

"Our Wilderness Journey"

OT: Exodus 17:1-7

## Read Exodus 17:1-7

I believe we all have things we desire in life. Children chase after an extra cookie or longer time at recess. Adults desire certain relationships or positions at work. We all tend to place a higher priority on pursuing those things that we believe will satisfy a longing in our hearts. We were created to hunger and strive with the hope of satisfaction. The question is "What will satisfy?"

What brings you satisfaction? We could also ask, what brings us fulfillment?

I want to give you a few seconds to think about that. Do not just stop at the first thing that comes to your mind, like having the laundry done or an afternoon of quiet to put your feet up and nap or a nice big brownie sundae. All those are great but push your thoughts a little further. What would really satisfy you today? To dig deeper, ask yourself what is something that could lift you up so much that you could ride the wave of emotion or thought or belief for a long time and maybe even your lifetime. Do you have at least one thing in mind?

Now I want to ask you whether anyone else in your life would know what you desire or long for so much? Does your spouse know? Do your kids know? Does a friend know?... How about God? Does God know?

I did a word study of the term "satisfy" and "satisfaction." In the OT, the word for satisfy or the equivalent appears approx. 97 times meaning to be satisfied, have enough, or be filled- with food, with drink, with nourishment, with breath, with life, with years. To be satisfied is also used spiritually about the psalmist's prayer to God "satisfy us with your unfailing love." (Psalm 90:14) In the NT, the word for satisfy is used to illustrate a satisfaction of one's physical hunger or appetite but is often interpreted as a metaphor for the satisfying of one's spiritual appetite. In the beginning of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount, within the section of Beatitudes, Jesus says "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be satisfied."

In all cases of scripture, the term "to satisfy" and "satisfaction" is only possible in God. God is the only one who can ultimately satisfy spiritual appetites. Both Augustine and CS Lewis articulate this. Augustine wrote, "You have made us for yourself, and our hearts are restless until they rest in you." Of course, the you is God and the our is us. God has made us for God's self, and our hearts are restless until they rest in God. Similarly, CS Lewis in *Mere Christianity*, wrote, "If I find in myself a desire which no experience in this world can satisfy, the most probable explanation is that I was made for another world." As Christians, we are not made to

find full satisfaction in anything of this world, like food, drink, sex, work, reputation, or achievement. I think things of this world can feed us, both positively and negatively, but things of this world will not bring us full satisfaction. We will always want more of worldly things, no matter how much we have already. Our full satisfaction, and only real fulfillment in life, is discovered in the hope we have in God and live toward through faith.

Last week we unpacked more of our belief that “where God guides, God provides.” The manna from heaven story just a chapter earlier in Exodus illustrated this well. Yet, here we are again, just a short time later and the Israelites are still unsatisfied. Perhaps they believe, because of their circumstances, that they could do better than God at providing? Their dissatisfaction leads to more complaining and forces Moses, their spokesman, to go back to God with open arms: “What shall I do with this people? They are almost ready to stone me.” Their dissatisfaction has gotten desperate it seems. They will now kill for water. They will now do whatever it takes to get a fix.

What God does in response is nothing short of divine. God tells Moses to take a group of elders (they must have been Presbyterian 😊) and go to the rock at Horeb. And there, God made water pour out from a rock.

One of the things I believe this text in Exodus calls out to us with is the assurance that God is available to us always. We are often blind or oblivious or distracted or diverted or even crying and complaining, but that does not mean God is not there. For the Israelites, the living water they longed for and desired, was in the rocks they stood on. It was right under their feet. The key is that it was only accessible in God. As they reached out, their longings and desires were met.

Where the Amazon River meets the ocean, there is 200 miles of fresh water available on the surface. The surge from the river is so powerful that it pushes the salt water to the bottom and rushes overtop. Several hundred years ago, before technology, ships would use flags to communicate to other ships and other people on shore. One ship had been lost at sea for days without direction. They ran out of food and had now been without water to drink for several days. They were on the verge of death when they spotted another ship. Frantically, the ship who had been lost began sending a message that they needed water. Help! We need water or we are going to die. They repeated their message. Then the other ship replied with a message, “let down your buckets.” The crew of the ship lost at sea thought the message had been misinterpreted and so they sent another message. The message sent in return was the same “let down your buckets.” Confused and frustrated, the ship frantically lost and dying of thirst carried on past. At a point of desperation, the crew of that ship thought what the heck, so they lowered a bucket into the water and found that the water was cool and clean and

refreshing, void of the heavy salt they anticipated. The water they needed and were asking for was right underneath them this whole time.

Let us go back now to what it is we are really longing for today? What is it that we desire today? What are we desperate for today? Joy. Love. Companionship. Peace. Hope. Strength. Courage. Purpose. What will it take for you to experience that satisfaction? Who can help provide for you and help you be satisfied? “Let down your bucket,” because the living water, God, is right there.

I want to shift for a moment to a more recent text in scripture, a story we have likely heard before. In John 4, Jesus is traveling with his disciples and others, and somehow, because it was not the easy road traveled, found himself at a well in Samaria. And there at that well, Jesus encounters a woman drawing water from the well.

