

THE SONG OF THE WELL

Numbers 21: 16-18

This song was sung by the people of Israel in what were to them exceptional circumstances. They had passed through the wilderness, around Edom and across the Arnon, and entered Moab - a land that was largely uncultivated, but not barren like the wilderness. When they pitched their tents by Arnon they had an abundance of water, but when they moved into the wilderness there was no water to quench their thirst. So it is with us. At one time we are abounding in every good thing, rejoicing "with joy unspeakable and full of glory;" and at other times we discover how great our weakness is; faith is at a very low ebb. and joy seems as though the frost of doubt has nipped its root. But great as the changes of our experience may be and are, our necessities never change.

Whether they found water or not, the people always wanted and needed it. A camp must always have a supply of water or the people will perish for the want of it. So, at all times, and in all places, believers need and want the grace which only their Lord can give them. They do not carry any supplies of grace with them, but are daily dependent upon their God. Although our experiences vary and our necessities remain the same, yet there is something that does not change, namely, the supply which God has provided for our needs. Both on the mountain and in the valley the Lord will provide. If our needs are great, so will be His supply.

I. God's Concern For The Refreshment Of His People.

They were in the wilderness and this was all the more reason for giving them water. God is desirous that we in our desert wanderings through this world should be refreshed.

To these people, who needed water as we greatly need grace, God gave a promise concerning the supply: "The Lord spake unto Moses, Gather the people together and I will give them water."

God's people are never in any plight but what there is a promise to meet that condition. There is not a single lock for which God does not have a key. You shall never be placed in a difficulty which God has not foreseen, and for which His heavenly wisdom has not made adequate provision, or devised a way of escape. The supply which He promised the Israelites was a divine one: "I will give them water." Likewise, the supply of grace that you are to receive in your time of need is a divine one also. You are not to look to man for grace. If you want grace, you must go to God for it. It cannot be found elsewhere.

The promise was not only a divine one, but it was suitable also. "I will give them water." Previously He had given them bread; He had also given them flesh to eat. Water was what they needed just then, and water was what they received. We do not always get that form of

grace which we think we want. We sometimes fancy that we need comfort, when rebuke would be more beneficial to us, so it is the rebuke which we receive and not the comfort. God is not to be dictated to by our whims and wishes.

Observe also, that the supply which we promised was and abundant one. God did not mock the people by giving them just enough to moisten their tongues but not enough to quench their thirst. No child of God shall ever be left to perish for the want of the necessary supplies,

It was also a sure supply. "I will give them water." Oh! the splendor of the Lord's "shalls" and "wills"! They never Fail.

II. Gods Conditions For The Refreshment Of His People.

1. Note the petitions that breathe our need.

"Then Israel sang this song, Spring up, O well." The people had not been singing for years. This song was the spontaneous expression of the joy of the people at being permitted to return to the inspring conditions of earnest and successful toil. There must have been something very depressing about a miraculous sustenance, unconditioned, and almost wholly unattended, by human toil, for forty years. With reference to the physical needs of men, God has never so far as we know, performed a miracle in order to provide for man that which, under God's blessing, he could provide for himself by honest and persistent toil. God performed miracles in the wilderness because of the special conditions and the peculiar needs through which the Israelites were then passing. Had it been possible for them to dig wells and thus obtain water, to sow the fields and reap their harvest, we should not have read of special interventions by which God provided for them bread and water in their journeyings.

In this impulse to dig a well they could hear God say: "When you were in the dry barren wilderness you could not provide water for yourselves, therefore did I by miracle provide for you. But miracle is not a premium on human indolence; it is my way of compensation for human helplessness. Therefore, now that you are in the land of Moab, from which the rushing Arnon -- the first river you have seen since you crossed the sea -- draws its waters so largely, dig deep and intercept some of the springs, and thus provide for yourselves the water you need." They responded with glad hearts, counting the toil an unspeakable privilege. It was a new and glorious experience for them. The great bulk of them had never witnessed the task of digging a well.

2. Note the action that breaks our pride.

"The princes digged the well, the nobles of the peoples digged it, by the direction of the lawgiver, with their staves." Here we see that it was the nobles and the leaders of the people who had to remove the obstacles. In a similar manner Christian leaders must

remove the obstacles in their lives before God's blessings can be received.

If we want to have God's blessings we must not expect to receive them by lying passive. The first blessings of grace come to passive sinners, but when the Lord quickens them and saves them He makes them active. When God intends to bless His people, effort is always esteemed to be honorable. The princes and nobles were not ashamed of work. We should consider it an honor to be permitted to do anything in the service of God. Note that they digged the well with their staves, which were far from first-class tools. We, too, must use what abilities we have. As they digged the well, they felt so certain that the water would come forth that they sang at the work.

III. God's Communication of Refreshment To His People.

The singing of God's people indicated that they were the recipients of inexpressible and inexhaustable blessing. The song was the vehicle of thanksgiving.

"O for a thousand tongues to sing
My great Redeemer's praise,
The glories of my God and King,
The triumphs of His grace.

My gracious Master and My God
Assist me to proclaim,
To spread through all the earth abroad
The honors of Thy name.

Jesus! the name that charms our fears,
That bids our sorrows cease;
'Tis music in the sinner's ears,
'Tis life, and health, and peace.

He breaks the power of canceled sin,
He sets the prisoner free;
His blood can make the foulest clean;
His blood availed for me."

For years these people had not been singing. In this song was the voice of cheerfulness. There was no water, but they were still in good spirits. Supplies were short, but their courage was still great. It is very easy to be cheerful when you have all that heart can wish. It is not difficult for us to remain in good spirits when everything goes just like we want it to go.

Their song was the healthy outburst of joy on the part of a nation over the long-delayed privilege of working out the energy that was in it, and thus doing its part to provide for its daily needs. Moreover their song was the expression of a nation's joy at being permitted to perform at work which would remain a

source of blessing to future generations. The rock which had been struck in the wilderness had quenched miraculously their thirst, but it was a temporary provision only. As soon as the need was over, that special provision was over; but now they were permitted to dig a well, which they could leave behind them as a permanent enrichment of the land through which they now passed. Other thirsty ones in generations to come would quench their thirst there, and bless those who had dug the well.

We can but inadequately realize the tender and sacred associations connected with the wells of the Bible. What value was attached to them; what sacred alliances were formed near them, from which the history of the race derived its subsequent character; and what conversations, so full of tenderness and light, are associated with those sacred spots! To dig a well was to begin a new history and to open up vast possibilities in the social life of the people. These people were conscious of all this. Thus, when at length they dug deep enough to touch a spring, that bubbled up with the freshness of perennial youth, they recognized a new source of blessing, which would not cease when they themselves passed away, but would be a well of water springing up to quench the thirst and brighten the lives of generations yet unborn.

Have you ever felt a joy like that? Is there not a special delight connected with doing a work that will remain here after we have gone as a source of blessing to others? This is one of the great joys of the Christian life. What assurance can compare with that which comes to the Christian preacher or teacher that he is working not only for time but for eternity, that some spring he has touched will go on sending forth its streams so that weary and thirsty people may be refreshed on their journey heavenward. Therefore, the people who sang this song made it easier for others to bear their burdens.

Every joyous worker in the service of Christ makes it easier for others to work and to bear their burdens. Joy in work is very contagious. There are some godly people who will never talk about the cross they have to carry, since every duty has become to them a privilege, and every cross has become to them an object in which to glory. When we are in their presence we feel that we do not have any right to talk about our crosses or burdens, but we have a desire to catch up their song. Let us learn to work with a willing heart and a joyous spirit, and thereby teach others how to work without grumbling.