

Series: Types of Christ
Title: The Sweetening Tree
Text: Exodus 15: 23-27
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Natural Israel, natural sons of Abraham are a picture of spiritual Israel—children baptized of God the Holy Spirit into Christ, who have believed on Christ, spiritual sons of Abraham.

Galatians 3: 27: For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ. 28: There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus. 29: And if ye *be* Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.

This book is more than a history of nations. This book is the history of God's grace toward the children he has chosen to save out of this world.

Mere historical facts will feed your head. It is not our head—our intellect—not our ears that need to be tickled—that puffs up, but it never heals. It is our hearts that need to be fed.

So let's get our text down in our hearts this morning. This is God's dealing with his own born-again children. These words describe the merciful, loving, gracious dealing of God toward each of his blood-bought children—you personally called by his grace.

Let me give you a few examples of how natural Israel is a type of spiritual Israel—believers in particular.

- Slaves in Egypt—typifying the spiritual death, bondage of God's elect before they are quickened by the Holy Spirit of God.
- The Passover Lamb was slain in the place of the firstborn of Israel—blood applied by the Head of the house—God passed over when he saw the blood—typical of redemption accomplished by Christ dying in place of his people. Of Christ our Head applying his own blood over his own house. God seeing his blood and passing over his firstborn elect children.
- They were brought out and passed through the Red Sea and were baptized unto Moses—picturing the baptism wherewith the believer is baptized when the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost
- They saw their enemies dead upon the seashore, and sang a song of rejoicing—a type of the believers rejoicing in faith as we behold that all our sins are cast into the sea by the power of Christ.

So you get the picture. We have a picture of a child of God delivered out of bondage, by the blood of Christ, the Spirit of God, into spiritual life. But then immediately a great trial began.

Exodus 15: 22: So Moses brought Israel from the Red sea, and they went out into the wilderness of Shur; and they went three days in the wilderness, and found no water.

Can you imagine being in a desert for three days without water—scorching sun, hot-dry sand. Two million people—men, women, children, cattle—no water to drink. For three days! But then they see water in the distance. Word begins to spread through the camp, “Water!” Excitement. Rejoicing. Finally, they get to the water. But they do not find what they expected.

Exodus 15: 23: And when they came to Marah, they could not drink of the waters of Marah, for they were bitter: therefore the name of it was called Marah.

What a disappointment! What did they do? Three days ago they were singing and rejoicing in the Lord but now what do they do?

Exodus 15: 24: And the people murmured against Moses, saying, What shall we drink?

Can you put yourself in Moses shoes? He is leading 2 million people. They are looking to him to lead them. Now, they all are murmuring against him. But notice what Moses did. Moses did not murmur with them. He did not lead them into further rebellion. Moses did what every child of God must do.

Exodus 15: 25: And he cried unto the LORD;....

Brethren, cry unto the Lord. His hand is not short that he cannot save. His ear is not heavy that he cannot hear. He is God at hand. Nigh thee. Look what the Lord did.

Exodus 15: 25:...and the LORD shewed him a tree, *which* when he had cast into the waters, the waters were made sweet:...

Proposition: If the LORD shows us that tree this morning, if that tree is cast into our bitter waters, they will be made sweet.

Divisions: 1. The bitter waters; 2: Two cries; 3: The Sweetening Tree

Title: The Sweetening Tree

I. MARAH—BITTER WATERS

Exodus 15: 23: And when they came to Marah, they could not drink of the waters of Marah, for they were bitter: therefore the name of it was called Marah.

Often in the life of the believer we think we have come to sweet-water only to find bitter waters.

In our homes. A couple believers fall in love and marry. Excitement! Joy! Then they face various bitter waters in their life together. The excitement of the first child, then another. *Then we try to raise them.* The cares of our household are often bitter waters. All our young lives we wish we were older, but with age the body breaks down. How many of God's people have had to taste the bitter waters of illness and bodily infirmities!

