



After a stirring victory, grumbling and need steal the joy of the Lord's previous provision. The trek in the wilderness begins with a difficult journey and a need for water. This is harsh terrain and what they expected to sustain them was actually a bitter pool of water. A natural object is added to the water at the Lord's direction, which takes away the bitterness making it drinkable. How about our own grumbling and bitterness? It colors our choices and flavors who we are. Do we obey them more than the Lord's direction? The wilderness is a shaping place. Will it be faith or bitterness shaping us and our faith? So too it's the Word of God's provision, the Cross that changes that. Will it change us?

Opening Question:

Have you ever been really thirsty? Not just a little dry or hot, but truly parched with thirst? Describe how you felt when you finally got relief.

Read: Exodus 15:22-27

What insights or questions do you have from this weekend's message or worship service?

Understanding the Story:

After trekking through the desert for three days, loaded down with all their belongings and forced to care for children and livestock on the go, the Israelites become physically desperate for water. Faced with imminent death, the only water they encounter is non-potable. (Most scholars believe that the 'bitter' water at Marah was in fact salt water). After searching and praying for relief for days, it must have seemed like a cruel joke to find a drink that would only increase their thirst. Do you think their reaction (v. 24-25) is warranted? Or, based on the miracles they had already experienced, should they have had more trust?

Who do you think the people are most angry with – Moses or God? What do you think their anger was rooted in?

God could have simply led the Israelites to another source of fresh water. Instead, He chose to transform the water already available. What, if anything, does this say about God's character?

The Jews of Jesus' time would have been very familiar with this story. So what do you imagine they thought when Jesus proclaimed himself to be the "living water?" And does Jesus' claim (John 4: 14) – "No one who drinks the water I give will ever be thirsty again" - take on any new meaning for you?

Living the Story:

Week of January 15 (revised)

It may be easier to recall times when God has completely removed bad things from our lives (pain, sadness, strife, etc.) but can you think of any times when God has taken something poisonous in your life and *transformed* it into something healthy or holy?

What would you say is currently shaping you more, faith or bitterness? Examine some of your most recent responses to hardship or challenge. What seems to be shaping you?

Pray:

Have one person pray Ephesians 3:14-19 over the group as you conclude your time. Pay attention to the phrases that direct our prayers toward lives shaped by faith and the love of God—not hardship or bitterness. May it be said of each one of us that we hold tightly to the power of God that is able to do immeasurably more than we ask or imagine and don't become shaped by our own sense of reality. Try to pray this verse for one another throughout the week as you are apart.