

Bitter Waters Made Sweet

Exodus 15:22-26, Easter Sunday II

April 26, 2009

Beloved of the Lord..... We all know well what it is like to struggle in our hearts to forgive. All of us, at one time or another have been hurt by the sins of our neighbor, and we often have a hard time letting go of the sin. While we know we should forgive, indeed God commands us to forgive or else, we do not find the strength within to do so. Instead we find bitterness of heart, even dark anger of the soul. So on the one hand we must forgive or we will lose our own salvation, but on the other hand we have no strength to forgive. What do we do? We look to Christ! We see all our Savior has done for us on the tree of the cross! In His forgiveness, by His forgiveness, we find the strength to forgive. In other words, we through Christ always have the strength to forgive for His forgiveness for us grants us the strength to forgive all. In today's lesson then let us see how the bitter waters of life, even the bitterness of our own heart is made sweet, by the tree of the cross. It is Christ, it is He which makes all bitter waters sweet.

I. The bitter waters of life. After the miraculous crossing of the Red Sea, the Israelites rejoiced and gave thanks to God in the Song of Moses. But after only three days of travel through the desert with no water, they bitterly complained when they found the waters of Marah bitter, saltish, even repugnant. Moses, what shall we drink? In a mere three days after seeing perhaps the most glorious miracle of the Bible, the parting of the Red Sea, they now fail to have faith that God will provide? Why didn't they just pray and trust in the Lord? Shouldn't we all fear, love, and trust in God above all things?

Often in our hearts we are bitter toward God, the same as the Israelites in the desert. Something terrible or difficult happens in life, and we experience poverty, disease, or tragedy, and inwardly our complaint is with God. When the heart is bitter, the bitter heart charges God with being unfair, that He has made a mistake, even sinned. Such bitterness leads the heart to say: God, if you love me, why do you allow me to suffer? I do not deserve this tragedy or difficult hardship. You are not being fair with me. Haven't I been faithful to you? Haven't I done all these good things for you? Do you like to see me suffer? Do you take pleasure in my misery? This charge that God is not being fair, is devilish and exceedingly wicked. God is neither the cause nor source of our problems in life, it is our own sin. As for the charge that God is not being fair, God Himself answers this charge in Ezekial 18. To His people God says, "You say the way of the Lord is not equal! Hear now, O house of Israel; Is not my way equal? are not your ways unequal?" God is here saying to all bitter and stubborn

sinners, "Who is the crooked one, you or Me? Who has been unfair, you or Me?" Those who continually blame God for the bitterness of life's journey, are those who have not yet come to grips with their own sin. As God threatened to punish the Israelites with Egyptian diseases if they would not obey His commandments, so He threatens to punish all who break His commandments and refuse to repent. On the other hand, those who realize the bitterness of life's journey is the fruit of their own sin, such will happily receive the free forgiveness of Christ. "I am the Lord that healeth thee."

We need His healing because without it we will find no strength to forgive. By nature we are all quite bitter toward any neighbor who sins against us. It is all too easy to hold a grudge. God therefore warns us of the power of this sin. Ephesians 4 says, "Grieve not the Holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption. Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil speaking, be put away from you, with all malice." In Hebrews 12 we see bitterness can even overthrow our faith. "Make straight paths for your feet, lest that which is lame be turned out of the way; but let it rather be healed. Follow peace with all *men*, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord: Looking diligently lest any man fail of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up trouble *you*, and thereby many be defiled." All Christians should understand that when we are bitter in our heart toward our neighbor, it is because we are not forgiving them as Christ has forgiven us. In James 5 God commands, "Grudge not one against another, brethren, lest ye be condemned: behold, the judge standeth before the door." That is the problem with bitterness, wrath, anger, and holding a grudge.....we pretend to be God, we pretend to be the judge and we quickly condemn our neighbor.

