

Sermon Transcript for February 13, 2022

Grace, mercy and peace be to you from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

So we have these unique themes going on. We have Matthew, which is this great parable of Jesus. Then we also have, in our old Testament, this the dramatic event of the people grumbling and Moses striking the rock. At first, I had a real hard time trying to figure out how these two passages were related. If you look at the Exodus passage, and you look at the First Corinthians passage, it's very clear how they're related, talking about spiritual drink and drinking from the rock, and the rock that is our salvation. You even hear that rock of salvation in the introit, in the middle there, "The Lord is my rock and my fortress and my deliverer." So you've got this theme of the rock of Christ, the rock being Christ, and that comes from this very passage in Exodus where Moses strikes the rock and water, living water in essence, comes forth.

Did the Israelites deserve this act of mercy upon them to give them water? No, absolutely not. What were the Israelites doing at this time? They were doing their favorite pastime, grumbling and complaining against God. That seems to be what the Israelites did most often. When we talk about the heroes of the Old Testament, we don't really read the Old Testament very clearly if we're reading it as the heroes, because most of the people in the Old Testament got it wrong, grumbled, complained and were against God half the time, and God worked in spite of them, rather than because they were such great and marvelous people.

Same thing with Moses. I mean, even when Moses was called, do you know that Moses rejected the call from God the first several times? He's like, "No, God, you chose the wrong person. I can't do it. I'm too old. I don't want to go there." And God said, "No, you're going." "But, but, but, but I stutter. I can't speak. I can't go." "Well, I'm going to send your brother Aaron in front of you." "But how is Pharaoh going to listen? He's going to look at me, and I'm just this shepherd," excuse after excuse after excuse. Finally, God covers all of the excuses and has enough patience with Moses to say, "Look, you're going." Moses finally submits, but he doesn't want to.

The Israelites don't seem to, kind of fall into the Exodus. I mean, did you know that a lot of them were actually worshipping the Gods of Egypt at the time of the Exodus? They weren't really being faithful to the Lord. They only cried out to the Lord out of desperation, because they remembered the history that their God was a God of grace and mercy, even though they had disobeyed Him and followed after other gods and forgotten about Him. When things got rough, what did they do? They cried out to the Lord.

Now they're in the wilderness. They saw the great miracles of the ten plagues. They saw the great miracle of the parting of the seas. They had, the miracle of the daily bread, the manna that came to them. Yet even now, even after all of those great miracles, all of the things that God had done for them, they suddenly get to a place where they don't quite have enough water, and they begin to thirst. Rather than saying, "Well, God has been pretty faithful, and He's done pretty miraculous and marvelous things throughout our history with Him, and He has continued to give us exactly what we needed when we needed it." Instead of thinking, "Okay, well let's just pray to the Lord and trust him," they grumble and complain, and they argue against Moses.

They basically, instead of trusting God, they argue with his messenger and say what? "Did you bring us out here to die? We should have stayed in Egypt," where they were slaves, but they had good food. So, as long as your stomachs are happy and filled, everything's okay, regardless of any other circumstance, regardless as if you're abandoned and you're slaves and whatnot. But if you feel good, if your stomach is full, then everything's okay and you can do whatever you want, think whatever you want, and you don't have to worship God. But here they're out in the wilderness, they still don't worship God, and they complain against Moses.

Now Moses is getting a little testy. He prays to God. He says, "What am I supposed to do with these people?" Notice he doesn't say my people, he doesn't say your people, he says these people. It's like he wants to abandon them just outright, because they don't deserve the grace of God. They don't deserve the mercy that God has given to them. Moses is right, they do don't deserve it. Of course, neither does he either and neither do we. If we're honest with ourselves, we have to admit that one of our favorite pastimes is grumbling and complaining as well. We often think that God not doing what he ought to be doing for us, or we think he's being too generous to the rest of other people and not to us. I mean, why is it that everybody else gets to succeed and do well, and we are still struggling? It's not right. It shouldn't be that way.

