

## Jason Upchurch - Exodus 15:21-17:7 - Complaining and Mercy

Good morning, brothers and sisters. I bring you greetings from Redeemer Bible Church up in Deer Park. It is my pleasure to be with you this morning to open the Word of God.

My assignment this morning is **Exo 15:21-17:7**. And it is a dangerous assignment because we're talking about food and drink. And just the about the worst thing you can preach about on Sunday an hour or two before lunch is food and drink. So I hope you brought a snack to tide you over.

If not, just know that man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from God's mouth.

I know you guys have been studying through Exodus. Well, this morning is something of a transition in the book. The people of Israel have been delivered out of slavery in Egypt. God multiplied wonders against Pharaoh in the 10 plagues as he delivered Israel out of captivity. And if that wasn't enough, God drowned the whole Egyptian army on the way out.

The Exodus is really something that God hangs his hat on for the entire rest of the Bible. The Exodus is one of the most stunning and amazing portions of history because it is so packed with God's power and glory to deliver his people.

And here in **Exo. 15** the people of God are free and safe on the other side of the Sea! I'm sure it's smooth sailing from here, right? They are free and so what could possibly go wrong. Well, if you've read this section you know that it's a rough go from there.

Here's what I want to do this morning. We're going to spend most of our time here in Exodus and then we're going to flip to 2 other passages to help us understand this passage a little better. The Bible actually makes amazing commentary about this passage in 2 other places and I think it's worth our time taking a look.

So here's our basic outline:

- 1) God's Pattern of Mercy
- 2) God's Act of Judgment
- 3) God's Warning to Take Seriously

1) Alright, let's talk about God's Pattern of Mercy.

We're going to get through basically 2 chapters of Exodus so here's a quick overview:

1. Israel complains about water; they grumble to Moses and the Lord.
2. God shows them mercy despite their grumbling.
3. Then Israel complains about food.
4. In response God shows them mercy despite their grumbling.
5. Then Israel complains about water again.
6. I'll give you 3 guesses as to what God does. God shows them mercy despite their grumbling.

That's why I say this is the pattern of God's mercy. Three times the people complain and three times Yahweh responds with mercy. Why? Because that's who he is:

Yahweh, Yahweh, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness. **Exo 34:6**

That's who God is.

Alright, so Israel had just been delivered from the Egyptian army. Remember, they were released, came through the Red Sea - water! God delivered them through water and by water. And now they're on the other side and what are they complaining about? "God you gotta do something because we don't have any water!" **Read 15:21-27**

So this is really amazing, after just finishing the song about how God saved Israel in the most impossible way, they complain to God about the very thing they know he is sovereign over - water. The thanks and praise is over. "God, we've got bigger problems now with water." They begin grumbling against the Lord.

And Yahweh responds in mercy. Rather than rebuke them in fury and anger, he actually solves the problem. Moses is told to take a log, put it into the water and it turns from Marah - meaning bitterness - to sweet water. He blesses them rather than curse them and then he charges them to obey his commands. He is a God worthy to be obeyed.

Now, be honest, can you think of a time where God blessed you in an amazing way - maybe answered some prayer or brought massive blessing in your life - and like two seconds later you're complaining to God?

I've had people tell me they got a huge bonus from work and then in the very next breath complain about the taxes they're going to have to pay.

You prayed for God to bless you with a home and then you're grumbling about closing costs or property taxes or the neighbors or the landlord.

Ten years ago my wife and I prayed for a second child, we wanted more babies. He blessed us and immediately she was crazy sick and in my heart all thankfulness to the Lord was gone and I was grumbling because she was so sick. It was inconvenient. How quickly our hearts complain.

You guys, we are just like Israel in the wilderness. Our thankfulness to God is so short lived.

And yet through it, we serve the same merciful God, don't we? It's funny that humanity doesn't change, but thankfully neither does God. He's the same merciful Savior.

Now, there's a little tidbit here that I think is worth mentioning. **Read 25b**

The tidbit here is that the Lord did this whole thing with the water on purpose to test them. He brought this trial about to show them the state of their heart. Sometimes I'm convinced that God brings trials about in my life and others' lives just to show them the state of their heart in responses to the trial.

The Lord gives, the Lord takes away. Blessed be the Lord in both situations? It should be.

So that's trial one. Trial 2 is food. **Read 16:1-8**

So we have more complaining. Grumbling. Can you imagine? God has miraculously brought Israel out of Egypt with a mighty hand and

outstretched arm. He multiplied wonders and miracles. And they are longing for slave life again. "Oh when pots were filled with meat!"

That'd be like us being kidnapped by North Korea, put in slave encampments, forced to work 16 hours a day. Then Navy Seals come in and rescue us, evacuate us to the chopper, we land on the aircraft carrier headed to safety...and dinner is late. The aircraft carrier food is horrible.

