

Camp at Rephidim



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Exodus 17:1-16

When we break a book down chapter by chapter, we sometimes forget the context of where we are actually at. The book of Exodus is about God leading his people out of Egypt through the wilderness. Now, normally we say to the land of Canaan, but yet, the book of Exodus is just about God getting them out of Egypt to Mount Sinai to get them where he wants them to be, Mount Sinai, where they can receive full instruction from him about him. He has to get them to Sinai, but before he can get them to Sinai he has carefully chosen the route. It is not the shortcut that would have taken them straight to the land of Canaan where they would have been there in a couple of weeks. No, the route to Canaan involved Sinai and between Sinai and Egypt was a vast, vast wilderness. Now, please hear this. The wilderness is going to be a theme. It is going to be a motive throughout scripture. Ultimately, here is what the wilderness is about: you being where you are now so that when you ultimately get where you are supposed to be you will be ready. Does that make sense? Ultimately, God has saved us and is sanctifying us to get us where we are supposed to be and that is a place where we fully serve him in our area of giftedness, with our abilities, and with a heart that is totally devoted to him, where we do things his ways and not our ways. Does that make sense?

Now, before we get there, there is actually a training center that God takes Israel through and he takes us through and that is called the wilderness. There was a time when Israel was in the wilderness because they had sinned against God and failed to enter the promised land. But in the book

of Exodus, Israel is in the wilderness and they are supposed to be in the wilderness because the wilderness is getting them ready for what God is getting them ready for. In our story today, you are going to see Israel be tested again. They are going to be tested over the same material they were tested over before. And that is water. It is going to look like Israel has a water problem. But Israel does not really have a water problem, Israel has a God problem. They are not getting it. So, here is what I want you to know. God does not socially promote people.

Now, if you don't know what that phrase means, let me remind you of my Faxon Elementary education. Faxon believed that kindergarten prepared you for first grade. First grade prepared you for second grade. Second grade prepared you for third grade. Third grade prepared you for fourth grade. Fourth grade prepared you for fifth grade. Then, just like that all the way through eighth grade. My teachers at Faxon Elementary would take issue with a book that said, "All I ever needed to know I learned in kindergarten." If that book was really true we would go from kindergarten to life, but none of us do. Amen? Now, here is what happened at Faxon. At Faxon, at the end of the year you could not wait to turn your report card over and see if you got promoted to the next grade. Teaching was so hard at Faxon you just didn't take it for granted that you were going to be promoted because there were some kids who didn't get promoted. There were some kids who were retained in the same grade another year. So, on the back of the report card it had our promotion or it had retained. So, while some of us were celebrating being promoted we had kids that were crushed because they were retained in the third grade. Now, I want you to hear this. I don't think they do this anymore, but here is what they used to do. I remember I was in the sixth grade and I had a kid in school who I believe was already driving. Finally, if you are in the sixth grade and are 16 years of age, there comes a time where the school system just said... *we are not going to invest anymore in you. Academically you will never get it, but we are not going to keep you in the sixth grade anymore. We are going to socially promote you.* So, at Faxon we actually had kids in the seventh grade who were old enough to quit school and start working. But they really should have been in about the second grade. Do you

understand what I am saying? There came a time when the school system said... *hey, we are just going to keep you with your peers. We are going to socially promote you, but we are not going to take the time to educate you anymore.*

Please hear me. The God you serve never socially promotes. He has designed a plan and a path to get you where you are supposed to be just like he did Israel so he can use you for his full honor and glory. He will not let you go into the land until you are ready to go into the land. Therefore, hear me. It is possible if you don't get what God is teaching you for him to so keep you in the grade that you are in that you will die in the wilderness. That is what is going to happen to most of the children of Israel. So, here is what you see in the wilderness. You see Israel learning information about God, getting to spend time with him on the journey, and then, all of a sudden, we come to a place and BAM, God puts a test on them. Some of these will be pop tests and some of these will be exams. Some of these will be semester exams and some of these will be chapter exams. But God is going to test Israel to make sure they know they are getting it.

