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## Exodus 15:22-17:7

### God's Exodus People: A Sanctified People

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Have you ever watched a movie or read a book that begins with the opening line “Once upon a time”? Usually they’re fairy tales, or Disney movies. These stories often end with a very similar line, “and they all lived happily ever after.” The Hungarian equivalent is “They lived happily until they died.” I prefer the Bulgarian equivalent, “...and for three days they ate, drank, and had fun.” If you’re like me, you’re happy the main heroes of the story overcome the villain and are happy, but you wonder, well, what happens next?

In the book of Exodus, when Moses leads the people out of slavery in Egypt, the story could end there. In chapter 15, right after God has delivered them from Egypt, there comes a moment when it could say, “And they lived happily ever after” but instead it says something more like a Persian ending, “This book has come to an end but there is still a story to be told.” As the initial rescue story ends, a refinement story begins.

The story in the first 15 chapters of Exodus can be summed up in one word. **Salvation**. They are all about God *saving* the Israelites from slavery in Egypt under Pharaoh. God *saves* baby Moses, he sends plagues to *save* the Israelites, and he *saves* them from the Egyptian army at the Red Sea. Last week we saw the people sing a song of praise after they crossed the red sea, thanking God for *salvation*. The spiritual lesson is that God wants to *save* them and us from slavery to something far worse than Egypt, sin and death. *Salvation*.

Now starting at Exodus 15:22, we see a new story with a new theme. **Sanctification**. The word “sanctify” means “to consecrate, make holy, set apart.” To sanctify someone is to help them become like God’s character, to be spiritually clean like him. God delivered the Israelites out of Egypt so that he can mold and change them into a new people that look like him. The rest of Exodus, the Ten Commandments, the tabernacle, the priesthood, and the golden calf is all about God making Godly people. God isn’t just interested in initial salvation, he’s interested “the happily ever after”—the life that follows. *Sanctification*.

### The Exodus Route

I brought a map today for two reasons. **First, I want to ground the story of Exodus in reality.** The Exodus happened at a real time, ~1446 B.C. (see 1 King 6:1), and in a real place, from the land of Goshen in Egypt, crossing over the Red Sea, today called the Gulf of Suez (see Exodus 14:22), to the wilderness, and finally up north to the land of Canaan. **Second, I want you to see God cares about longterm change.** God is going to take the Israelites into the wilderness to demonstrate he is interested not just in initial salvation, but in continual sanctification. God is going to refine his people as he leads them into the promised land.

If I put your life-map on the screen, what would it look like? Where would it show you’ve gone and grown? If you’re a **mature Christian**, at some point in your story, God saved you. But that was just the beginning of your story, wasn't it? God has already taken you on a journey of sanctification, many years of molding you to be more Godly and there's still more to go. If you’re a **new Christian**, you’re just at the beginning of this journey. You have years of sanctification ahead of you. Oh boy! And if you’re **not a Christian**, I want you to understand that Christianity isn't about just saying a prayer, it's giving your whole life to God so that he can

mold and change you through the years. Like the Israelites, God promises to lead us into his promised land one day too, eternity with Jesus.

Today, we're picking up right after the crossing of the Red Sea. It's here that God begins to clearly sanctify his people, to set them apart and make them holy, and it's here that we learn how God sanctifies us.

## **God sanctifies us by testing us. (Exodus 15:22-27)**

After the Israelites leave the Red Sea, they enter the desert. They travel for three days, but don't find any water until they come to the springs of Marah. You can imagine the scene; two million people with parched throats rushing these springs, only to hear a cry that the water is... bitter! Marah! Marah! Verse 25 says "There the Lord... put them to the test." See, God wants to reveal their heart-attitude. He just delivered them from the Egyptians three days prior, but do they really believe in him? We find two ways to respond:

### **Response A: Grumbling (v. 22-24)**

The word for grumble means **"to murmur or rebel."** The picture we get is of pockets of people huddling together to whisper or loudly complain about Moses and his leadership. When you ask your children to do a chore, like take out the trash or pick up their room, and they moan and say, "Why don't you do it?" that's an example of a happy heart, isn't it? No. That's grumbling, murmuring, rebellion.

