

5th February 2023

Exodus 17:1-7

Water From the Rock

17 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. ² So they quarrelled with Moses and said, "Give us water to drink."

Moses replied, "Why do you quarrel with me? Why do you put the LORD to the test?"

³ But the people were thirsty for water there, and they grumbled against Moses. They said, "Why did you bring us up out of Egypt to make us and our children and livestock die of thirst?"

⁴ Then Moses cried out to the LORD, "What am I to do with these people? They are almost ready to stone me."

⁵ The LORD answered 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, and go. ⁶ I will stand there before you by the rock at Horeb. Strike the rock, and water will come out of it for the people to drink." So, Moses did this in the sight of the elders of Israel. ⁷ And he called the place Massah and Meribah because the Israelites quarrelled and because they tested the LORD saying, "Is the LORD among us or not?"

Matthew 16:1-12

The Demand for a Sign

16 The Pharisees and Sadducees came to Jesus and tested him by asking him to show them a sign from heaven.

² He replied, "When evening comes, you say, 'It will be fair weather, for the sky is red,' ³ and in the morning, 'Today it will be stormy, for the sky is red and overcast.' You know how to interpret the appearance of the sky, but you cannot interpret the signs of the times. ⁴ A wicked and adulterous generation looks for a sign, but none will be given it except the sign of Jonah." Jesus then left them and went away.

The Yeast of the Pharisees and Sadducees

⁵ When they went across the lake, the disciples forgot to take bread. ⁶ "Be careful," Jesus said to them. "Be on your guard against the yeast of the Pharisees and Sadducees."

⁷ They discussed this among themselves and said, "It is because we didn't bring any bread."

⁸ Aware of their discussion, Jesus asked, "You of little faith, why are you talking among yourselves about having no bread? ⁹ Do you still not understand? Don't you remember the five loaves for the five thousand, and how many basketfuls you gathered? ¹⁰ Or the seven loaves for the four thousand, and how many basketfuls you gathered? ¹¹ How is it you don't understand that I was not talking to you about bread? But be on your guard against the yeast of the Pharisees and Sadducees." ¹² Then they understood that he was not telling them to guard against the yeast used in bread, but against the teaching of the Pharisees and Sadducees.

G'Day Church Family

We're beginning a **series** on **Matthew's Gospel** this morning – continuing where we **left off in June** of last year.

Please have your Bibles in front of you – we'll be looking at both Bible passages.

There's the usual **outline** for you to **take notes** – if that helps you **concentrate**.

Let me ask **God** for His **help** and **guidance** first – let's **pray**...

Intro/Signs

I don't know about you but **I really like signs – especially church signs**

I came across a **sign** outside a **local church recently** that said:

If God is in the co-pilot seat – swap seats

(pause)

God also gives us so many **signs** in His **creation** – if we care to take notice!

Every time I see a rainbow – I'm **reminded** of **God's promise** to Noah after the

flood – that *God would never again send waters to destroy all life* – and God

gave Noah the sign of the rainbow to remind us all of His eternal promises!

Every time I hear thunder or **see lightning** or **see the waves ebbing and flowing**

at the beach – It's a **sign** to me that **God created everything** and it's a **sign of**

God's power over all creation.

God has given us **many other signs** – which we'll **get to shortly**

(pause)

And speaking of signs...

Did anyone notice **our church sign** when they came to church this morning?

(pause)

“If you’re looking for a sign to come to church – you’re looking at it!”

(pause)

In our Bible passages this morning – **signs from God are a big feature**

If we look at our **Old Testament** reading from **Exodus 17:1-7**

[Please turn there now]

No Faith (Exodus 17:1-7 and Matthew 16:1-4)

[Slide 1-Context]

The **context** of the story is that the **Ancient Israelites** are in the **wilderness** – they’ve been rescued by God - from slavery in Egypt – and God has appointed Moses to **lead the Israelites** to the **Promised Land**.

The **Israelites** have already had **many signs from God**.

