



**BELIEVERS CHAPEL**

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The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

Exodus 17: 1-7

“The Smitten Rock”

TRANSCRIPT

[Prayer] Father, we thank Thee for Thy word and we thank Thee again for the privilege of following the children of Israel as they made their way from the Egypt to the land, and we thank Thee for the lessons that we have learned and will learn as they attempted to follow Thee. We thank Thee for the illustrations of important truth for us today so many hundreds of years later and we remember that these things were examples for us and we pray that we may learn from them and profit from them and grow in the knowledge of Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

We thank Thee for the work that Thou has done in the past with the nation Israel, for the work that Thou has done with the Church of Jesus Christ. And may Lord we be pleasing to Thee in our daily lives as we seek to follow Thee. We ask Thy blessing upon us in this hour.

For Jesus' sake. Amen.

[Message] We are following along and we have now in our study from Egypt, Canaan reached the smitten rock incident in Exodus chapter 17, and so if you have your Bibles, turn to Exodus chapter 17 and that will be our subject for tonight. Remember that in Exodus chapter 16, we have had the chapter on the manna and there God made

provision for the children of Israel as they were to make their way through the wilderness and now in chapter 17, we have the provision for water that was given to them. In a sense, this incident in chapter 17 is the other side of John 3:16. Remember that the Apostle wrote, "For God so loved the world that he gave His only begotten son that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." And so in Exodus chapter 17, we have emphasis upon what we do have now that we have the Lord God.

The authentication of the typology and you no doubt have noticed that what we have been doing is laying a great deal of stress on the illustrative way in which this account speaks to us in the twentieth century is two-fold in its substantiation because the Apostle Paul as we have pointed out more than once in 1 Corinthians Chapter 10 speaks of these incidents in the life of the nation Israel and he calls them in samples. For example in verse 6 of 1 Corinthians 10, we read now these things were our examples to the intent we should not lust after evil things as they also lusted. And then in verse 11 of the same chapter, he says, "Now all these things happen unto them for ensamples and they are written for our admonition upon whom the ends of the world are come." And if your eyes will just rather quickly survey 1 Corinthians chapter 10, you will notice that we have here a reference to the passage through the Red Sea in verse 2 and we are all baptized unto Moses in the cloud and in the sea in the second verse. We have reference to the manna in the third verse and did all eat the same spiritual meat. And then in the fourth verse we have reference to the incident before us tonight and did all drink the same spiritual drink for they drank of that spiritual rock that followed them and that rock was Christ.

So, the authority for finding in the incident before us an illustration of New Testament truth and an illustration of the ministry of the Lord is the Apostle Paul. Many years ago when I first came to know the Lord and got to know Donald Grey Barnhouse quite well, he told an illustration of a woman who came up to him after a meeting in

which he had made reference to the fact that these things were examples and that the Lord Jesus Christ was the rock that followed the children of Israel through the wilderness. And she was very, very unbelieving and didn't see how that could possibly be in the Bible, and so he asked her to turn to 1 Corinthians chapter 10 and just read verse 4.

It was his habit often to just ask people to turn to the text without opening his Bible because he was very familiar with it. He had memorized the New Testament and so he would just say turn to 1 Corinthians chapter 10 and verse 4. And so she turned and she read “And did all drink the same spiritual drink, for they drank of that spiritual rock that followed them and that rock was Christ.” So, it was quite evident that the apostle was authorizing our finding of Christ in these incidents.

And then you probably also remember that the Apostle John in describing the ministry of the Lord Jesus in the seventh chapter of the Gospel of John describes the activities of the Lord at the feast of Tabernacles and the climax of the description is given in verse 37 of John chapter 7, “In the last day that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried saying if any man thirst, let him come unto me and drink. He that believeth on me as the scripture has said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water.”

Now if you remember the ceremony of the Feast of Tabernacles, it involved for seven days, a journey on the part of the priests to the Pool of Siloam where they took a golden pitcher and they filled it with water and they came back with a procession of the priests and they came into the temple area and they went over to the altar of bird offering and there was a funnel there and they poured the water into the funnel because one of the things they celebrated during this week of celebration was this incident in Exodus chapter 17, how God gave them water in the wilderness.

So, that was one of the things they celebrated, and it was at this point evidently that the Lord Jesus stood up on the last day of the feast, it’s called the great day of the feast and said, “If any man thirst, let him come unto me.” Not to the Pool of Siloam, but let him come unto me and drink and “He that believeth on me as the Scripture has said,

out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water." In other words, the Lord Jesus was claiming to be the rock from which had come supernaturally the water that assuaged the thirst of the children of Israel as they went through the land of Egypt.

