

**Victory Lutheran Church- Jacksonville, FL**  
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**Worship Series: *Our Greatest Needs***  
**Service Theme: *Water for the Thirsty***

**Sermon Theme: *Everyone Thirsts, Only One Quenches***  
**March 12, 2023 (Lent 3) Exodus 17:1-7**

We've all been there. The dry mouth. The sandpaper tongue. The sticky throat. Maybe even the headaches, blurred vision, or fainting. That's why Jesus' imagery in his Word today is such a compelling visual. Because since the beginning of time—no matter when, or where, or how they lived—everyone knows what it's like...to be thirsty. Everyone thirsts!

Whether it's running a marathon, mowing the lawn in the Florida summer, sitting in a movie theater with a giant tub of popcorn, or preaching a sermon, we've all experienced the nagging, sometimes desperate thirst for water. Water is an absolute need, because every aspect of life's biochemistry, and all the bodily functions we need to live are dependent on water. Without water, you can't live more than about three days! That's why God designed our bodies with a monitoring system that ensures we have just the right amount of water to function and live—we get thirsty!

Because everyone thirsts, and because everyone needs water to live and function, we might think the Israelites' actions in our sermon text aren't that egregious. A handful of months after God had freed them from their slavery in Egypt, they were trekking through the wilderness on their way to the land God had promised. ***“The whole Israelite community set out from the Desert of Sin, traveling from place to place as the LORD commanded. They camped at Rephidim, but there was no water for the people to drink. So they quarreled with Moses and said, “Give us water to drink.”***

For a community of half-a-million plus people and all their livestock, not having water accessible was a deadly problem! Who wouldn't feel

a little panicked and grumpy? Except the Israelites had no reason to worry or grumble, because of everything they'd already experienced!

During their slavery in Egypt, they'd experienced God's power as he poured out plagues on their captors. They'd seen God's mercy when the angel of death passed over the Israelites' lamb's blood-painted households, and his judgment as he struck down the firstborn in every Egyptian household. They'd seen God's power to rescue when he parted the waters of the Red Sea so the whole Israelite nation could march safely across on dry ground, then swept away the pursuing Egyptian army by sending the waters crashing back down. In the wilderness, they'd seen God's power and providence when he'd turned bitter, undrinkable water into sweet, thirst-quenching water, and provided quail and daily manna bread that appeared on the ground each morning. Over, and over, and over again, they'd seen God's miraculous power to protect his people, and provide for their every need! So, instead of panicking and grumbling about no water at Rephidim, they should have been reassuring each other, “Don't worry, God will provide, just like he always has!”

Only, they didn't. Instead, they grumbled against Moses, ***“Why did you bring us up out of Egypt to make us and our children and livestock die of thirst?”*** ready to stone Moses as their fear and anger mounted. Moses rebuked them for ***“putting the LORD to the test.”*** Basically they thought, “Unless we have water to drink, we can't be sure that God's with us.” They were testing God, rather than trusting in God. The Israelites were understandably thirsty, but they were thirsting for the wrong kind of water, which couldn't satisfy their greatest need.

That was also true about the Samaritan woman Jesus met at the well. Sure, she came to that well for water that would quench her physical thirst. But as Jesus' conversation peeled back layers of her life, it's clear that she was really thirsting for something else. Through his penetrating request, ***“Go, call your husband and come back,”*** Jesus got to the heart of what she was really thirsting for: love; acceptance; commitment. Only, a trail of relational wreckage from five failed

marriages, and a current live-in boyfriend revealed that she was trying to quench her thirst with “water” that was just making her thirstier.

So, the question for us is, “If Jesus met you at the well, what would he tell you to go and bring back?” If you were at Rephidim with the Israelites, the lack of what would set you to grumbling and panicking? Just like everyone biologically thirsts for water, everyone psychologically thirsts for something in their life.

Maybe like the woman at the well, you thirst for love and commitment. Maybe you thirst for approval, acceptance, and validation. Maybe you thirst to feel valuable and important. Maybe you thirst for a sense of identity which gives your life direction and purpose. Maybe you thirst for joy, happiness, and pleasure. Maybe you thirst for rest, peace, and security. Everyone is thirsting for something in their life that leaves them with a nagging, or sometimes desperate need for it.

And that’s not wrong. Just as God wired us with a biological thirst for water, he’s also wired us with a spiritual and psychological thirst for those things. The problem comes when we try to quench our thirst with the wrong kinds of water. The Samaritan woman was trying to quench her thirst for love, approval, and acceptance through human relationships. The Israelites at Rephidim were trying to quench their thirst for security and peace by testing God over physical water, rather than trusting God’s promises.

So, what are you guzzling as you attempt to quench your thirst? Maybe like the Samaritan woman, your thirst for love has led you into relationships that are anything but God-pleasing. Maybe you’re a workaholic who’s always chasing security through a bigger paycheck; or pursuing identity and meaning by making a name for yourself. Maybe your desperate thirst for pleasure or happiness has driven you into an addiction to substances, sex, or screens.