If you will turn to Deuteronomy chapter 8, verse 2 when you get home, Moses is going to remind Israel that God tested them in the wilderness to humble them. And here is what that means. That means God is designing your life so that eventually you come to the point to be humbled to realize your way will not work. I don't know why some of you don't get it. Until you get it your marriage will stay in the wilderness, your company will stay in the wilderness, and your family will stay in the wilderness because God is not going to promote you. He is going to humble you to see your way will not work. He wants you to know who he is. He wants you to trust him. So, he has designed life for you to get to know him. And ultimately, if you really know him, you trust him and you obey him. Now, I don't know if you have ever failed a test or if you ever had a teacher think the test was not fair so they let you retake the test, and then you get the same test. Man, those are a piece of cake, amen! Then what is your problem? Why do you keep staying in the same relationship or the same situation over and over and over and over and over again? Here is why: because God is letting you

know that you don't get it yet. The test is not so God will know your heart; it is so you will know your heart. What God is after is a heart change- a heart that is moving away from Adam and fleshly tendencies more into a heart that like he has, like Christ has. So, that is what we are seeing in the book of Exodus.

Now, here is what is going to happen. At first, I had to decide which story I was going to emphasize, the first story or the second story. I really wanted to go with the first story, but then the more I studied this week, I began to realize that these two stories are meant to be seen together, not as two, but as one with two different parts. You say, "Brother Ricky, how do you know that? They seem totally different? You have Israel needing water and then you have Israel needing victory over an enemy." Well, notice this: both stories happen at the same place- a place called Rephidim. In verse 8 there is an "also" telling us that Israel is still where they were, at Rephidim. Now, Rephidim in Hebrew means resting place. And here is what the Bible says: Israel camped at the resting place, Rephidim. You know what it means to camp, right? This is not like they are at a rest stop. This is not Beaver Dam; this is Hillman Ferry or Piney Campground except this is not them being tourists and going there for a few days off. It is about God taking them somewhere and designing stops on the way so Israel could rest and then in resting, take a test to see what they had learned. Now, I want you to hear this. According to verse 1, Israel is where they are supposed to be. They are at the resting spot God had designed for them. Now, two things happen at Rephidim. The first thing that happens is they get to Rephidim, and all of a sudden, they realize there is no water.

Now, imagine you are traveling to Lexington and you stop at Beaver Dam. Do any of you ever stop at Beaver Dam on your way to Lexington or Louisville? You stop there for one of three reasons. You either stop there for gas, a bathroom break, or food. Amen? Now, imagine you pull in and there is no gas. Imagine you pull in and there is gas, but there is no bathroom. It is closed and under repair. That is bad. Now, what would be even worse is if you stopped at Beaver Dam and there was no Snickers. Amen? I mean, there are just things that you need when you are traveling.

Do any of you remember the day years ago when you used to have to stop for gas and the only thing the gas station had was gas? Then, to get food you had to go to restaurant somewhere down the road. Now you love those places where you do it all together, especially us men who have to beat our buddy's record to Orlando. You know how long it took him to get there and you have to shave 5 or 10 minutes off of his trip. Amen?

Now, get this picture. We are traveling and we stop at Hillman Ferry. Did you know there are four different campsites at Hillman Ferry? You can get the full hookup where you get water, electricity, and sewer. You can get water and electricity. You can get electricity only, or you can get primitive. Now, Israel is following God. So, if you are following God, hanging out with God, going to the promised land and going through the wilderness, you expect full hookup, amen? You expect water, electricity, and sewer. Israel gets to the resting spot where they are going to unpack the bags and set up the tents. All of a sudden, the rumor starts going through the camp that there is no water. They are in desert and there is no water. Do you know what Israel does? They quarrel with Moses. Does anybody see the progression? We got to the Red Sea and they complained. We got on the other side of the Red Sea and they grumbled. Now they get to Rephidim and they quarrel. Do you remember when you used to just complain? Then you started grumbling. Now there is just all out hostility with other people. If you and I don't learn the way of God that is what is going to happen.