The word Marah means **"bitter."** Maybe some of you know the story of the woman **Naomi** from the book of Ruth. Several hundred years after the Exodus, a famine hits the land of Israel (the promised land) and a woman named Naomi and her husband go to live in a foreign country. Her husband dies, but she manages to get her two sons married, but then both of them die. When she finally returns home to Israel, she renames herself Mara. Now she's a bitter, unhappy person (Ruth 1:20). God took her sons and she'll probably live in poverty till she dies. That's exactly how the Israelites feel. Marah describes the taste of the water, but it also describes their hearts. The bitterness in the water reveals the **bitterness in their hearts.**

God tests us with trouble to help us grow. But what's our usual response? We say, "God, I can't do this. I can't handle this." I just watched a **TED talk** on [growth mindsets](#). The speaker shared what happens when a child encounters a test problem they don't know how to solve. The ones who say, "I can't do it. I don't know how" test poorly. But those children who learn to view the problem as an opportunity to grow do really well. The difference is the word "yet... I can't do this yet." God gives us life-tests to mold and shape us to say, "God, I can't do this... yet. God, you're molding and shaping me into the kind of person you want me to be. I trust you." Let's respond differently, respond in joy. God knows what he's doing.

### **Response B: Trust (v. 25-27)**

How is Moses' response different? When the people complain, it doesn't say **Moses** politely approached God. It says he "cried out" to God. Moses shouts in desperation, "Do something God! Do something!" When I was home for Christmas, my little nephew was trying to sleep upstairs. There's a baby monitor in his room, so you can hear him speak. When he got scared, he said out loud, "Dad, can you hear me?" That's what Moses is doing, "God, do you hear us?" Both Moses and the people are scared and stressed, and even angry. But the difference is what they do with their emotions. The Israelites turn their back on God but Moses turns to God. *The difference between grumbling and trust is who you talk to.*

We don't need to trust when the going is easy. Right after this God takes the Israelites to an **oasis**. We don't learn to trust God when life is an oasis. We learn to trust him when life is difficult. But instead of showing

God gratitude for the times he leads us into the wilderness, we say, “God, the glass is half empty. God, you don’t have my best at heart.” The solution to a desert heart, a bitter heart, is to encounter the God who is himself an oasis. We believe in a God who can bring refreshment in the middle of the wilderness. At the end of verse 26, God says, “I am the Lord, who heals you.” I am “Yahweh Rophe.” No matter how bad our circumstances are or how bitter our hearts get, God can heal and renew us. Sometime this week, take time to go to the oasis. Read your Bible, pray, receive the one who heals hearts. *God sanctifies us by testing us.*

## **God sanctifies us by providing for us. (Exodus 16:1-36)**

In chapter sixteen, the testing grows, but so does the grumbling. God takes the Israelites into another desert, and this time they complain about the food (v. 1-3). They say, “It was better in Egypt where there was beef stew, alligator BBQ, pita-pancakes.” They were dying as slaves in Egypt and they think food is better than what God has done for them. Despite their grumbling, God shows them he is good and will provide for their needs. As we come to see firsthand God is trustworthy, we’re changed. So how does God provide?

### **Provision 1: God provides for our daily needs (v. 4-21).**

The people complain, and Moses says, “You’re not complaining against me, but God. Here’s what God is going to do. He is going to give you meat tonight and bread in the morning.” And then Moses says why.

**Exodus 16:12** “I have heard the grumbling of the Israelites. Tell them, ‘At twilight you will eat meat, and in the morning you will be filled with bread. Then you will know that I am the Lord your God.’ ” (NIV®)

God will provide bread from heaven so they will know he is God and they can trust him. The next morning the Israelites get up and a dew is covering the ground all around the camp. When that dew melts, it uncovers flakes of bread that look like frost on the desert floor. Not knowing what it is, they turn to each other and say “What is it?” The Hebrew phrase, “What is it” sounds like “manna”, so that’s what they call it—manna.

But there are some rules for this bread. The people are only to pick up enough for each family member (v. 16). They’re not to store any extra for the next day (v. 19). And when the sun comes out, it melts away (v. 21). Of course, these people do exactly as they’re told. Not at all. They ignore Moses, and in the morning they find maggots in their bread. It stinks. It’s bad. Now why would God do this to the Israelites? *God wants his people to depend on him for their daily needs.* If they can’t gather enough for the week, they have to believe that God is going to provide for them **every single day**.