Maybe your thirst for approval or acceptance has made you a people-pleaser, doing or saying whatever you think will make people like you, or by adopting the opinions, mindsets, or worldviews of the prevailing

culture and society as your own. Or maybe your thirst for validation motivates you to surround yourself with people who tell you what you want to hear, even if it’s not what you need to hear. Whatever it is you thirst for, because everyone has a sinful nature, we often assume we can quench our thirst with all the wrong kinds of drinks. But they just make us thirstier.

Lots might taste good. When you finish mowing your lawn in the summer heat, nothing tastes better than an ice-cold beer. When you hit the mid-afternoon lull, your 4<sup>th</sup> cup of coffee hits just right. When you’re eating at a burger place, a fountain Coke makes you go, “Ahhh!” But while they might taste good, alcohol, caffeine, and sugar won’t quench your thirst. They’ll make you thirstier. Everyone thirsts, but only one quenches.

As Jesus told the woman at the well, ***“Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks the water I give them will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give them will become in them a spring of water welling up to eternal life.”*** Only one type of water can truly quench our thirst and meet our greatest need. Living water!

God knew the Israelites needed living water. So despite their grumbling and testing, God still instructed Moses, ***“Go out in front of the people. Take with you some of the elders of Israel and take in your hand the staff with which you struck the Nile. I will stand there before you at the rock at Horeb. Strike the rock, and water will come out of it for the people to drink.”***

Once again, God provided for his people’s physical needs through his miraculous power. With Moses’ same staff that God had used to show his mastery over the Nile River by turning it to blood, and over the Red Sea by parting it’s waters, he again shows his miraculous mastery over water. Through the same representative the Israelites wanted to stone, God produces water from stone. And not just a trickle, but enough water to quench the thirst of over half-a-million people, and all their animals!

But while God provided them with the physical water they needed to live, his purpose was to give them the living water they needed to live eternally! The rest of Scripture makes that clear. In Psalm 95, God encourages us, ***“Let us shout aloud to the Rock of our salvation,”*** and warns, ***“Do not harden your hearts as you did at Meribah...at Massah in the desert where your fathers tested and tried me, though they had seen what I did.”*** In First Corinthians, the Apostle Paul recaps Israel’s history as a warning, writing, ***“[The Israelites] all drank the same spiritual drink; for they drank from the same spiritual rock that accompanied them, and that rock was Christ.”***

God brought forth miraculous water from the rock at Horeb not just to quench Israel’s physical thirst, but to point them to the living water who would meet their greatest need—the one who promised living water to the Samaritan woman—Jesus Christ! He alone can quench our thirst!

Water is absolutely necessary for life, and Jesus, the living water is absolutely necessary for eternal life. Like I said earlier, God created all human beings with a thirst for things like love, joy, peace, rest, meaning, purpose, and identity—so that we’ll seek them, and find them only in him! Nothing can quench our thirst for love and peace like Jesus. As Paul writes in Romans, ***“Since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”*** Nothing can quench our thirst for value, identity, and purpose like the one who sees us as so valuable, he willingly gave himself for us, giving us an identity as God’s own child, and giving us the eternal purpose of glorifying him with our lives, and sharing living water with thirsty souls around us.

For all of our chasing after things that can’t quench our thirst, we don’t deserve to receive this living water any more than the grumbling, doubting Israelites deserved the water from the rock. But purely out of God’s grace and mercy, he’s given us that living water, and everything that comes with him.

God designed our brains so that even the slightest dip below the amount of water we need in our bodies to function triggers behavioral changes, so we’ll pursue water. Just think how often you’ll take a sip from the water bottle on your desk during work, without even thinking about it. Or how our bodies exhibit symptoms, like irritability, lethargy, headaches, nausea, or even seizures to alert us that we’re dehydrated. Have you ever considered that God wired us spiritually, so we exhibit certain symptoms when we’ve become spiritually dehydrated from a lack of living water?

If you’re feeling constantly stressed, angry, broken, hopeless, helpless, depressed, anxious, lonely, or unloved; if your life feels meaningless, valueless, or purposeless—are these symptoms of spiritual dehydration from a lack of hearing, reading, and taking to heart Jesus’ promises? Symptoms that we’re trying to quench our thirst by guzzling a bunch of things that just make us thirstier?

May God give us the kind of desperate, insatiable thirst for the cool, refreshing waters of life; like someone who’s wandered in the desert for two days and comes upon an oasis. May the Spirit wire our hearts with faith, so that it detects in every change and shift in our lives, the need to be filled with the right amount of Living Water!

Sadly, most of the Israelites who drank the miraculous water at Rephidim failed to thirst for the living water of God’s promises, still trying to quench their thirst with the wrong kinds of water. As Paul warns, ***“God was not pleased with most of them; their bodies were scattered over the desert.”*** Compare them to the Samaritan woman at the well. After years of unquenchable thirst and chasing all the wrong kinds of water, when Jesus revealed that he was the Water of Life, what did she do? She ***“left her water jar.”*** She didn’t need any of that other kind of water anymore. She trusted that her every thirst was quenched forever in the love of her Savior, Jesus. And the same is true for you, dear friends. Leave any other water jars, and drink deeply from the water of life, who quenches our thirst, and meets our greatest need.