So, they are quarreling with Moses. Now, here is what you have to remember this is a really big deal. This is a really big deal because Paul is going to actually tell us in the book of Corinthians, the tenth chapter of the first letter that when Israel went into the Red Sea and when they went into that cloud they were actually baptized into Moses. We Baptists don't like to use the word "baptism" when there is not water involved (meaning they don't get completely wet), but Israel actually went into the water without getting wet. And when they went into the water without getting wet it was called a baptism. That is crazy!! But here is what Paul is doing. He is using baptism at its basic root meaning and that means to identify with. And here is what he is saying: when Israel went through the Red Sea they were

identified with Moses just like you and I are identified with Christ. Now, do you know what they are doing? They are taking up arms; they have picked up stones to stone Moses. Why? Because they are demanding from God the provision of water. They are denying God's plan for them. They are actually believing that God led them out into the wilderness to let them, their children, and their animals die in the wilderness.

Don't ever think it was God's design of the wilderness in your life to kill you. It was to get you spiritually strong. Now, I am not talking about when you are in sin. There is a lot of sinful situations that we get into because of us that will kill us, but God didn't design the wilderness to kill you; God designed the wilderness to make you strong and to make me strong. The children of Israel doubted his presence. You know that is what happens, right? If you and I don't see the wilderness correctly here is what you will believe, you will believe there are times in your life when you are alone and God is not with you. Can anybody join me in saying there have been many times in my life when I was in the wilderness and I felt like I was all alone and I didn't know where God was? Can anyone raise their hand if they have felt like that before? Have you ever been ready to make a big decision and just...*God, where are you!?*

See, when this first story ends, verses 1-7, they are going to name the place and the first Hebrew name means "testing" and the second name means "quarreling." So, the name of the place in English would have been this "testing and quarreling." They are there to be tested by God, but they are testing God. They are putting him to the test. It would be like you giving a test to the teacher to see if the teacher is qualified to teach you or not. You do know we do that from time to time, right? We test the teacher. You don't test God. He is the sovereign Lord of the universe. And you don't quarrel with him. You say they didn't quarrel with him, they quarreled with Moses. No, they quarreled with God when they quarreled with Moses. Moses was the one God chose to lead them out of Egypt and he identified them with him. Now they believe they have a water problem, but they don't really have a water problem, they have a God problem. And let me just say because they had a water problem they should have realized while

they had a problem with water God never has a problem with water. Can I just say this? Whatever problem you are having now in the wilderness may be a problem to you, but it is not a problem with God.

Many times our problems cause us to doubt God and we believe we are where we are because he is not there. The truth is you are where you are, if you are in the wilderness correctly, and he is there with you, because he is getting you ready for what he is getting you ready for. You will not be ready for what he is getting you ready for until you learn the lesson of him in the wilderness. Does that make sense? You say...but Brother Ricky, there is no water; that is important. It is, but it leads them to ask this question: where is God. And many of us ask that question a lot. Where is God? "Where is God" is the same question as "why is this happening to me." Why would God let me camp at a place where there is no water when he knows I need water. The water is what God is going to use to teach you about him. The water is what God is going to use to see if you already know who he really is. So, instead of testing him and doubting him and denying him and demanding from him, you simply trust him. And when you trust him, do you know what you do? You obey him.