Did you know **Jesus** teaches you and me to express this same kind of trust in God daily? In the **Sermon on the Mount**, Jesus taught us to pray, “Give us today our daily bread.” (Matt 6:11) A little later in that same chapter, Jesus says, “Do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink...” (v. 25). When his original audience would have heard him, they would have remembered the story of God providing for the needs of the Israelites in the wilderness. They would have thought, “We’re supposed to trust God daily like them.”

Maybe some of you have heard of George Mueller. He’s a Christian who founded an orphanage in England in the 1800s, but he’s most famous for the way God answered his prayers. Whenever he needed something, he wouldn’t ask others. Instead, he prayed, and God answered. One example is the day the 300 children in his orphanage were dressed and ready for school, but they didn’t have any food. George told them to sit in the dining room, he prayed thanking God for the food, and they waited. Within a few minutes, a baker knocked and said, “Mr. Mueller, last night I could not sleep. Somehow I knew that you would need bread

this morning. I got up and baked three batches for you.”<sup>1</sup> Shortly after that the milkman knocked on the door. His cart had broken down in front of their orphanage and he wanted to know if they wanted the milk because otherwise it would spoil. He brought in ten cans and the children had enough.

You don't have to run an orphanage for God to answer your prayers. You can pray, “God, I can't pay my co-payment or my medical bill. Will you provide?” Or, “God, we're moving and I don't know where we're going to sleep. Will you provide?” Or, “God, we don't have enough money to buy healthy food. Will you provide?” God cares about our food, our drink, our rent payments, our relationships, all our needs. Most of the time God provides for us using ordinary ways, but he can use miracles too. God wants us to come to him so that as we see him provide, we grow in faith, and ultimately, grow in godliness.

## **Provision 2: God provides for our rest needs (v. 22-30).**

Very briefly I want to point out how God instructs Moses to have the Israelites gather a double portion on the sixth day, and miraculously, it doesn't go bad. That's because here we encounter the first official mention of the Sabbath in the Bible. The Sabbath is a special day every week (Saturday) which God sets aside for the Israelite people to rest and worship him. In Genesis 2, we see God rest on the seventh day, which lays the groundwork for Moses when he codifies it here and in the Ten Commandments at Mount Sinai.

Maybe you're someone who doesn't worry about your daily needs because you know you'll have enough. You work hard and you know you'll get paid. In fact, you work all the time. You never stop. *The amazing power of the Bible is that it comforts the poor that God will provide for them, and it confronts the strong that they need to let God provide for them.* Life will go on if you don't answer emails one day a week, or work around the house, or do laundry, dishes, or take out the trash. Part of growing in Godliness is accepting the Sabbath rest God offers every week. If you're not already doing so, commit one day a week to resting at the Oasis with God. God sanctifies us by providing for our rest needs.

## **Provision 3: God provides for our future needs (v. 31-36).**

I like how the chapter on manna ends. Moses records what manna tastes like—wafers made of honey. God's goodness is sweet. And God tells Moses to store some in a jar for generations to come. I like to think of this as the very first cookie jar... One day the Israelites are going to reach the land of Canaan, the promised land, and when they do the manna will stop falling. In the years that follow this jar will serve as a reminder that God takes care of his own yesterday, today, and tomorrow.

If you're future oriented, you probably spend a lot of time worrying about tomorrow, the next day, or the future in general. God promises to provide what we need for tomorrow, but not till tomorrow. Listen to this quote by Tim Chester in his book, *Exodus For You*; “God doesn't give grace today for tomorrow. Don't worry how you would cope if... Don't play scenarios. You are not given grace for ifs and maybes. You will be given grace for today. You will have the grace for the next day when it comes—and it will not come till tomorrow.” (page 119) You don't need to worry about tomorrow, because God will provide you the emotional strength, or physical strength, what you need, but only tomorrow.