Where we work. Remember the excitement after the first interview. Remember the joy of coming home and announcing, "I got the job!" Remember learning the job, it was all brand new. Remember how thankful you were to have it. Then some bitter disappointment—a bitter load, or a bitter loss. You just wanted to take a long, cool, drink and be satisfied, but the waters turned out bitter.

Where we live. We find where we are to be a dry desert. We set our sights on the waters of a new city or community. From the surface it appears to be a beautiful place, shady streets, nice homes, thriving with life, the solution to all our problems. But we bend down, dip beneath the surface, take a drink and we find bitter waters. Sin is there like it was where we were.

Where we worship. We see here the church in the wilderness. They had plenty of people—that didn't make the waters sweet. They had a faithful man leading them—that didn't make the waters sweet. Here they are before bitter waters.

Illustration: We are like the old cow straining through the fence--the grass is always greener on the other side.

Application: How long we will go after that mirage in the desert? Wherever *you* go there *you* are—the same bitter waters of sin will be wherever *we* are.

Do we really expect Canaan's fruits in the wilderness of Sin? In all worldly rivers we find pond scum mixed with every sip. But what a blessing! God will not let his child find refreshing in these earthly things! Else we would call bitter sweet and sweet bitter.

II. TWO CRIES AT BITTER WATERS

Exodus 15: 24: And the people murmured against Moses, saying, What shall we drink? 25: And he cried unto the LORD...

Old Sin-Man. Bitter waters reveal to us there is yet an old bitter sin-man that is still in the believer. It is not Jewish nature that God shows us to be vanity in this text, it is human nature in its best state.

Psalm 39: 5:...verily every man at his best state is altogether vanity. Selah.

Romans 7: 18: For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh,) dwelleth no good thing: for to will is present with me; but *how* to perform that which is good I find not.

Do we realize we murmur? It may just be thoughts like, "Why should I be dealt with like this? I'm trying to do what is honorable. I'm working hard. Yet, this has happened to me while I see others who seem to thrive in all."

Is our murmuring against God? They murmured against Moses. Are we honest with ourselves that our murmuring is really against God?

Illustration: Someone backs into your car at the parking lot. "The person driving the car. The person who designed the parking lot. The car manufacturer. If it would not have been raining!" But all second causes are ruled by the God of first cause. We murmur against God.

It is a sure indication that the old man of our flesh is talking when we say the problem is someone else's fault. As soon as Adam sinned and "sin entered into the world, and death by sin." Adam blamed God—this woman you gave me. Adam blamed Eve—she gave me to eat **And the people murmured against Moses, saying, What shall we drink?**

It is another sure indication that our old man of sin is talking when the cure to the situation is us. When the lustful spirit is blaming others it is doing this at the same time:

Luke 18: 11: The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, God, I thank thee, that I am not as other men *are*, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican. 12: I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all that I possess.

Application: Let us not make excuse by merely saying, "Well, that is my old sin nature." If we are partakers of the divine nature, give ourselves to lay aside all murmuring and magnify the Lord of the trial. But if the Spirit of God left us in our flesh we see what we are—*murmuring against*.

Intervening Grace. But when God intervenes in grace, there is another cry--the cry of the new man--**25: And he cried unto the LORD.** Grace brings us to cry this cry. The God of all grace gets all the glory for bringing us to make this cry—

Romans 8: 26: Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities: for we know not what we should pray for as we ought: but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered.

Trials do not of themselves bring forth prayer from a believer. Only the God of all grace does that. The Lord pours in "the Spirit of grace and supplications." After the Lord humbles us by making us see our old cold, murmuring body of death then the Lord pours in and draws forth a spirit of prayer from the soul.

Sinners need not only his throne of grace to go to, but we need his grace to ask him. The Mercy Seat will do a sinner no good without mercy to make us approach. We have to be stripped in bitterness, then the Lord answers and blesses.

He that seeks shall find; he that asks shall receive. "To him that knocketh, it shall be opened."

Application: Cry unto the Lord. Approach his throne of grace. What grace to have access! What grace to be drawn to approach him!

III. THE SWEETENING TREE

Exodus 15: 25:...and the LORD shewed him a tree, which when he had cast into the waters, the waters were made sweet:...

