



Sermon, Sunday March 12, 2023

“The Waters of Meribah”

SCRIPTURE: Exodus 17:1-7 ¹ From the wilderness of Sin the whole congregation of the Israelites journeyed by stages, as the Lord commanded. They camped at Rephidim, but there was no water for the people to drink. ² The people quarreled with Moses and said, “Give us water to drink.” Moses said to them, “Why do you quarrel with me? Why do you test the LORD?” ³ But the people thirsted there for water, and the people complained against Moses and said, “Why did you bring us out of Egypt, to kill us and our children and livestock with thirst?” ⁴ So Moses cried out to the LORD, “What shall I do for this people? They are almost ready to stone me.” ⁵ The LORD said to Moses, “Go on ahead of the people and take some of the elders of Israel with you; take in your hand the staff with which you struck the Nile and go. ⁶ I will be standing there in front of you on the rock at Horeb. Strike the rock, and water will come out of it, so that the people may drink.” Moses did so, in the sight of the elders of Israel. ⁷ He called the place Massah and Meribah, because the Israelites quarreled and tested the LORD, saying, “Is the LORD among us or not?”

Introduction: Meribah - where the most infidel events took place

Today is the third week of Lent. Today's text, Exodus 17:1-7, is the story of what the Israelites experienced in the wilderness. The people of Israel left the Desert of Sin according to the Lord's command and arrived at a place called Rephidim where they pitched their tents. However, there was no drinking water in Rephidim, so the Israelites quarreled with Moses.

Let's look at verses 2 and 3 of today's text. **“The people quarreled with Moses, and said, “Give us water to drink.” Moses said to them, “Why do you quarrel with me? Why do you test the Lord?”(v.2) But the people thirsted there for water; and the people complained against Moses and said, “Why did you bring us out of Egypt, to kill us and our children and livestock with thirst?”(v.3)**

According to verses 2-3 above, the Israelites placed all responsibility for the situation on Moses. They asked Moses why he let them go on an exodus and face painful situations. We can understand the Israelites' grudge against Moses. In fact, water is essential for the survival of all living things. Therefore, lack of water for the Israelites in the wilderness meant death to all, so it is natural to think that if the Israelites were going to die from lack of water in the wilderness, they would have been better off staying in Egypt.

By the way, we know through Exodus that events like the waters of Meribah were repeated during the wilderness days of the Israelites. Exodus 15:22-27 tells the story of the Israelites crossing the Red Sea and arriving at Marah, where they could not drink because the water was bitter. The Israelites resented Moses, but by the grace of the Lord, they experienced a miracle that turned bitter water into drinkable water. After that, when the Israelites reached the Desert of Sin, they were starving because they had nothing to eat. Then they grumbled against Moses and Aaron again. But by the grace of the Lord they were able to eat manna and quail. (Exodus chapter 16)

When we see these repeated actions of the Israelites, we think they lack faith. However, this repetitive behavior of the Israelites is rather natural.

So, what is our life like now? We complain to the government when our gas bills go up and the cost of refueling our car or our heating bill skyrockets. We are also angrier when we cannot find a job because the



economy is not doing well. In this way, looking back at ourselves, we realize that we are no different from the Israelites who complained to Moses that there was no water to drink or food to eat 3,500 years ago.

Then, how did Moses deal with this crisis of absolute despair? Moses cried out to the Lord. The Lord said to Moses, “Go on ahead of the people, and take some of the elders of Israel with you; take in your hand the staff with which you struck the Nile and strike the rock at Horeb, and water will come out of it, so that the people may drink.” (Exodus 17:5-6)

Looking at it from our vantage point, we think this incident was the amazing grace of the Lord who solved the problem of suffering of the Israelites. However, the biblical writer evaluates the events of the waters of Meribah quite differently. **Today's text 17:7 says, “He called the place Massah and Meribah, because the Israelites quarreled and tested the Lord, saying, “Is the Lord among us or not?”**

In a sermon given just before his death, Moses retold the story of Massah. **“Do not test the Lord your God as you tested it at Massah” (Deuteronomy 6:16).** Massah or Meribah is described as the site of one of the most infidel events that occurred in Israel's history.

What does the Bible writer teach us through the Meribah incident?

Body: Correct faith is to live at God's eye level, not at one's own eye level.

Looking at the incident of the waters of Meribah, we can question whether what the Israelites did was very wrong. In today's text, the Israelites did not explicitly make idols. And they didn't steal or commit murder. Nor did they say that they would not believe in the Lord. They just asked for water to drink.

If what the Israelites asked of the Lord was bad, the Lord should not have granted their request for water. But the Lord gave the Israelites the water of the rock.