When they were Egypt – **God sent 10 plagues** to deal with Pharaoh and the Egyptians – **so that Pharaoh would let the Israelites go**.

Those signs were:

- Water in the **Rive Nile** turning to blood
- a plague of **frogs**
- a plague of **lice**
- a plague of **flies,**
- **diseased livestock**
- a plague of **boils**
- a **hailstorm**
- a plague of **locusts**
- a plague of **darkness**

- and finally, the **death of the firstborn.**

With all these plagues – **God protected and preserved the Israelites** – and they were able to leave Egypt.

Then when they left Egypt – **God gave them two signs in the sky** – a cloud to **follow** during the **day** – and a **pillar of fire to follow** at **night** to guide them.

When they got to the Red Sea and couldn't cross it – **God parted the waves so they could cross.**

Even in the previous chapter – **Exodus 16** – **God has just provided them food** in the wilderness – **manna from Heaven** and **quail!**

But here we are in Exodus 17 – **verse 1** – and the **Israelites have no water**

So, they **quarrel with Moses** – v2 – and **demand water**

They get angry with Moses **accusing him of bringing them out of Egypt to die of thirst** – v3.

They are so angry with Moses that **Moses thinks they are ready to stone him to death** – v4

[Slide 2-No Faith-Exodus 17]

Application – The problem is the **Israelites have forgotten all the signs that God has given them along the way.** He's protected them from slavery and death – He's guided them day and night - He's provided food for them in the middle of the dessert. If God has done all that – it **stands to reason that He's going to provide water** – and in fact provide all that they need!

But before we give the Israelites a hard time – **aren't we a bit like the Israelites.**

God gets us through a huge problem or provides a certain need – **but when we're faced with the next challenge or the next need - in our lives** – we forget

all the signs God has given us in the past and we forget all the things God has done for us – and **we forget that He is a God who can be trusted.**

We might even unfairly blame others for the problem we're in – and **get angry with them** – like the Israelites got angry with Moses?

We might even doubt God can help this time or even accuse Him of not caring?

Just like the Israelites **that amounts to having NO FAITH!**

(pause)

But **look** at how gracious God is.

In His grace and mercy – despite the fact that the Israelites have mistreated Moses and despite the fact that they have no faith

Look at v6 – God says: *He will stand before the rock and Moses is to strike the rock – and water will come out for them to drink.*

God doesn't treat the Israelites as they deserve.

And **God doesn't treat us as we deserve.**

We continue to sin and rebel – we doubt Him and blame Him!

But God loved us so much – **He sent Jesus to die for our sins to be forgiven.**

(pause)

The Israelites had no faith – **let us not be like them!**

And speaking of no faith.

[Please turn to our NT passage](#) – from **Matthew 16**

Looking at **verses 1 to 4** to begin with

[Slide 3-Context]

Two groups of people – the **Pharisees and Sadducees** - come to Jesus in verse 1

The **Pharisees** were an **influential religious group** – who followed God's law and the **oral traditions** handed down from previous generations. They **gave equal authority to these oral traditions** as they did to God's Law. They insisted on holy living and were **pedantic in rule-keeping** – sometimes at the expense of lacking compassion – and sometimes finding loopholes in the law to avoid helping people. The **Pharisees** were **popular with the people** – and **prided themselves on their holiness** and **status in the community**. They believed in the **resurrection of the dead**, the **spiritual realm** and **angels** and **demons**.

The **Sadducees** were a **religious** and **political** group – **mostly wealthy and powerful men** – and included chief priests and the **high priest**. They seemed at times to be **more interested in politics than religion** – and often **worked hard to keep on good terms with the Romans ruling Israel**. Because they **spent a lot of time with Roman officials** they didn't relate well to the common people. The **Sadducees** didn't believe in the resurrection of the dead –nor the **spiritual realm** - nor **angels and demons**.

The **two groups were at odds** with each other because of their different standing with the people and their **different beliefs**.

But with Jesus gaining popularity – both groups were **threatened by Him**.