I don't know about you, but I feel sorry for these people. I really want to believe if I would have seen God part the Red Sea, walked through on dry land waved at the fish, and then three days later didn't have any water and saw Moses take a log, put in the bitter water that was before me, and it turned to sweet water, I don't think I would have ever griped about water again. Amen? Let that show up on my final exam and I am going to ace it every time! Israel just outright fails here. Nobody says...*oh, no water. Wow, what is God going to do now?* Nobody thought that God could get water out of a desert so they put God on trial and they convicted him of being an absentee Lord. They convinced themselves they were all alone. Do you know where God was? He was right where their need was. Did you get that? When they asked the question where is the Lord, is the Lord among us, do you know where the Lord was? He was standing on a rock. And do you know what was in the rock? Water. So, he tells Moses take a few of the elders, bring your staff with you because that is my staff that I

gave you, bring it to me and when you see where I am standing on the rock, just hit the rock. When you hit the rock, water will gush out. Moses goes to the rock, hits the rock, and you know what happens. Water gushes out. Wow! Paul is actually going to take this story and somehow teach us that that rock and the rock and the water that Israel drank in the wilderness spiritually was Christ. I remember the first time I went to Brazil and I drank something called guarana. I didn't know what it was, but it was good. It didn't matter what it was; it was just good. It quenched my thirst. Please understand in the Old Testament, here is what the Bible is going to teach: Israel actually drank from the same spiritual rock that you and I drink of- and that is Christ; they just didn't know him as Christ. Is that glorious? Do you know where Christ was? He was right where their need was. They needed water and that is where God was. And Moses had in his hand what Israel needed to get water from God. Wow!

So, here is the question I want you to ask. The next time you ask where is God, you just ask this next question. What is your need? And whatever your need is, know God is there. He was not under the rock or beside the rock; he was on top of the rock. I love that picture! I don't know where we got that phrase "on top of," but on top of is better than being underneath, amen? We are in the NBA playoffs and I don't know if you know this, but if you follow that, sometimes they will talk about somebody being on top of their game. That means they are playing up to their potential. When somebody is not on their game that means they are not living up to their potential. Here is what the Bible teaches. Do you know where God was when Israel had a need? He was on top of the situation. Israel felt like they were under the situation. Israel felt like they were going to thirst to death and here is what God knew...*Hey, boys! Hey, ladies! Here I am!! Woo! You are looking for me! I am right over here!* Israel: *That is a rock!* God: *I know. But what you don't know is what I know and that is what is inside of the rock. And what is inside of the rock is water.* Wow! Is that awesome?

Then, all of a sudden, something happens at Rephidim. They are camping out, and all of a sudden, the Amalekites appear. Now, Moses is going to tell us later when he recounts this story in Deuteronomy that there were some

stragglers, some that were weak, some that were feeble, and some that were following behind in the march to Rephidim and the Amalekites attacked them. Notice in our story, Moses tells Joshua to gather men from the camp and go fight tomorrow. I don't know about you, but if I am being attacked, I am going to feel like I need to do something today. Have you noticed how they are attacked, but they don't answer the attack until tomorrow? Here is how they are going to answer the attack: Joshua is supposed to take men with swords and go into battle with the Amalekites. And here is what Moses is going to do, he is going to take the staff of God and he, Aaron, and Hur are going to go up on a hill and he is going to stand with the staff of God in his hand. So, the next day he goes up on that mountain, he takes the staff of God in his hands, and he holds that staff up. While he is holding the staff up, Israel prevails in the battle with the Amalekites. Now, can you imagine starting early in the morning and having your hand in one position and trying to hold it all day? You would have to take a break, right? Well, every time he would take a break and let his hands down, guess what? The Amalekites would prevail over the Israelites. All of a sudden, Aaron and Hur and everyone watching knew... *whoa!* So, they brought a stone, he sat down on the stone, and they held both of his hands up with the staff of God. When the sun went down that day, Israel prevailed.