So then we get to the parable of Jesus. The Kingdom of Heaven is like - and again, this is true for every single parable except maybe two - the Kingdom of God is like a person, in this case the master who owns a vineyard. So what we're learning about, what we're to listen for in the parable, is we're to hear the nature of God that is surprising. When we hear about the Kingdom of God is like a man, or is like the owner of a vineyard, what we learn in the parables, what Jesus constantly is trying to illustrate to us in the parables, is the unique nature of God. The character of God that surprises us, that doesn't sound right to our human ears.

In this case, we have a master of a household, who owns a vineyard, who hires people at the very beginning of the day, and then at the third hour, the sixth hour, the ninth hour and the 11th hour. Then, with no reasonable logic or business sense whatsoever, he pays the people who have worked one single hour. I mean, they've barely taken off their cloaks and gotten into the field before it's time to quit. They haven't broken a sweat even, and he pays them first. Not only does he pay them first, he pays them the full day's wages. Now, by the time the guys that started the day working came around, they expected a lot more. When they got a denarius, which the master had promised them, they grumbled and complained. See, even when they got what they had been promised, they wanted more, because other people got the same thing they got.

How often, maybe we don't look at other people and say, "Well, they shouldn't receive the grace of God like me," but how often do we think, "Well, I've been faithful in church all these 20, 30, 50, 70, 80 years of my life. I've gone every Sunday, and even most Wednesdays during Advent and Lent. I've been there faithful, I've given my money to the church, I deserve the grace of God. I deserve the blessings that he promises." That's where we need to be careful. When we begin to think that we have earned this, or we begin to think that we deserve this. At the end of the parable, when the last people are complaining, the owner says, "Am I not allowed to do what I choose with what belongs to me?" Then the ESV says, "Or do you begrudge my generosity?" But I like what the King James Version translates, and which is more literal to the Greek, "Is your eye evil because I'm good?"

Is your eye evil? There's that jealousy, that desire to look for what I deserve, I deserve better than this, rather than recognizing everything that we have is a gift from God. Moses even thought the people did not deserve the grace of God, and yet God was still gracious to Moses and to the people. None of us deserve what God has given to us. Yes, we are called to strive, to run the race that God has set before us. We ought to be self-controlled in all things, focused upon God and the gospel, so that our entire lives and everything that we do, think and feel is focused upon the word of God, to self-control our lives, to control our thoughts and our actions so that they all conform to the word of God. Yet, you and I both know we can't do that, and we don't do that.

We still strive, but we don't strive because we think, "Well, if I strive hard enough, God's going to give me what I deserve." We strive because we know that God is gracious, and that he has already given us the prize of the forgiveness of sins. We strive to live a holy life not because we are earning it, but because we have already received it, and we want to be worthy of that which we have received by grace. We want to be worthy of the grace of God, so we act with joy and thanksgiving in our race. We focus, and we control our thoughts and our minds as best we can, because we know that this is pleasing to God, and we know this is the way that we can thank God for his grace, in spite of our grumbling and our complaining.

See, the Old Testament folks were baptized through Moses in the cloud, and ate the same spiritual food and drank the same spiritual drink as us, for they drank from the spiritual rock that followed them, and the rock was Christ. It has been Christ all the way through. It has been God that has sustained. He sustained the people of Israel, He sustained the New Testament people, and He sustains us. We all stand on this rock, this sure and firm foundation. As Peter said, "You are the Christ, the son of the living God." What does that mean? The Christ, the anointed one, the chosen one who saves, who shows grace and mercy and love to us, hold fast to His promise, hold fast to His love.

We are entering the Lenten season, where we are focused upon the death of Jesus Christ, and the reason for that death, our sin and our rebellion, and yet we begin this season with a clear statement of the grace and mercy of God. So while we dwell, and while we take this Lenten season to reflect upon our need of salvation, let us always remember we began by recognizing that God already knows we do not deserve it, and yet in His grace, gives it to us as a free gift, undeserved and with all the love that He has.

You are loved by God. He will never leave you, nor forsake you. Even when things seem bleak and you're out of water, and there's nothing left to drink, trust Him, for the rock will give you spiritual drink and nourishment to sustain you, in this life and all the way through unto life everlasting. May His grace and mercy and peace be and abide with you always, now and forevermore unto life everlasting. Amen.