

Toowoomba North – 29/3/20

“God Provides” - Ex 16:6-10

✿ At the beginning of this year we were led by the Lord to commence a sermon series from the book of Exodus. How good is our God? In recent weeks we have considered the plagues that came upon Egypt – who could have predicted that a plague, the corona virus would spread around the world? The Hebrew people longed to be set free from captivity, and they complained under the weight of slavery. People all around the world complain because of the captivity that we find ourselves in, due to this plague – so many restrictions. And as the Hebrew people began their journey into the wilderness, they faced the unknown and certain challenges to their own provisions. We too face the unknown – how long will we be in this desert? And how will our needs be met?

And so we come to our reading today. We’re reading from Ex 16; and we’re reading from v.6-10.

✿ **“So Moses and Aaron said to all the Israelites, “In the evening you will know that it was the Lord who brought you out of Egypt, and in the morning you will see the glory of the Lord, because he has heard your grumbling against him. Who are we, that you should grumble against us?”** ✿ **Moses also said, “You will know that it was the Lord when he gives you meat to eat in the evening and all the bread you want in the morning, because he has heard your grumbling against him. Who are we? You are not grumbling against us, but against the Lord.”**

✿ **Then Moses told Aaron, “Say to the entire Israelite community, ‘Come before the Lord, for he has heard your grumbling.’”**

While Aaron was speaking to the whole Israelite community, they looked toward the desert, and there was the glory of the Lord appearing in the cloud.” Let’s recap a little...

✿ The Hebrew people have now been in the desert, wandering around for one month. It’s been four weeks since the Passover and that fateful night when Pharaoh sent them packing. They took off and a few days later found themselves being set upon by the Egyptian army. They were corralled into a dead end – stuck between the Red Sea and the marauding Egyptian army. ✿ The Lord opened up the Red Sea and they crossed over to the other side on dry ground. They were struck with fear as their lives were under threat; imagine the sight of the mighty Egyptian army hot on your heels, and then they watched as the horse and rider were destroyed – drowned in the Sea. They were free!

But now, they were captive to the desert. ✿ Facing the unknown - how long? And how will my needs be met? And so from verse 22 in chapter 15 we see that they travelled three days into the desert and came upon a pool of water – but it was too bitter to drink. Naturally a delegation storm toward Moses and grumble and complain.

And naturally for Moses – where does he turn, but to God. He cries out to the Lord and God instructs him as to how to alter the water so that it is drinkable – sweet, even. ✨ The Lord can make even that which is bitter – sweet. He can transform a life – a heart – from bitterness and anger, through forgiveness, into someone who is pleasant to be around.

And God works in the most unusual of ways. Did anyone else think to throw some wood into the pond? Did Moses know what to do? No! God instructs Moses. And consider Moses himself. At the burning bush Moses declares that he is a man of faltering speech. Now, having crossed the Red Sea, he champions the people into song; he leads them with such eloquence. Cry out to Jesus, and you too may sing your praises of Him.

You see, the waters of your life might seem quite bitter at the moment. You are in social isolation. You have been forced into captivity and you don't like it. You may also sense the bitterness of fear; fear of loss of income; bankruptcy; you might hear of suicides in the coming months; this corona virus and its consequences may be a bitter pill to swallow. But, can I encourage you, that the Lord knows just what is needed to transform this into a sweet experience. Call out and call upon Jesus! He can transform this bitter time into sweet communion with Him.

Well, from there they moved on to a place called Elim – ✨ and what an oasis that must have been – 12 springs of refreshing water, and 70 palm trees to provide shade. No complaints here – this is what desert livings all about! Hanging the hammock between the trees and sipping on coconut juice. “Thank you, Moses. We could handle a bit more of this!” There are passages throughout life that are just sublime. We'd like all of life to be like that, but...

From there they begin to move toward Mt Sinai, which is on the way to the Promised Land. But, continuing on and camping in the middle of nowhere, they once again bring their complaints to Moses. From the superb and sublime, to the depths of despair. ✨ Verse three, **“If only we had died by the Lord's hand in Egypt! There we sat around pots of meat and ate all the food we wanted, but you have brought us out into this desert to starve this entire assembly to death.”**

So, they're not too happy are they? “We'd have preferred to have died in Egypt just as their firstborn did, rather than waste away out here in the desert. At least we had plenty of meat and bread to eat.” Sure, they had their herds with them, but they wouldn't last forever, and in the desert you can't grow a cereal crop to make your bread. So, albeit they're only a month in, they can see the writing on the wall; things aren't going to end well. Moses! Fix it!

