

## Exodus 17:1-7

I wonder what ever happened to Moses' staff. It would fetch a high price at auction today. With it he struck the Nile River and the water turned to blood. And with it he struck the rock at Rephidim and water came out for the people to drink. If a billionaire bought that staff, he could donate it to the Red Cross and they would never again have a shortage of blood. Or a greedy businessman might buy it and corner the market on bottled water. Yet we know, of course, that it was not the staff itself, but God's Word and command behind the staff which did those amazing things.

Rephidim was not a place where you would travel with your family for a camping vacation. Not only was there no water, the hot sun and dry climate, combined with no natural water source, would be a recipe for disaster. But this is where God led His people. And it didn't take long before they quarreled and grumbled. Thirst can do that. So can hunger. In fact, pretty much anything, if it's a need not being satisfied, can drive God's people to quarreling and grumbling. Unless it's our spiritual needs. Take away the Word of God for a few weeks and little or nothing is said. But take away the paycheck and sparks will fly.

That's how it went at Rephidim. They came to this place where there was no water, and they were ready to stone Moses to death. And yet, Moses was the mouth of God. Through him God spoke the words of life to His people. But who cares about God's Word when there is no water to drink! The people were angry. They demanded water.

Now let's not be too rough on them. Isn't it true that God wants us to come to Him for all our needs? Jesus teaches us to pray, "*Give us this day our daily bread.*" The problem, however, was not that God's people demanded water. It's that they doubted whether God was going to take care of them. "*Is the Lord among us or not?*" they cried. They had the pillar of cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night to lead them. They had Moses as God's spokesman. But all these meant nothing to them. A simple drink of water is the only thing they wanted as proof that God was with them.

My dad's first church was in North Dakota. After leading his first Bible Study with a ladies group, he was surprised when they complained. They grumbled just like the people did at Rephidim. But here's the thing...they were not demanding coffee, or juice, or donuts. They complained that the Bible Study was too short. They wanted a full hour in the Word of God. That's good grumbling, good complaining. It's what God wants to hear. "Give us more time in the Word!" "Give us the Lord's Supper more often!"

Meeting our physical needs is a simple thing for God. It was nothing for Him to bring water out of the rock. And it's nothing for Him to give us food and shelter and every other physical need we have. Even the nonbelievers have all these. If God takes care of them, won't He take care of us who trust in Him? Would Jesus have us pray for daily bread if our Father in heaven was unwilling to give it? If you and I do not trust God to care for our physical needs, then how will we ever trust Him with our eternal soul?

Shame on us for acting like God's people at Rephidim. Shame on us for doubting God, for grumbling and quarreling about such little things as money, and finding work, and our health. The test to determine whether God was among His people at Rephidim or not, was not in giving them water for their lips. It was that He was giving them living water for their eternal souls. Unbelievers who have plenty of water to drink, but do not drink the sweet water of the Gospel of Jesus, do not have God among them...not the God of our salvation. But you who have the words of life in Jesus Christ, you do

have God among you, and He will not fail to take care of all your needs--physical and spiritual. He does not always give us what we want, thank God. But He does give us what we need.

*“Is the Lord among us or not?”* That question, asked at Rephidim, is still asked today, and is answered by the staff of Moses. With that staff, Moses struck the Nile and it turned to blood. And with that staff, he struck the rock at Rephidim and water came out. Blood and water. One staff brought forth both blood and water. Fifteen centuries later a Roman soldier took his staff, and with it he struck Jesus’ side as He hung in death on the cross, and out of His side there came both blood and water--the sign of God’s presence among His people.

Friends, that very blood and water is here with us today. We do have the staff of Moses, because we do have God’s Word and command behind the water of Holy Baptism, and behind the Sacrament of Jesus’ body and blood on the altar. Jesus was struck for you, and so in your baptism you are sprinkled with the water from His side to raise you from death to life, from unbelieving to believing, from not being God’s people to being His people in Christ. Jesus was struck for you, and so in the cup of Communion you are given Jesus’ blood to drink, under the wine, that blood which poured out of His side so that you who come to the altar with all of life’s burdens, along with your sins, leave refreshed, strengthened, and forgiven.

Some Christians determine whether God is among them or not, whether God is for them or not, based upon their health. “If God gets me through this surgery...” or “if God makes my grandma well...then I know that He hears my prayers, and that He loves me, and is with me.” Some use their daily life as the test. “If God gets me a good job...” or “if God allows me to pay my debt...” or “if God keeps my family safe...then I know He is with me, and that He hears my prayers.” But how dare anyone put God to the test like this! It’s what His people did at Rephidim. Why not, instead, have the attitude of Job...*“If God were to slay me, yet I will still trust in Him.”*

God’s presence, His love, His faithfulness have nothing to do with how we think He meets our physical needs. Look, rather, to the staff of Moses--look at God’s promise attached to your baptism; look at God’s promise behind the Lord’s Supper. The staff that struck Jesus’ side is the only proof you need. Your God was willing to be struck for you. Your God suffered thirst for you. Not one of Jesus’ needs was met as He hung on the cross, so that you now have God’s promise to meet every need of yours. The water and blood is the only proof you need. These flowed from Jesus’ side giving evidence that He was dead. Yes, God died. He died for you. How do you know? Because that very water and blood has flowed into your life in your baptism and in the Holy Supper.

My friends, Jesus took your sins. He took your shame. “Shame on Jesus!” we can truly say. No guilt, no shame falls on you. He who was without sin became sin and was shamed for you. Every shameful thing you have ever said or done is completely forgiven. You are forgiven. This is your greatest need, and God meets it head on for you. He is struck for you. He dies for you. Drink, all of you, the sweet water of His forgiveness. It is yours in Jesus. Amen.