But who is the Judge of all men? Who alone will judge the sins of our neighbor on Judgment Day? Who is it that said, "If ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father which is in heaven forgive your trespasses"? Who alone has power to cast souls to hell or deliver to heaven? Jesus said, "Fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell." The power to judge and the power to condemn belong to God alone. On the Last Day of Judgment, God Himself will cast out of His holy presence all those who refuse to forgive their neighbor their trespasses till seventy times seven. Do we really want our neighbor to spend eternity in torment, when our Savior said, "Love thy neighbor as thyself" and "Love your enemies". Do we really want our neighbor to perish when Christ our Savior earnestly shed His blood on the cross to deliver them from sin? Can the love of Christ be alive and well within our hearts if we continually bear a grudge against our neighbor for whom Christ died? When we consider the passage "Christ died for the ungodly", do we rejoice knowing we are the

ungodly for whom Christ died OR do we consider the "ungodly" just to be our neighbor? Aren't we ungodly too? If we don't consider ourselves to be the ungodly for whom Christ died, can we be saved from the bitterness of sin?

II. By a tree, the bitter waters are made sweet. Dear friends, our problem is this: it is because of our own sin, that the waters before us are bitter. We make the waters of our own life bitter every day by our sins of thought, word, and deed. Moreover when we do not see these waters as sweet, our bitter heart shakes its angry fist at Almighty God and we have the audacity to say, "Lord your ways are not equal!" What should God do with such bitter people? Don't we know what God should do with those who charge THE HOLY GOD with sin?

Here now is what our HOLY GOD has done! He cast a tree into the bitter waters, making them sweet. "The Lord showed [Moses] a tree, which when he had cast into the waters, the waters were made sweet." God commanded Moses to throw a tree into the bitter waters?.....a tree into the bitter waters! This tree made the bitter waters sweet! This TREE made the bitter waters sweet!

Do you see the meaning of this glorious verse, dear Christian? The tree which makes the bitter waters sweet is the tree of the cross, where the Son of God with tender mercies gave His life for the sins of the world. The bitter waters were made sweet when the Living Water came down from heaven and entered into the bitter waters of this earth. It was the sweet love of God, His mercy, His compassion, His grace, which made the water sweet. "God so loved the world." The Son of God the Living Waters entered into the womb of the Virgin Mary, and God was made man. "Behold, God *is* my salvation; I will trust, and not be afraid: for the LORD JEHOVAH *is* my strength and *my* song; he also is become my salvation. Therefore with joy shall ye draw water out of the wells of salvation."

Our Lord earnestly wants us to drink from these wells of salvation. We need this sweet Living Water to live. Can you imagine how thankful the Israelites were, that the bitter waters were made sweet when they had been without water for three days? Weren't they happy to drink the living waters which kept them from dying? In like manner Jesus once said to a Samaritan woman by a well, "Whosoever drinketh of this water shall thirst again: But whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life." We call Christ the Living Water because He gives the living waters of forgiveness to our thirsty soul. To drink of the living waters of Christ is to believe in our heart that He through the cross has forgiven us all sins. To believe in Him is to receive His wonderful gift of

forgiveness by faith. "By Him all that believeth are justified of all things."

With such living water there is perfect healing for the bitterness of sin. "I *am* the LORD that healeth thee." Moreover, when we see the sweetness of His mercy toward us, our bitterness and anger toward our fellow man departs from our heart and there is peace. In the Bible our Savior says, "Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil speaking, be put away from you, with all malice: And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you." When we see His tender mercies by faith, we can almost "see" the bitterness of our heart quietly leave. The Sun of righteousness shines again. Jesus came to this world for one reason, and one reason alone, to bring to us His sweet forgiveness of sins. By a tree, all things bitter are made sweet.

This is true, even concerning our trials in life that are often bitter. He gives them only out of the sweetness of His mercy. If He gives us poverty we are yet rich in grace. If He grants the loss of a loved one, He is yet with us always. If He grants disease, heaven is our cure. If He gives us a cross, He will help us bear it. Let us therefore diligently hearken unto the voice of our Good Shepherd. Let us be faithful sheep that readily obey His commandments, for they are for our own good. "I am the Lord that healeth thee." In His Kingdom of Grace, even the bitter trials of life are made sweet, for we will on our last day enter into heaven. He has made all bitter waters sweet, by the tree of the cross. Therefore continue to travel your short three days in this wilderness and readily drink the sweet and Living Waters your Savior provides. If you drink His living waters by faith, you have a well of water which springs up to everlasting life. Amen.

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