Albeit that we're only a short space into our Covid-19 journey, some folk are fearing the worst. And the call, right around Australia seems to be, “Sco-Mo! Fix it!” And I'm sure that he has spent many hours in prayer seeking the Lord as he tries to lead our nation through this most difficult time. ✨ Are we praying for Scott Morrison and the government; for wisdom as they co-ordinate our response? Are we praying for our health professionals that they may stay well, and have insight into effective treatment? Are we praying for our scientists to be led into a vaccine or cure?

And so what does the Lord do? It seems that he can't help Himself; He comes through once again; displaying His grace and mercy; His long suffering. He promises that He will provide both meat and bread. The Hebrew people are whinging and complaining. The Lord has already done so much for them, and yet they still complain. Be aware; sometimes we're just like the Hebrews. God has done so much for us, and yet we're liable to complain. Yet, once again God has been gracious to us, and provided all that we need and beyond. What a gracious God we have! What a merciful God we serve! Forgive us Lord for our complaints against You, and our lack of trust.

But Moses response to the people is most telling. He once again highlights the faithfulness of God, but also raises a question concerning their lack of a personal relationship with Him. They complain for two reasons, Firstly, because they remember the good times of the past. ✿

As time goes by we tend to see the past through rose coloured glasses. "Remember the good old days." Although, only a month has passed, the Hebrew people could remember and began to savour the good old days in Egypt. They thought about the security, the food, the shelter, the clothing that they had had back in Egypt. And they were forgetting the afflictions of slavery and how they cried out in desperation for freedom. Alexander MaClaren wrote, "People don't know how happy they are until they cease to be so." He went on to say that, we tend to focus on our present miseries, whilst at the same time emphasise the blessings of the past. The result? A rising discontent. We're not happy with the present, and we think the past was better than it was.

But secondly, and the main obstacle for the Hebrew people was that they didn't have a personal relationship with God. ✿ Moses was their "go-to." They'd lived in Egypt and had taken on the worship of their Egyptian gods – dead gods. They understood that Moses was the mediator between them and YHWH. They hadn't yet come to know God as their own personal God. This would have been a foreign concept to them indeed.

Hence Moses response in verses 7 and 8, ✿ **"Who are we, that you should grumble against us?" You're not grumbling against us, but against the Lord.**" Moses is pointing the people to God. He's not just trying to deflect their complaints away from himself, but for them to begin to see that they can go directly to God and bring their concerns to Him. Are you taking your concerns to God at the moment, or are you stuck in discontent? Do you tend to remember the past through rose coloured glasses? Forgetting the troubles and dissatisfaction you experienced back then – and forgetting how God carried you through those struggles?

Like the Hebrew people too, during this time of isolation, for some Christians; our separation from one another; our inability to worship together may test our personal faith relationship with God. Some folk depend upon getting together for their spiritual sustenance. Some folk will battle to spend time with God alone – but that's not how it's meant to be. God wants a personal relationship with each one of us that can stand on its own.

When the struggles come, and the mountains loom in front of us, and we wonder how we'll cope; when fear takes hold; when we lose our job, or get cancer and we're facing the

unknown, turn to God first! Then... you might look to your Moses and to one another – because we're not meant to do life on our own; but always seek God first.

The Hebrew people were becoming increasingly discontent. And discontentment perverts our perspective. It's easy to be discontent in a time like this. We're forced into social distancing, and being isolated from one another. And our discontent can pervert our perspective. Fear of the unknown and fear of financial ruin can lead to an increasing restlessness.

But once again the answer is in seeking God first and then... praise Him! You say, praise Him in a time like this? Yes! Can I take you the Philippians 4. ✠ V.6-9, **“Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.**

Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things. Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me—put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you.”

Praising God! Praise is being thankful for the good things. It is to express your approval and gratitude; your admiration and respect. It is as we look for that which is good and right and praiseworthy, that we are filled with peace in the midst of the most troubling circumstances. We therefore need not be anxious about anything, but rather bring our requests to God from an attitude of thanksgiving and faith – that he will work all things together for good – that we may be transformed into the image of His Son.

The last verse of our reading says, that as “they looked toward the desert, there was the glory of the Lord appearing in the cloud.” They understood God to be in that cloud. They were in the desert, but God was with them. Whatever we are facing in life, God is with us; the glory of God is with us; the power of God is with us; the Mighty hand of God is with us; the provision and protection of God is with; the peace of God is with us. Amen? Can you look for that which is good and right and praiseworthy; can you see God with you? Amen!

If you'd like to chat about anything that may have been raised for you in this message, please contact me through our church office.

May the God of peace, bless you, direct you, keep you, and guard your heart, through Christ Jesus. Amen.