

From Bitterness to Abundance

Text: Exodus 15:22-27 Date: January 30, 2022

INTRODUCTION

How may the Lord bring us from bitterness to abundance?

Bitterness in the Bible is portrayed as both external and internal. Sometimes there are these external circumstances that are bitterly hard. Not just hard. *Bitterly* hard. But most times bitterness in the Bible is described in terms of the internal spirit. That there is a bitter spirit—a spirit or heart that is bitter with grief. Bitter with anger. Bitter with envy. These are the terms that show up most often in connection to bitterness. Filled with grief. Filled with anger. Filled with envy.

And often times accompanying this bitterness of spirit, there is a weeping—loud weeping at times—with bitter tears. But too often, the examples we see in the Bible is that these bitter tears are not tears of repentance, but remorse. And the individual continues in their bitterness—in fact, it grows, and solidifies, becoming a hard heart, towards God and others—and continues on toward actions that lead to death.

I have said this before, so bear with me if you are hearing it again, but I think it bears repeating:
Bitterness is a gateway sin.

So again... how may the Lord move us from bitterness to abundance?

And so I came to the Lord earlier this week, right here at the altar and left led to pray from Exodus 15:

²² Then Moses led Israel from the Red Sea and they went into the Desert of Shur. For three days they traveled in the desert without finding water. ²³ When they came to Marah, they could not drink its water because it was bitter. (That is why the place is called Marah.^u) ²⁴ So the people grumbled against Moses, saying, "What are we to drink?"

The Three Primary Emotions of Bitterness

- Grief (1 Samuel 1:10; Esther 4:1)
- Anger (Ephesians 4:31)
- Envy (James 3:14; 4:1-2a)

I see a bit of a progression in these three. Life is hard. Bitterly hard sometimes. And we respond in grief. But when we don't grieve well... it leads to anger. And in our anger, we lose perspective. And we begin to envy those around us because of the bitterness of spirit. And then that unholy cocktail of emotions sets us up for sin. (e.g. Asaph in Psalm 73)

So what do we do? *We learn to lament and we learn to repent.* (more on this in the upcoming weeks)

Keep a Soft Heart: Proud People vs Broken People

How may we walk in ongoing humility of spirit and a softness of heart, instead of bitterness of spirit? What do we do with the “wells of bitterness” in our lives? We run to the cross.

³ When they came to Marah, they could not drink its water because it was bitter. (That is why the place is called Marah.) ²⁴ So the people grumbled against Moses, saying, “What are we to drink?”

²⁵ Then Moses cried out to the LORD, and the LORD showed him a piece of wood. He threw it into the water, and the water became fit to drink.

There are some, and I would be among them, that feel that the branch that Moses threw into the water symbolizes the cross. Or it may symbolize Jesus Himself who is described in Isaiah and Zechariah as the Branch of the LORD.

And THEN after being saved. After a great salvation in fact, the LORD instructs His people:

There the LORD issued a ruling and instruction for them and put them to the test. ²⁶ He said, “If you listen carefully to the LORD your God and do what is right in his eyes, if you pay attention to his commands and keep all his decrees, I will not bring on you any of the diseases I brought on the Egyptians, for I am the LORD, who heals you.”

In other words, don’t just be hearers, but doers, don’t be hearers but doers. And I will heal you. And notice with me, He says, I won’t just heal after you’re sick. I will keep you from becoming sick at all.

And here’s how that beautiful story ends.

²⁷ Then they came to Elim, where there were twelve springs and seventy palm trees, and they camped there near the water.

Do you see it? ABUNDANCE. God brought them from bitterness to abundance by way of utter dependence and ongoing repentance.

Questions for Personal Reflection/Group Discussion

1. Why is a root of bitterness so dangerous? See Hebrews 12:14-16.
2. Ask the Lord to reveal any “wells of bitterness” in your heart. Write them down.
3. Name the emotion attached to these wells. Is it anger? Pain? Envy? Judgmental spirit? Pride? Etc. Ask the Lord to show you what life in the Spirit would mean for you even if the situations causing the pain/anger do not change.
4. Go through that list and ask the Lord to give you the ability to lament and repent these wells of bitterness (we will be talking about this more in the upcoming weeks, but start praying now).
5. Review the list of Proud People and Humble People prayerfully once more.