The Tree that Sweetens every trial of bitter water is Christ crucified.

1 Peter 2: 24: Who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness: by whose stripes ye were healed.

Galatians 3: 13: Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us: for it is written, Cursed *is* every one that hangeth on a tree:

The LORD says, "I am the LORD that healeth thee". Make the connection between the cursed tree and the healing.

*The Tree Had to Be Cut Down--*In place of his people, Christ drank the bitter waters that caused our curse! (Read Ex 15: 25-26—hearkening, fulfilling, is all of Christ)

2 Corinthians 5: 21: For he hath made him *to be* sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.

Isaiah 51: 22: Thus saith thy Lord the LORD, and thy God *that* pleadeth the cause of his people, Behold, I have taken out of thine hand the cup of trembling, *even* the dregs of the cup of my fury; thou shalt no more drink it again:

Isaiah 53: 5: For he *was* wounded for our transgressions, *he was* bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace *was* upon him; and with his stripes we are healed. (Isa 53:5.)

The sweetening tree for all bitter waters is the tree of life—Christ and him crucified. Atonement made by Christ in our place upon Calvary's tree. Reconciliation to God by his offering for "by one offering He hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified."

The tree was there along. So it is with us. He Jesus Christ is the same, yesterday, today and forever. We have been Sure in our Surety from before the world began. Wrath was put away when he made satisfaction to God on behalf of his elect. Our salvation was accomplished when Christ said "it is finished." Right now we are reconciled, pardoned, accepted, saved--"Who hath saved us, and called us with a holy calling."

Blinded by Bitter Waters. But how blind we become at the bitter waters—this tree had to be "cast into the waters." We have to have the veil taken off by the Spirit turning our hearts to Christ. We need the Spirit to take of the things of Christ, and reveal them to our soul, bring Christ into our hearts sight. The blood must purge our conscious, renew, revive, refresh, heal us—by bringing Christ crucified into our soul, as the tree was cast into the waters. Then by his strength we lay hold of Christ our Sweetening Tree through faith.

When cast into the waters, the water are made sweet.

Proverbs 27: 7: The full soul loatheth an honeycomb; but to the hungry soul every bitter thing is sweet.

When the tree was cast into the waters, then they were made sweet; their bitterness was taken away, and they could be safely drunk. What is this blessed sweetening assurance by Christ crucified?

Romans 8: 34: Who *is* he that condemneth? *It is* Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us. 35 Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? *shall* tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? 36 As it is written, For thy sake we are killed all the day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter. 37 Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us. 38 For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, 39 Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Application:

1. The wilderness is ever presenting to us trial, we cannot find our pleasure in this life as worldly men can. But remember that is God's great mercy to our souls. We would not appreciate his sweat in Gethsemane if we never had to sweat pain! We would never know the sorrow he endured for us in being forsaken of his own friend if our dearest friend never forsook us. We would never know the suffering he encountered from intellectual religious venom if we never suffered something of it ourselves. We would not know anything of his "I thirst", of "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" did we never find ourselves in the dry desert at the bitter waters.

2. Strive against that old murmuring man and cry unto the Lord out of the new heart. He is near. He hears the cry of his child. He is an everpresent help in all our time of need.

3. Remember the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ whereby all is accomplished and our bitter waters are sweetened. "now are we the sons of God". God is satisfied. Christ the tree of life is the healing of bitter water. This is what our Lord is always teaching us. Exodus 15: 25:...I am the LORD that healeth thee.

4. These trials are sweet consolation for a future day: one day when we face that bitter water of death. It won't be sweetened by looking back to a well-spent life or our honors or by our benevolence or by anything

we have done. All these things would only make the water of death more bitter. But the Lord Jesus Christ and his free forgiveness will make even those bitter waters sweet.

One last thing, the Lord is always able to provide plenty of sweet water for each of his children.

Exodus 15: 27: And they came to Elim, where *were* twelve wells of water, and threescore and ten palm trees: and they encamped there by the waters.

Amen!