you come to difficult times. This is exactly what Israel does. Over and over they complain. They forget God’s promise (God’s covenant) to take them to Canaan and to give them his blessings.

Application: Give thanks! Praise His name in all circumstances. Ps. 68:4 says: **“Sing to God, sing praises to his name; lift up a song to him who rides through the deserts; his name is the LORD; exult before him!”** It is not about us! We are clay in his hands!

3. Christ is always with us. In 1 Cor. 10:4 Paul says the rock “followed them.” This is very interesting. We know that the physical rock that Moses struck did not follow them. I believe this is merely a picture saying that through all their desert wanderings, God followed them with provisions. He blessed them with what they needed. And whether it is OT saints looking forward by faith, or NT, New Covenant Christians looking back, God is always with his people through the provisions of his Son, ALWAYS! I think of the words from Matt. 28:18-20 Jesus says that as we go about in this world making disciples, **“I will be with you always, to the end of the age.”**

If you are Christian, there is NEVER a time that Jesus is not with you. Through the good and the bad, He is with you the same. Fairbairn says, *“The refreshments of His grace are confined to no region, and last through all ages.”* Let me ask, if Christ now sits at the right hand of the Father, how can He be with us? In John 16 Jesus tells his disciples (and us) that He is going away. But, it

is better that He goes away? Why? Because He will send the Helper. And who is the helper? He is the Holy Spirit. In 16:13-14 Jesus says, **“When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth, for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you things that are to come. He will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you.”** Today, the “water” of Christ flows down to us by the power of the Holy Spirit. By the Spirit we have life. By the Spirit we have refreshment. By the Spirit we have help. By the Spirit we know what is true. On and on I could go. Let me end with a few more applications.

Application: We cannot separate Christ from his provision. It is the same as worshiping the gifts over the giver. When we get Christ, we get ALL of Him and ALL of his benefits.

Application: We must live by faith, even when we don’t understand. Fairbairn says, *“So little had they yet learned from the past manifestations of divine power and faithfulness, and so much had sight the ascendancy over faith in their character, that they even spoke as if certain destruction were before them, and caused Moses to tremble for his life.”*

Application: The Result of Christ’s refreshment is life. What kind of life? A life that is very different from the world. A life of godliness. A life of peace with God. A life filled with great power. A life that always holds onto Christ. Rom. 8:9-11 says: **“You, however, are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if in fact the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him. But if Christ is in you, although the body is dead because of sin, the Spirit is life because of righteousness. If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit who dwells in you.”**

Application: The best thing a pastor can do is to lead his people to Christ! The best thing you can do to your neighbor is to lead them to Christ! The best thing you can do to your friend is to lead him/her to Christ! The best counseling sessions you can give is to show how the gospel is applied in Christ! We must give Christ to the world!

Let me end this morning with Ps. 61:1-2, one of my favorite verses. **“Hear my cry, O God, listen to my prayer; from the end of the earth I call to you when my heart is faint. Lead me to the rock that is higher than I . . .”** May this be our prayer this week and every week of our lives!