The **Pharisees** – didn't want to lose their popularity and status and power among the people – **if Jesus became more popular than them!**

The **Sadducees** – didn't want their status and relationship with the Romans threatened – if Jesus became so popular the people might rebel against the Romans.

But **there's nothing like a common enemy to bring two opposing groups together.**

So, in v1 – they ask Jesus for a **sign from Heaven**

Why?

Because they were **skeptical about who He really was** – or more accurately they know who He is – **but they don't want to accept it**– so if they could discredit Jesus – **that would be great!**

[Slide 4-No Faith-Matthew 16]

But just like the ancient Israelites – the **Pharisees and Sadducees have already been given signs before.**

- Back in Matthew chapter 9 – **Jesus drove out demons from a man** – but the Pharisees – **said Jesus drove out the demons by the power of the Prince of Demons (Satan)** – 9:34.
- And in Matthew chapter 12 – **when Jesus healed a man's hand on the Sabbath** – the Pharisees and Sadducees were more interested in why Jesus is working on the Sabbath than in Jesus' compassion to heal someone – and **so they decided to plot to kill him** (12:14)
- And again, in Matthew 12 – **when Jesus healed a demon-possessed blind and mute man** – the Pharisees accused Him of doing this in the power of Satan!

- This led them to ask for a sign – just as they are doing here in v1

What the Pharisees demand is a sign from Heaven.

Their traditions – which they put way too much store in – held that a sign on earth could be a counterfeit sign from Satan – they wanted a sign from Heaven (from the sky so to speak).

Jesus' reply in verses 2 and 3 – is that they can work out the weather from the colour of the sky

[When I was growing up, we had the saying “*Red sky at night, shepherds delight; red sky in the morning, shepherds' warning*”

Jesus' point is – the Pharisees and Sadducees can read the weather signs – but they can't read all the signs around them that show who Jesus is. **Because they have NO FAITH** – and have made their mind up - to REJECT Him and IGNORE Him.

It's ironic – **that Jesus IS a sign from Heaven** – **God the Father has sent Him from Heaven** – **and they can't see it – or don't want to see it!**

Jesus calls them wicked and adulterous – because they have NO FAITH and are deliberately ignoring the truth and they are **cheating on God by worshipping their own status and power rather than God** – and following their own man-made rules and traditions rather than believing in God's Son.

So - Jesus' tells them the only sign He will give them

Is the sign of the prophet Jonah – a sign He already gave them in chapter 12!

Now remember the **prophet Jonah went to the Ninevites - to preach repentance** – but because Jonah was reluctant to preach repentance to non-

Israelites – **Jonah spent 3 days and 3 nights in the belly of big fish** – before being coughed up on the beach – to go and preach to the Ninevites.

Jesus is saying to the Pharisees and Sadducees –that **His mission** – is the **same as Jonah’s mission:**

To **preach that people need to repent and turn back to God** – **AND** – that just like Jonah – **Jesus will be swallowed up in the Earth for 3 days and 3 nights** [by dying on a cross]– **and then rise again** [just like Jonah rose again from the big fish] – so that people can be forgiven of their sins by believing He died for their sins = and so that people can have eternal life by believing Jesus rose from the dead.

That’s the **only sign Jesus will give** and the **only sign necessary!**

Jesus leaves them with this sign of Jonah.

But they’re not going to accept it because **they have NO FAITH!**

Application

I wonder if we’re sometimes guilty of asking God for signs and trying to do deals with Him – instead of simply having faith?

Yes - it’s nice when we do receive a sign from God – it’s encouraging – and it confirms God’s promises to us – but we shouldn’t be demanding them!

Little Faith (Matthew 16:5-12)

Jesus leaves the Pharisees and Sadducees **to think about the sign He has given them.**

And Jesus hops into a boat with His disciples in v5

[Slide 5-Little Faith]

He's not dealing with a group who have NO FAITH - like the Pharisees and Sadducees – he's dealing with His disciples who we will see have little faith
 We discover in their haste to go across the lake – the **disciples have forgotten to take any bread.**

Jesus gives them a warning in verse 6 – to be on their ***guard against the “yeast” of the Pharisees and Sadducees.***

The **disciples** misunderstand Jesus' warning.

