

Good morning, Fellowship. Thank you, Noah and Sarah, for blessing us with your leading. If you're new to Fellowship, my name is Richard Kerry and for those of you who do know me – I am sure you didn't recognize me at first. Been growing the beard out so I could do some Moses method acting as we continue our series in Exodus called *A New Normal*. We've been considering how God wants to change us during this season we're in – and really – how He wants to change us no matter what type of difficult experience we have.

Turn with me to Exodus 17.

On most nights, when we put our boys to bed our 3-year-old volunteers to pray. His prayers are sometimes silly but mostly sweet. Each night he thanks God for his family – naming each of us. He gives thanks for everything from that day – the food, the nature preserve, his grandparents, the tv show *The Masked Singer*. He prays that he and his brother would love God and people. He finishes with, "God love me. Love Roman. Love Isabel. Love mama. Love daddy." And on the silly nights, he might pray that, "God would love Richard and Erin" instead of calling us mommy and daddy. He doesn't ask for anything other than for God to love us. No demands. Just thanks for God's provision and love.

But two weeks ago, something different happened. Right before bed time Rhett got his feelings hurt. He wasn't angry or throwing a fit. He was just sad. His feelings changed his normal posture and attitude. That night, he couldn't express thanksgiving. Has that ever happened to you? Have you ever felt fear, sadness, anger or desperation and it changed your interaction with God? My circumstances have altered my prayers and interaction with the Lord more than once in my life. I'm sure that's happened to you as well and this morning we'll see how that happened for the Israelites. Let's read Exodus 17:1-7.

Then all the congregation of the sons of Israel journeyed by stages from the wilderness of Sin, according to the command of the LORD, and camped at Rephidim, and there was no water for the people to drink. ²Therefore the people quarreled with Moses and said, "Give us water that we may drink." And Moses said to them, "Why do you quarrel with me? Why do you test the LORD?" ³But the people thirsted there for water; and they grumbled against Moses and said, "Why, now, have you brought us up from Egypt, to kill us and our children and our livestock with thirst?" ⁴So Moses cried out to the LORD, saying, "What shall I do to this people? A little more and they will stone me." ⁵Then the LORD said to Moses, "Pass before the people and take with you some of the elders of Israel; and take in your hand your staff with which you struck the Nile, and go. ⁶Behold, I will stand before you there on the rock at Horeb; and you shall strike the rock, and water will come out of it, that the people may drink." And Moses did so in the sight of the elders of Israel. ⁷He named the place Massah and Meribah because of the quarrel of the sons of Israel, and because they tested the LORD, saying, "Is the LORD among us, or not?"

Imagine with me. Hundreds of thousands – maybe millions of people leaving Egypt. When they get to Rephidim there's no water. Notice, it doesn't say barely any water. There's none.

Thousands of men, women, and children – dehydrated, exhausted, and desperate for water. And what do they do in their desperation?

They want their needs met so they grumble and complain. They've done this before. Remember? The Egyptian Army chases them to the Red Sea. They're stuck. The Lord parts the waters and saves them. **He provides.** They worship the Lord for His provision and protection, and just a few verses later they're grumbling. They get to a place with bitter water and they grumble, "What are we going to drink?" The Lord, in His grace, changes the water from bitter to sweet. **He provides.** Chapter 16 – they don't have food. They grumble. They complain. What does God do? **He provides.**

Now, they're in Rephidim with no water and their desperation intensifies their interaction with the Lord. They don't just complain and grumble. They want control and they attempt to gain it with 3 different tactics. **First, the Israelites make demands to take control.**

17:2 – ²Therefore the people quarreled with Moses and said, "Give us water that we may drink." They aren't asking questions anymore. In the past it was, "Hey, uh, Moses. What are we going to do about this water situation?" Now, they're demanding. The word for "quarrel" is translated as "contend" or "debate." It's a word used in legal complaints or fights. Instead of waiting patiently on the Lord's faithful provision they're demanding their needs be met immediately. This isn't a faith-filled plea. It's contentious.

In their desperation, they demonstrate a lack of faith in God's provision and character. They want Him to act as they command instead of patiently waiting for Him to provide as He has promised. It lacks trust because it exclaims to the Lord, "You don't know what you're doing. Let me take over from here." Making demands of God is an attempt to take control.

In a prideful moment, which we all have, have you ever done this? Ever felt like God needed to get on board with your plan instead of His? Maybe you didn't say it but by your actions, that's what you told Him. It's this prideful, "God, my way is better, easier, or quicker than Yours." It's taking the shortcut when God wanted you to be patient. They make a demand to take control. And it gets worse.

³But the people thirsted there for water; and they grumbled against Moses and said, "Why, now, have you brought us up from Egypt, to kill us and our children and our livestock with thirst?" ⁴So Moses cried out to the LORD, saying, "What shall I do to this people? A little more and they will stone me." **The translation of that last phrase is literally, "they be almost ready to stone me."**

They move from making demands to making threats. They're frightened. Remember, they already served a tyrant leader. **Pharaoh made them slaves, had them beaten, and their children murdered. They're afraid they've left one tyrant leader for another and in their fear – they become the tyrants.** "Hey, if this guy brought us out here to kill us – let's kill him first." In other words, if you don't do this for us, here's what we're going to do to you. If God doesn't

provide for us the water we need to survive, we'll take out the leader He has given us. **Making threats is an attempt to force control. God, you better do this or we're going to punish you.**

In my youth, I made a mistake many of you have made. I told God there was something I would never do. I told Him I would never work at a restaurant. My mom had been a server at a restaurant and told me horror stories that made me never want to work in one. So, at 22, I was jobless and found myself working at Ruby Tuesday. I remember some of my interactions with people there. There were times when if I didn't get a meal out quick enough or if someone was asking for something we didn't have – they were quick to jump to a couple phrases – “Let me talk to your manager.” Or, “Well, there goes your tip.” There was one guy who literally put down 5-one-dollar bills for a co-worker of mine. Every time he did something wrong – the man took a dollar away. When people are desperate, when we're tired, hungry, or thirsty – we'll threats to get what we want – to force control of a situation.