This text incidentally was one of the major texts in the conversion of David Brainerd who ministered to the Indians in the early days of the United States. In his early life he speaks about the fact that it was this text that the Lord used to show him the freeness of salvation. He wrote, "Mr. Stoddard's book told me to come to Christ, but didn't tell me anything that I could do that would bring me to him." And the he later said, "I was amazed that I had not dropped my own contravenes and complied with this lovely, blessed, and excellent way before," which was to come to the Lord Jesus Christ. As it is said in John chapter 7, "And believe on him and receive from him the benefits of eternal life and specifically of the Holy Spirit" because John goes on to say, "But this speak ye of the spirit which they that believe on Him should receive for the Holy Ghost was not yet given because Jesus was not yet glorified." So, there are two aspects to our salvation. There is the forgiveness of the penalty and guilt and condemnation of sin, but when we are saved there is also the gift of life and the permanent gift of the Holy Spirit who indwells all believers.

So, this text in Exodus chapter 17 illustrates the positive side of our salvation in the provision of water through the wilderness. Now, the problem facing the people is described in the first verse of Exodus chapter 17, "And all the congregation of the children of Israel journeyed from the wilderness of sin after their journeys according to the commandment of the Lord and pitched in Rephidim and there was no water for the people to drink." Now the intensity of this problem might be overlooked, because I don't know how you are, but as far as I'm concerned, I never really have faced thirst in any serious way. Hunger is attended by gnawings and tearings in one organ of the body and I have that. I have been hungry and I have been just dying to eat. But thirst, that is

something else, and if you have ever been thirsty so I am told, thirst possesses the whole being, it mounts to the brain. It's not something that is located in the belly or the stomach, it burns and rages like a fever in the blood. It drains the body of its juices, it causes every nerve to throb with acute suffering; heart and flesh cry out for the boon of water.

It has been remarked that "I have thirst" was the only expression of bodily suffering wrung from our Lord Jesus on the cross. And I guess that is one reason why people when they fast, they still drink water, because it wouldn't be long before they couldn't stand it if they thirsted. So, we can sympathize a little bit with the children of Israel, they didn't have any water and there they were in the wilderness and what is ironic about it is that they were at Rephidim.

Now, Rephidim was a Hebrew word that seems to mean resting places. So, they were at resting places and like so many such places, you can see signs of water all around. Now if you've ever gone out West in the summer time, you see signs of water everywhere. You see all of these washes and places where there were streams in the spring, but there is nothing now except a pool over there that you wouldn't drink the water off. And so everywhere there is evidence that water has been there, which makes it worse, but nevertheless you don't have any. And so, I guess it's very much like Coleridge's ancient mariner who speaks of, "Water, water everywhere, but not a drop to drink".

So, when you travel out West and you see all these washes and canyons you say "There is water there sometime, but no longer there" reminding you of your American history perhaps when you read that and I think it was about 1887, the people who went out west in order to have a new life when the drought of 1887 came, they came back with bumper stickers on their wagons and it was something like -- I have it listed in my notes, maybe I can find it somewhere, yes -- "In God we trusted, in Kansas we busted." So, lack of water is a very serious thing and when we read here there was no water for

the people to drink, you can enter in to, I'm sure, of the feeling of the people there, but think about it now as the perversity of this crowd is described and if you want to enter into the reality of it, just put your name here. Wherefore the people did chide with Moses and said give us water that we may drink.

Now notice what they've already forgotten. They've already forgotten chapter 15 in verse 26 where Moses had said, "If Thou wilt diligently hearken to the voice of the Lord Thy God and will do that which is right in his sight and will give ear to his commandments and keep his statutes, I will put none of these diseases upon Thee, which I have brought upon the Egyptians for I am the Lord that healeth Thee." They have forgotten chapter 6 verse 14 and verse 15, "When dew that lay was going up, behold upon the face of the wilderness there lay a small round thing as small as the hoar frost on the ground. And when the children of the Israel saw it, they said one to another it's manna for they wist not what it was." And Moses said unto them, "This is the bread, which the Lord hath given you to eat."

So, all of these marvelous ways in which the Lord has dealt with them, they have it seems forgotten. Someone has suggested that what they did was something like a little child will occasionally do. When a child gets sick, if you give you him some medicine that he really likes he may want to have the medicine again and so he will feign that he is sick in order to see if you would give him some of that good medicine again. And I couldn't find any medicine that I really liked, Castoria came about as close anything, but when it came to castor oil that was something that I did not want to have. But now so I understand they put all kinds of things in children's medicine in order to make them like it better.

Well maybe they murmured in that sense they were chiding Moses and in effect they were saying let's see if God will do again what he did before. That's what's meant by verse two. And Moses said unto them, "Why charge ye me, wherefore do ye tempt Lord, test the Lord to see if he is really going to do what he has done before." And verse

three reads, “And the people there thirsted there for water and the people murmured against Moses and said wherefore is this that Thou hast brought us up out of Egypt to kill us and our children and our cattle with thirst.” And Moses cried onto the Lord saying, “What shall I do unto this people, they be almost ready to stone me?”