They think Jesus is talking about bread because they forgot to bring bread with them

But Jesus is making a spiritual point.

Just like a small teaspoon of yeast can permeate the whole batch of bread dough – a small teaspoon of false teaching and thinking by the Pharisees and Sadducees can permeate and corrupt a whole batch of people.

Application For us there's a few lessons here:

– when we sin, it **can lead to further sin and corrupt us entirely** – and when we sin, it can corrupt others too.

– when we read God's Word – **we need to be looking for spiritual meanings** – not just take everything literally

– **We need to pray to God for discernment** – so that when we hear people's teaching and prophecies – **that we check they actually line up with God's Word**

– and not get fooled by any false teaching.

Because the disciples took Jesus' comment about yeast literally – Jesus had to remind them in verses 8 to 10 – that **when He fed the 5000 and 4000 with very**

little resources – there were plenty of leftovers. If Jesus provided for 5000 and 4000 – **can't He provide the disciples a bread roll if they need one!**

Application - But can't we be like that – **we limit what God can do** – we put our own human limitations and boundaries on God – **and forget He can do ANYTHING** – and that **NOTHING is IMPOSSIBLE** for Him.

Notice in v8 – because of the disciples' not understanding what Jesus is saying – **Jesus says they have LITTLE FAITH.**

At least they have FAITH – more than the Pharisees and Sadducees!

Great Faith (John 20:29)

What about us?

How can we move from having LITTLE FAITH – to having GREAT FAITH?

[Slide 6-Heading]

Here's five things:

[Slide 6a]

1. #1 – Remember - God and His Son Jesus have left us **many "signs" in His Word**. Two major signs are - **The CROSS** and the **EMPTY TOMB**

[Slide 6b]

2. #2 - God has left us the **whole revelation of the Bible** – the story of God's dealings with His people; His promises always kept; His prophecies always fulfilled. As we read all this – **it will move our faith from a little faith – to great faith**

[Slide 6c]

3. #3 – As we read God’s Word – **look for spiritual connections and insights.**

Dig deep into His Word. This will strengthen our faith.

[Slide 6c]

4. #4 – **Pray** – **Pray for discernment;** pray that we would not be affected by other people’s skepticism about God and His Son – pray and ask God to help us remember all He has done for us

[Slide 6d]

5. #5 -5th and final thing. When Jesus rose from the dead and appeared to His disciples – the Apostle Thomas was not there – when the other disciples told Thomas they’d seen the risen Jesus – **Thomas doubted** – He said He **wouldn’t believe unless He saw Jesus with his own eyes** – and put his hands in Jesus’ wounds.

Graciously – **Jesus appeared again** – this time Thomas was present – and of course Thomas believed. In fact, Thomas makes a glorious statement about Jesus in John 20:28 – *Thomas said to Jesus “My Lord and my God!”*

But it’s Jesus’ words after this which are important to us – and **I pray His words will increase OUR faith**

In John 20:29 Jesus said to Thomas: *“Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.”*

We are blessed – that we have faith – even though we have not seen Jesus – **WE believe WITHOUT having seen. That is great faith** – I pray we all hang on to that great faith!

Conclusion

[Slide 7-Conclusion]



Let me finish with the **Apostle Paul's encouragement** from 2 Corinthians 5:7

For we live by faith, not by sight

Let's pray...

Heavenly Father, thank you that you sent Jesus – and He has left us the sign of His death on the cross – and the sign of the empty tomb and His resurrection.

Help us to have faith in you in all things.

Help us to faithfully read, study and meditate on your Word.

Help us to always be looking for spiritual meaning and insight as we read your Word.

Help us to continue believing without seeing!

In Jesus Name, Amen.

Benediction

Let me finish we the Apostle Paul's words from 2 Corinthians 4:18 - So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen, since what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.