The Israelites make demands to take control. They make threats to force control. But they aren't finished. They test in order to manipulate control – continuing to demonstrate their lack of trust in the Lord.

Verse 2. “...Why do you test the LORD?” and in verse 7 “⁷ He named the place Massah and Meribah because of the quarrel of the sons of Israel, and because they tested the LORD, saying, “Is the LORD among us, or not?”

Through their mediator, Moses, the people are asking the Lord to prove and show Himself. Remember the pillars of cloud and fire that led them out of Egypt? God's presence is still with them. So, it's like they're talking to Moses – God's presence is in the background – and they're pointing at the pillar saying, “Is He still WITH us? Is He still FOR us? Is He going to do something or not? If He's REALLY for us, then He needs to give us water.” **Ever tried to manipulate God? If You're really out there then You'll _____. God, if You really love me, You'll _____. If You want me to do _____, You need to _____. I know I have.**

Again, it's the Israelites attempt to get what they wanted when they wanted. God has proven His trustworthiness to them and yet they still don't trust. **They make demands, threats, and they test.**

What does God do? **He provides.** He gives them the water they desperately need – not because of the Israelites behavior but in spite of. His character and grace towards His people causes Him to act. **But, don't mistake God's provision with His permission because in Psalm 95:8-11, we find out God wasn't happy about this moment.**

Do not harden your hearts, as at Meribah, As in the day of Massah in the wilderness, ⁹“When your fathers tested Me, They tried Me, though they had seen My work. ¹⁰“For forty years I loathed *that* generation, And said they are a people who err in their heart, And they do not know My ways. ¹¹“Therefore I swore in My anger, Truly they shall not enter into My rest.”

Maybe you don't make demands, threats, or test to control. Maybe for you, in difficult and uncertain times, you isolate, hide, run, or rely on your own power and strength. And so, the question becomes – How do faithful followers of God respond to Him in desperate times? What's our new normal?

The new normal is to Lament. Lament means to grieve, to cry out, to mourn. It's allowing ourselves to feel the weight of our circumstances and to pray vulnerably to the Lord fully trusting His provision and admitting He's in control.

Psalm 13 is a very famous Lament Psalm and it says this: How long, O LORD? Will You forget me forever? How long will You hide Your face from me? ²How long shall I take counsel in my soul, *Having* sorrow in my heart all the day? How long will my enemy be exalted over me?

³Consider *and* answer me, O LORD my God; Enlighten my eyes, or I will sleep the *sleep of* death, ⁴And my enemy will say, "I have overcome him," *And* my adversaries will rejoice when I am shaken. Notice these first 4 verses. David expresses his sorrow. He feels forgotten by God. His enemies are prospering. He's desperate. But one word changes the tone of the psalm – "But..."

⁵But I have trusted in Your lovingkindness; My heart shall rejoice in Your salvation. ⁶I will sing to the LORD, Because He has dealt bountifully with me.

When David says the word "but" – it's because what he is about to say means more than what he already said. He's feeling down and desperate, but He knows God is faithful. Lament psalms always end with trust in the Lord – His salvation, His lovingkindness, and provision. We can be honest with Him and remain faithful. We can be present in our circumstances, knowing and trusting God's provision, timing, and love. Lamenting isn't our attempt to gain control. **It isn't telling God we know of a better option. It's confessing to God that we know He is in control and that we will trust Him because He always provides. The Israelites, in their pride and impatience, missed out on this opportunity with the Lord. But, the good news for us – there's still time...**

1. In this season, some of us need to lament the fact that we got too comfortable and now we're lamenting things that we don't really need. We might need to lament that we ever let temporary things become more important than eternal.
2. Some of us need to lament true losses – the loss of a job, a relationship, or a dream. It helps us to grieve those losses while resting in God's character and love.
3. Some of us know how to lament. We have seen and trust God's provision. It's our job to make sure we lament when necessary and also help younger believers – the next generation – learn how to lament well.

A couple of years ago, Erin and I were in the middle of uncertainty and had a few major decisions to make in our lives – our finances had changed, careers were changing, and we were considering moving to a different part of Dallas. That same summer, we were speaking at a Pine Cove Family Camp. During that week, the staff asked us to pray and talk about what the Lord wanted us to remember from the week. As Erin and I did that, it became very clear – He had

one phrase for us. “Trust His provision.” We even painted that phrase on this rock and put it in the window seal in our kitchen. Can I just tell you – that in these two years – the Lord has time and time again reminded us that this statement is true? It hasn’t always been easy. There have been tough times. There have been times of doubt and confusion. But He always reminds us He is faithful. A few things even happened this week in Erin’s business that confirmed it more than ever. I don’t know how you’re doing right now with everything going on in your life – but I want to encourage you to share with the Lord in a real, honest, vulnerable way – knowing and trusting He can handle that and is at work in your life. Trust His provision.

Devotional question: Each week, we’ve been asking you to consider a few questions. Here’s the first one for this week. How have you attempted to take control of situations in your life instead of giving control to the Lord?

Devotional question: What feelings do I need to express to the Lord this week? What ways can I give Him my trust and obedience – knowing He provides?