Now, can I ask you this question? In verses 1 through 7, at Rephidim Israel needed water. Where was God? He was on the rock. Now they need victory. They need strength for the victory. And do you know where God is? He is on the throne. He is on top of the situation. Whether we in the wilderness are battling the enemy within us, our flesh, or we are battling the enemy outside of us, which is Satan, the victory comes from God! How many times in a battle with your flesh do you feel like you are all on your own? How many times in a battle with the enemy have you felt like you are on your own? See, here is what Moses is doing. Moses is taking that staff before the children of Israel, that same staff that he struck and hit the rock that provided water, and he is now holding that staff up on a hill and all of Israel is watching him. The men on the battlefield are watching him and here is what happens, through that stick, that staff, that pole being raised

up, God empowers the men on the battlefield and they win the battle. When the battle is won, here is what the Bible says happens; God tells Moses to write it down. Record it and recite it. Write it in a book. Have you ever written your victories down in a book? Have you ever just said, *wow, God gave me victory right here today*, and then you wrote about it? See, you need to recite those victories God has given you from time to time. He said don't just record it. Don't just recite it. Moses built an altar. And you know what he is doing here, right? He is worshipping God for the victory that he has just had. Then, he names his altar. Have any of you ever named a place of worship? He names it "Yahweh Nissi," meaning "The Lord is my Banner."

Now, this word banner can either refer to the piece of cloth that was on the pole or it can refer to the pole itself. There are examples in the military when they took that pole into battle and that insignia, that standard was on that flag. When those men would look to the pole, as long as that pole was standing up that meant there was still a battle to fight and there was still hope for victory. So, those men pushed through and kept fighting. But if that standard ever got lowered, if that pole ever came down that meant defeat was close or had already happened. It would just take away the motivation of the men in battle. I may be wrong on this, I have never been in the military, but I have a feeling that we take our flag with us when we got into battle. Is that not right, guys? Sometimes when you are on foreign soil and you see that flag it reminds you of everything that America stands for and you want to fight for your country. You are not fighting for a flag; you are fighting for what that flag represents. Now, notice what Moses said. Moses never said the flag is my banner or the pole is my banner. He never worshipped the staff. He never worshipped a thing. He said the Lord! See, that is what that pole, that staff, signified. It signified the Lord and Moses and the children of Israel knew that at that moment the victory was coming to them because of the Lord. Then, here is what Moses says. Please note this in verses 15 and 16. He said the Lord, Yahweh Nissi, is my banner and the hand is upon the throne of the Lord. You guys get this, right? Victory came to Moses and the children of Israel because when

Moses lifted that staff and he had help holding his arms up, his arms and holding onto that pole was on the very throne of God.

Where is the Lord when you need water? He is on the rock! When you need victory, he is on the throne! The reason many of us will die in the wilderness is because we will not keep our eye on where God is. He is the sovereign Lord of the universe. You do know where the ultimate provision was made for man and the ultimate victory for man was accomplished, right? It was at the cross of Christ. Whatever you laid down that you took back up that God gave to you and he empowered you with it, I pray you keep it in the direction of the cross and you keep your hand on the throne of God because the sovereign Lord of life and your life reigns victoriously. See, God is not just into the destination of getting you to Canaan. He is into the journey because it is in the journey that you get to know who he is. As you get to know who he is and you learn more about him, the more you trust him.

You know who the first people they saw when they got into Canaan was, right? It was the Amalekites. Why did someone not say...*GET THAT STAFF!* Not a single person did and a whole generation of people died in the wilderness. They had enough faith to get out, but they didn't have enough faith to get through what God ordained them to go through.

What a story! You may be asking this morning, where is the Lord? What is your need? You say, Brother Ricky, I am having a problem. You are having that problem, but I promise you it is not a problem with God. Now, please hear this. Don't take this wilderness and make Israel be in the wilderness because of their sin. No. Later they are going to be in the wilderness because of their sin and then they are going to die. But on this side of Mount Sinai, where they are is where they are supposed to be. Are you where you are supposed to be because you are in the training center being prepared for Canaan? Or, are you in the wilderness because that is where you are going to die? Paul says this story was written to be an example to us. My question to you is do you know where the Lord is right now in your life?

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