And we're sitting in the mess hall, "Oh, that we would be back in North Korea at the labor camp! Where we had our fill of gruel and beatings." Can you imagine that? The Navy Seals would probably just drag us us to the edge of the carrier and toss us into the ocean.

But God doesn't do that. God actually decides to feed them. And he feeds them lavishly. They get manna from heaven. Six days a week God places this stuff all over the ground so that all they have to do to survive is go outside and pick up their food.

Can you imagine not having to go to Winco or Walmart? Just stepping outside and there's basically pop tarts all over the ground? **Read 12-16**

God graciously feeds them this amazing bread. And they don't have to work for it. They just go outside and pick it up off the ground. Interestingly, Jesus says that manna was a foreshadow of him.

**John 6:35:** I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger and whoever believes in me shall never thirst...[he goes on to say] your father's ate manna in the wilderness, and they died. This is bread [Jesus] that comes down from heaven, so that one may eat of it and not die.

Just like God dropped manna from the heavens to give Israel physical life, Jesus came down from heaven to give us spiritual life. And Jesus says that just like the manna there's no work to have this eternal life. You just believe in him, that he is sent from God and his death and resurrection is the source of eternal life.

The manna - which in Hebrew is something like Man hu - literally means "what is it?" They couldn't figure out what it was. Whatever God was providing was foreign to them. But it was delicious.

And not only to they get manna, they get quail. They get meat!

Interestingly, the Lord gave the quail in a miraculous way as well. I don't know if you've ever gone hunting for quail or watched quail. I grew up watching quail quite a bit. My mom fed all the quail in our rural neighborhood and we had several covey of the fattest quail you've ever seen. But quail are not like chickens where you can just go out and pick them up. They fly high and fast. Israel didn't have shotguns in the wilderness. And I don't think they brought bird traps with them the night of the Exodus.

No, but **Num 11:31-35** records that the Lord did a miracle with the quail. He actually made the quail fly 2 cubits above the ground. They flew 3 feet off the ground so that all Israel had to do was simply reach out and grab them. That'd be the greatest hunting trip ever.

God's mercy is lavish despite the grumbling and complaining.

And did you notice the small note in **Vs. 4?** Why did all of this happen? **Read 4**

This happened that the Lord would test them. Not test them to get them to sin. We know God doesn't tempt anyone to to sin. He does it to examine their hearts. "Do you really trust me? Are you going to obey me?" And of course God knows the answer, but do they know the answer? Do you and I know whether or not we trust God when the test comes?

We talk a lot about God's goodness and sovereignty but it's only in the trial that we find out if we actually believe it. And that's what God is doing here. Testing his people.

Third trial: water again. Now, we're going to read this and I want you to watch for the word testing again. Because this time it's used in a different way and it's super important. **Read 17:1-7**

So water again. They complain and grumble. And what does God show to them? He shows mercy. The passage doesn't explicitly say it, but we are to understand that God gave them the water from the rock. I don't know if you've seen many rocks, but water doesn't usually just start gushing out of them. This is miraculous water enough to supply 2 million people - this is a small river coming from the rock.

But did you notice the word testing? It's in **Vs. 2 and 7**. Who's doing the testing now? The Israelites - they are testing God. That's not a good thing. Jesus says to Satan (of all people): you shall not put the Lord your God to the what? Test. (**Matt 4:7**)

You know what's funny about what Jesus says to Satan? Jesus is quoting from **Deuteronomy 6:16**. This is what it says: You shall not put the Lord your God to the test, as you tested him at Massah.

**Look at Vs. 7**: where are they at? Massah. When Jesus rebukes Satan, he does so with a verse that's talking about this very event where Israel tested God. Israel is acting like Satan. And their hearts are so wicked that the place is called Massah.

If you look at your footnotes, Massah means testing, Meribah means quarreling. Jesus rebukes Satan with a verse rebuking Israel for what we just read.

Massah and Meribah. Can you imagine complaining and quarreling so bad that God names the city it?

Where are you from "Oh live on the south side of complaining. How about you?" "Oh, we're just down the road, I live over in Arguing with God." What a weird city name. But it's testimony to their sin.

And it's such an infamous ordeal that when Jesus quotes that line to Satan; he has this very incident in mind. And yet through it all, God shows that his pattern, his character is one of mercy.

And he is the same merciful God today that he always has been.

Now, **turn** over to **Psalms 95**. The Bible offers some commentary on Israel's failure in the wilderness and I think it's very instructive.

2) God's Act of Judgment. So God is merciful, but he's not a pushover. He will show steadfast love to thousands, but he will by no means clear the guilty. (**Exo 34:6-7**).

I want us to look briefly at this passage because here in **Psalm 95** we actually have a divine commentary on the section we just read in Exodus. God is going to explain to us what his attitude was all those years with Israel. Isn't that interesting?

What we saw was God's pattern of mercy, but here God tells us that there was more than that. **Read 6-11**

That's pretty sobering, isn't it? On the one hand God did show Israel mercy. But it says that God loathed that generation. The NIV says he was angry with that generation. The Hebrew word means to feel disgust. It's a visceral reaction.