**A Samaritan woman came to draw water, and Jesus said to her, “Give me a drink.”<sup>8</sup> (His disciples had gone to the city to buy food.)<sup>9</sup> The Samaritan woman said to him, “How is it that you, a Jew, ask a drink of me, a woman of Samaria?” (Jews do not share things in common with Samaritans.)<sup>10</sup> Jesus answered her, “If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you, ‘Give me a drink,’ you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water.”<sup>11</sup> The woman said to him, “Sir, you have no bucket, and the well is deep. Where do you get that living water?<sup>12</sup> Are you greater than our ancestor Jacob, who gave us the well, and with his sons and his flocks drank from it?”<sup>13</sup> Jesus said to her, “Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again,<sup>14</sup> but those who drink of the water that I will give them will never be thirsty. The water that I will give will become in them a spring of water gushing up to eternal life.”<sup>15</sup> The woman said to him, “Sir, give me this water, so that I may never be thirsty or have to keep coming here to draw water.” (John 4:7-15)**

It is very easy for us, is it not, to forget that God is available and able to satisfy our every need? We fall victim, all too easily, to temporary satisfactions. We tend to seek satisfaction in all the wrong places. And all for what?

Although she may not have realized it at the time, simply living the life she was born into and the culture she was raised in, the Samaritan woman was needy for a solution to her sin. But, as Jesus declared, the Samaritan woman at the well was living a life seeking satisfaction in all the wrong places. The specific example given is that she had several husbands. What Jesus did at that well, in seeing her and talking with her, highlighted her need for a permanent solution to her deepest thirst, telling her that she should be begging him for a drink of the water he was able to offer— “living water.”

The good news for us today, is that God works toward our reconciliation. Whatever path we have been on and whatever temporary satisfactions we have been desiring and seeking to fulfill on our own, God's mercy meets us and offers a way out of those bottomless and soul-sucking pits. In *The Grace of Giving*, Stephen F. Olford illustrates this through an encounter between a Baptist minister named Peter Miller and his friend, George Washington.

Olford writes: In the days of the American Revolution there lived at Ephrata, Pennsylvania, a Baptist pastor by the name of Peter Miller, who enjoyed the friendship of General George Washington. Also residing in that town was Michael Wittman, an evil-minded sort who did all in his power to abuse and oppose the pastor.

One day Michael Wittman was arrested for treason and sentenced to death. Pastor Miller, traveling many miles on foot, walked to Philadelphia to plead for Wittman's life. When admitted into Washington's presence Pastor Miller at once begged for the life of the traitor.

"No, Peter," said Washington, "I cannot grant you the life of your friend."

"My friend!" exclaimed the preacher. "He is the bitterest enemy I have."

"What?" cried Washington, "you have walked all these miles to save the life of an enemy? That puts the matter in a different light. I will grant the pardon."

And he did. Peter Miller took Michael Wittman from the very shadow of death and returned him—no longer an enemy, but a friend—to Ephrata.

Miller's intervention on behalf of Wittman is just a shadow—and an outworking—of God's reconciling love for us. God made a way for us to receive the "living water" we so desperately need—the gift of the Holy Spirit, who grants eternal life to those in whom He dwells. God made this way possible for us through Jesus' death on the cross. Why? Love.

Out of pure and unconditional love for you and me, God provides, and God satisfies, so that you and I can put one foot in front of the other, one at a time, and forge ahead faithfully and hopefully in our wilderness journeys of life.

When in doubt? Go, stand on God, our rock and refuge. When you are thirsty? Go, let down your bucket and be satisfied by the living water.

When we do, there is no telling what God will help make happen in us and through us to help build God's kingdom here on earth further. Let all God's people say... Amen.

Prayer adaptation using lyrics from "One Day" by Cochren and Company.

God, in this moment we turn to you and pray. As we pray, we lift our thoughts and emotions to you. As we pray, we offer you our minds, hearts, souls, and abilities. As we pray, we offer you us: all we are and all we have to give back to you. Why? Because in you is where we find our true satisfaction. Because it is only in you that we can find ultimate fulfillment in life. We long for so much. We desire so much. Good things like family and love and joy and purpose and belonging and worth and health and wellbeing. But also bad things like revenge, pleasure in the wrong places, temporary escape with the help of drugs or alcohol, the need to be right all the time. In faith of all you are and all you have the strength and power to do, we pray in and toward hope. Hope that:

One day there'll be no more waiting left for our souls  
One day there'll be no more children longing for home  
One day when the kingdom comes right here where we stand  
We will see the promised land.

One day there'll be no more lives taken too soon  
One day there'll be no more need for a hospital room  
One day every tear that falls will be wiped by Your hand  
We will see the promised land.

One day there'll be no more anger left in our eyes  
One day the color of our skin won't cause a divide  
One day we'll be family standing hand in hand  
We will see the promised land.

One day every knee will bow, every tongue will confess  
One day when our tired and weary bones find their rest  
One day when the power of evil is brought to an end  
We will see the promised land.

We hope God that there will be healing  
From this heartbreak we've been feeling  
May we sing in the darkest night 'cause we know that the light will come  
And there will be healing. May we believe and live into the hope that there will be healing.