However, according to the judgment of the Bible writer who deals with the Meribah incident, this was to test the Lord. The Israelites wanted to check whether the Lord was with them or not. For the Israelites to judge whether the Lord is with them or not is to require a sign. The parting of the Red Sea in the Bible, manna and quail coming down from heaven, and water coming out of a rock are signs. But why do these things test the Lord?

In Matthew 16:1-4, the Pharisees and Sadducees seek a sign from Jesus. In other words they tested Jesus. The content of the test was to demand that Jesus show a sign to the world, a sign to prove that Jesus was the Messiah. The sign they demanded here is an amazing miracle which is a little strange.

During his public life, Jesus healed many people, showed people the miracle of five loaves and fish, and cast out evil spirits from those who were possessed by evil spirits. Now the Pharisees, and Sadducees, were aware of these things Jesus did, but are again asking Jesus for an amazing miracle.

Regarding the demands of the Pharisees and Sadducees, Jesus answered, **“A wicked and adulterous generation looks for a miraculous sign, but none will be given it except the sign of Jonah.” (Matthew 16:4).** The sign of Jonah in this passage refers to the incident where Jonah spent three days and three nights in the belly of a large fish. However, this was not the answer the Pharisees expected from Jesus.

The three days Jonah spent in the belly of the big fish that Jesus spoke of are foreshadowing Jesus who will be resurrected after three days. In other words, the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus most clearly show that Jesus is the Messiah.

In fact, the cross and resurrection are not the signs the people of the world demanded. To some people of the world, the cross is a stumbling block and foolishness. The Apostle Paul pointed it out clearly in 1 Corinthians chapter 1 (1 Corinthians 1:18-31). In fact, how can the fact that the Messiah died helplessly be a sign that proves that he is the savior of life?



Also, resurrection is an apocalyptic event that is not experienced by the people of the world. To the people of the world, the crucifixion or resurrection of Jesus is just a dry story. On the other hand, for those people of the world who follow the law well, live morally, and move themselves forward, meeting their needs is more realistic and interesting.

However, there are things we should not overlook in our life of faith. That is, faith is a matter of death and life. A life of faith is not a religious hobby.

Let's go back to today's text and tell the story of the Israelites who tested the Lord. The Israelites during their wilderness life wanted to confirm that the Lord was with them. It is understandable that they want to check their future with a sign because they always had to face the crisis of survival in the wilderness. So is it wrong to seek a sign to confirm that the Lord is alive? In fact, there are many stories of signs throughout the Bible. During Jesus' public life, there were many signs pointing to the fact that he was the Messiah.

In this way, we cannot deny the signs that reveal the Messiahship of Jesus in the Bible. However, we should not ask the Lord for a sign. Asking the Lord for a sign is an expression of unbelief. Why is that?

Jesus came in human form to fulfill God's will. In other words, the Lord intervenes in our lives. And the Lord's intervention in our lives is revealed as a sign in our lives.

Why did the Lord tell the Pharisees and Sadducees that the evil generation seeks a sign, but there is nothing to show them except the sign of Jonah? Because Christian faith is given by grace through the love of the cross and the power of the resurrection of the Lord. So, for Christians, the cross and resurrection of the Lord are the signs that reveal that Jesus is the Messiah. That is complete and sufficient. Therefore, asking the Lord for something other than the cross and resurrection is an expression of unbelief.

Please do not misunderstand me when I said not to ask the Lord for other signs. It does not mean that we should not pray to the Lord or seek our needs through our prayer.

To put it simply, it means that we must live our lives of faith according to the standards and will of the Lord, not our own experience, knowledge, and standards.

Conclusion: Don't put the Lord to the test.

Now let's summarize today's message. Dear brothers and sisters in Christ! How can we overcome this unbelief? The answer is obvious. We must not seek a sign. Also, we must abandon the attitude of asking the Lord according to our experiences and standards. Furthermore, we must abandon a life of faith that is biased towards our own expectations. If we do not abandon this attitude, we are living a life that tests the Lord.

If we expect and hope for the love of the cross and the power of the resurrection of the Lord, will our life of faith be boring and lethargic? Definitely not! If we knew even a little how new and amazing the work the Lord is doing in the world and in our lives, we wouldn't think so.

Our life of faith must be able to meet the Lord's standards, not our experiences and standards. That's why Jesus also prayed that, **"Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet not my will, but yours be done."**(Luke 22:42).

Please do not bring the Lord, His deeds, His providences, and His reign down to our level. It is an act of testing the Lord. And the result will be to harm the holiness of the Lord and live in captivity to our desires. For Christians, only the love of the cross and the power of the resurrection are sufficient. And we are full of that. May the power of the Lord's amazing cross, love, and resurrection be filled for everyone.