Have you ever smelled dead skunk on a hot summer day? That whole body reaction was God's response to Israel for their complaining. He loathed them.

Now, here's the amazing thing: God still showed them mercy even though he loathed them. That's a pretty amazing thing - that is how merciful God is.

But God isn't a push over. Here he promised in his anger that they would never enter his rest. What's the rest? It's the Promised Land. And the Promised Land really looks forward to heaven where we get true rest.

But if you remember your Bible history, that generation that came out of Egypt never entered the Promised Land. All the adults 20 and older who saw God's miracles and wonders and walked on dry ground through the Red Sea all died in the wilderness. Never made it to the Promised Land. Why? Because God loathed them for their complaining.

See, grumbling against God is not a small thing. It's really a type of idolatry because what we're saying is that God's ways are wrong and our ways are better. We're not rejoicing in God's sovereignty, we're complaining about his sovereignty.

**Vs. 8** says this is a hard heart.

**Vs. 9** says this is putting God to the test.

**Vs. 10** says it's going astray and not knowing God's ways.

See, God was doing Israel no wrong in the wilderness. He wasn't withholding some good thing from them. He wasn't depriving them.

He had set them free and was providing for them, and showing them his glory in a way that we can only imagine.

**Turn to Heb 3:7-14**. So in **Psalm 95** we saw a commentary on Exodus. And in Hebrews 3 we see a commentary on Psalm 95. It's a like a daisy chain.

So we've seen:

- 1) God's Pattern of Mercy.
- 2) God's Act of Judgment.

3) God's Warning to Take Seriously. As I was thinking about how to apply Exodus, it occurred to me that God applies it for us in **Hebrews 3**. The author of Hebrews takes **Psalm 95** and the events of the Exodus and tells us how to apply it. And I can think of no better way to apply the passage than let God give us the application. **Read 7-11**

So that's a quote from **Psalm 95**. I hope you see that connection. So here's 3 quick applications. Application 1: Take Care. **Read 12**

Friends, one of the most sobering realities is that there will be many on the Day of Judgment who have heard faithful preaching, who know the gospel information. They could talk at length about the atonement, that Jesus died on the cross in our place for our sins. They could talk about salvation by faith alone in the grace of God alone because of the person and work of Jesus alone.

They could talk about the Trinity and baptism and predestination and spiritual gifts. They could give testimony for the works God has done in their lives and others.

But within them is actually a evil, unbelieving heart that will cause them to fall away from the living God. Not lose their salvation - that's

not possible. But just like the Israelites saw all the amazing works of God and never truly believed, there are people who will hear and know about the glories of Jesus and never actually believe in him.

Take care, GCF, that what you hear week in and week out is actually coupled with true saving faith. And in light of the Israelites, you know how that is often shown? In an attitude not of complaining, but of pure thankfulness.

Application 2: Exhort One Another **Read 13**

God calls us to exhort one another. NIV says encourage one another. We short one another away from sin.

You guys, we're called to get on each other about our sin. One of the problems with Israel was that there was this collective mass of complaining. No one stopped to think "Hey, wait a minute: God has miraculously brought us out of Egypt...what are we complaining for? Be quiet and eat your manna!"

No one actually stopped anyone from doing that. And as a result there was a collective hardness that crept into their hearts. Think about that word hardness in **Vs. 13**. Who's heart was hardened in Egypt? Pharaoh's. Who's heart was hard after the Exodus? Israel's. That's scary.

Exhort one another. How often? Every day. Are you open to being exhorted to flee sin? If your friend or daughter or pastor came up and said, "Hey, you gotta stop complaining like Israel" would you accept that and repent?

And are you brave enough to go exhort your brothers in love? This is what God calls us to do.

Application 3: Hold Your Confidence to the End. **Read 14**

We are called to joyfully hold our confidence in Jesus until the end. It's not enough to make a one time commitment to Jesus. To pray some prayer or have some experience at a retreat once when you were in college or high school.

No, the Bible calls us to hang on to Jesus all the way to the very end of our lives.

Israel saw saw the hail, the darkness, the frogs, fleas, Nile turn to blood. They walked through the Sea. They literally ate miraculous food day after day. They didn't even need faith! They had sight! But they didn't share in Christ because they didn't hold fast to the end.

Brothers and sisters: Hold fast to the end. Do not let go of Jesus.

Because the same Jesus who led Israel out of Egypt is the same Jesus who leads us out of sin and darkness and wrath. And he'll lead us all the way home.

**Hab. 3:17-18:**

Though the fig tree should not blossom,  
nor fruit be on the vines,  
the produce of the olive fail  
and the fields yield no food,  
the flock be cut off from the fold  
and there be no herd in the stalls,  
yet I will rejoice in the LORD;  
I will take joy in the God of my salvation.

**Pray**