*What's your cookie jar?* What's a reminder of the ways God has provided for you? For me it's my wife, my house, and it's you, this church. As we learn to trust God daily, and for our rest and future, he molds and changes us to be a bit more like him. *God sanctifies us by testing us and by providing for our needs.*

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<sup>1</sup> Story adapted from George Mueller, *Orphanages Built by Prayer*. <http://www.christianity.com/church/church-history/church-history-for-kids/george-mueller-orphanages-built-by-prayer-11634869.html> (accessed 2016.02.16)

## God sanctifies us as we encounter Him. (Exodus 17:1-7)

Halfway through the miracle of manna in chapter 16, verse 10, God's glory shows up in a cloud. The whole encampment sees him. Everybody sees God, but God says, "You'll see my glory again in the morning." But the cloud never returns. Instead, manna appears. I think God wants to encounter us not just in the big miracles, but as he meets our daily needs. This promise also points forward to a future day when God will send another kind of bread to the earth, his glory in the form of his Son.

**John 6:41** At this the Jews there began to grumble about him because [Jesus] said, "I am the bread that came down from heaven." (NIV®)

Exodus and the gospel of John match each other here. In both, people encounter God, and instead of praising him, they grumble. When Jesus calls himself "the bread that came down from heaven", he's saying, "I'm the manna. I'm the glory of God. Trust me. Just like the Israelites needed me in the wilderness to live, you need me too." If you want to think and act more like God, you need to encounter God through Jesus Christ. When God tests us, we don't just trust a general sense of God, we trust the person of Christ Jesus who defeated sin and death at the cross and is himself trustworthy. *God sanctifies us as we encounter him.*

### We all need to encounter God. (v. 1-3)

The Israelites continue their journey, and once more, there's no water. And what do they do? They quarrel and grumble. When they do this, Moses asks, "Why do you put the Lord to the test?" (v. 17) Their grumbling has grown worse; they're receiving manna everyday, this is rebellion. They're testing God. But even after Moses's rebuke, they just keep complaining. And then Moses in v. 4 catches the grumbling bug too, "They are almost ready to stone me" he yells at God. They all need to encounter God in a life-changing way.

Have you ever heard of sibling harmony? "Sibling harmony is a musical term that refers to the tight -- almost inseparable -- vocal harmonies generated by members of the same family."<sup>2</sup> There's something about family members, that when they sing, their voices blend really well. We are the church family. If some of us grumble, we'll eventually all sound like grumblers. But if we as a family fill our speech with thankfulness and praise, pretty soon we'll become known for our gratitude and joy. But the only way this happens is as each one of us experiences God and his grace.

### We all need to encounter God's grace. (v. 4-7)

Notice what happens next. Moses goes out in front of the people, he takes some elders, and God says;

**Exodus 17:6** 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. (ESV)

The people here deserve to die for testing God. They deserve to be struck with Moses's staff, but instead God tells Moses to strike him. God takes the people's punishment on himself. He strikes himself instead of them. Here, the Israelites are encountering the **heart of God**. God's heart doesn't struggle with bitterness, or grumbling. God's heart is overflowing with compassion for his people. If you want your heart to change, you need to encounter the heart of God. God promises to give his heart to all who trust him (Ezek 36:26).

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<sup>2</sup> Sibling Harmony: Family members often have tight vocal harmony by Jerry Johnston. Desert News. Published June 10, 1999. Accessed February 16, 2017. <http://www.deseretnews.com/article/701507/Sibling-harmony.html>

The heart of God is revealed in another way at the rock Moses strikes. That rock in the Old Testament symbolizes Jesus in the New Testament. **1 Corinthians 10:4** says, “[our ancestors] drank the same spiritual drink; they drank from the spiritual rock that accompanied them, and that rock was Christ.”

When Moses struck the rock, he was spiritually striking the Son of God, Jesus Christ. One day Jesus Christ would come and take the physical punishment too. This saves any Israelite who truly believes in God back in 1446 B.C. and anyone who truly believes in Jesus in 2017 today.

I have one final question and thought. Have you encountered God? Have you encountered his heart? **God loves you too much to leave you as you are.** That’s why he tests us, why he provides for our daily needs, and why he steps into our lives. One day we will live “happily ever after” but not just because God will have changed our circumstances. We’ll live “happily ever after” because Jesus will have **changed our hearts**. We won’t grumble or complain anymore. We’ll be the kind of people you want to spend eternity with.