Same old thing, isn’t it? The Lord supplies our needs; we have marvelous experiences, but then when the next occasion comes we find that it seems just as difficult to trust the Lord then as in the preceding incident. It seems that because of the fall, we have such a nature that it's impossible for us to learn lessons from the word of God. These things are told us in order that we in the 20th Century might learn these lessons. Over and over again, we are given illustrations of the faithfulness of God in the midst of the trials of life, but when next one comes after He has delivered us from the preceding one, we have to go through the same old thing again. Now we read in verse five through verse seven of the provision of the Lord. And the Lord said unto Moses, “Go on before the people and take with thee of the elders of Israel and Thy rod where with Thou smotest the river, take in Thine hand and go.” Now, if you remember the rod, this was the rod that Moses had used to strike the river and turn it into blood.

Now if you’ll turn back to chapter 7 and verse 20, we read in one of the signs that Moses performed, “And Moses and Aaron did so as the Lord commanded and he lifted up the rod and smote the waters that were in the river in the sight of Pharaoh, and in the sight of his servants; and all the waters that were in the river were turned into blood.” So, the rod and the smiting of the rod is illustrative of Divine judgment. Further, Moses is told in verse six, “Behold I will stand before thee there upon the rock at Horeb and Thou shalt smite the rock and there shall come water out of it that the people may drink.” And Moses did so in the sight of the elders of the people. So, at the rock, the Lord is present.

In fact in the Hebrew text, it's almost as if the language supports the idea of the Lord in the rock so that the smiting of the rock is even more illustrative of the ultimate smiting of the Lord Jesus on Calvary’s cross. And the rock is said here, the rock in Horeb.

You might wonder how it is that they would find the rock in Horeb because they haven't been this way up to this point. But either this was a very well known rock or since Moses remember had been a shepherd here for 40 years, then of course he would have known what was meant by the expression the rock in Horeb. So, that's the historical background.

Now the typical significance of remember our passage in 1 Corinthians chapter 10, "And the rock was Christ." And remember also Paul's words, "All these things happened unto them for ensamples." So, first of all, think of the thirsting people, the needy people and there are ones also who speak of the fact that wherefore is this; thou hast brought us up out of Egypt to kill us and our children and our cattle with thirst. And so of course, the needy people and the thirsting people and those who feel that they are reaching the end of their days is an illustration of the needs of all people before the Lord God.

And the smitten rock that follows in the sixth verse is I think anyone who reads this with spiritual understanding is a reference to the Lord Jesus Christ and his crucifixion because as Paul says, "The rock was Christ" and also Moses is said to smite the rock and Thou shall smite the rock. Now that was an act that is illustrative of judgment and the fact that this rock was the same rock -- or the same rod that turned the river into blood suggests also the act of judgment, and suggests also the judgment upon the Lord Jesus Christ which brought the blood that brings the forgiveness of sins.

If you'll turn over to as Isaiah chapter 53 and verse four, you know that familiar passage in which he has spoken of as having been smitten. In verse four of Isaiah 53, "Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows, yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God and afflicted." Now historically, the Lord Jesus was smitten on the cross at Calvary. And on the cross at Calvary in John chapter 19 and verse 34, John describes this in this way, "But one of the soldiers with a spear pierced his side and forthwith there came out blood and water."

Now if you wanted to develop the typology of this, the illustrative feature of it, you might even think of Moses as the representative of the law because it's Moses to whom the law was given and who is spoken of, of course, as the lawgiver. And so in taking the rod which turned the Nile River into blood and smiting the rock, which are a reference of the Lord Jesus Christ, this it seems to me is illustrative of the divine judgment that is poured out upon the Lord Jesus, because he is burying the penalty of the broken law for sinners. And when the judgment falls upon him, he of course, sheds his blood in the payment of the penalty that is due the Lord God's holiness and righteousness and judgment.

In fact, you may remember that one of the last words that our Lord spoke before his cross was his reference in Matthew chapter 26 and verse 31 to his smiting. Matthew chapter 26 and verse 31 just before our Lord is crucified we read these words. Matthew 26:31, "Then Jesus saith unto them, all ye shall be offended because of me this night, for it is written I will smite the shepherd and the sheep of the flock shall be scattered abroad." So, the thought of taking the rod and smiting the rock is I think a beautiful illustration of the Lord Jesus burying the divine judgment for sin, in fact burying the penalty that comes from the broken law by sinners.

Now we often sing the hymn, Oh Christ what burdens bowed Thy head. Here are a couple of stanzas. "Oh Christ what burdens bowed Thy head, our load was laid on Thee, Thou stoodest in the sinner's stead bearest all my ill for me, a victim led Thy blood was shed, now there is no load for me. Jehovah bared his sword awake, Oh Christ it woke against Thee, Thy blood the flaming blade must slake, Thy heart its sheath must be. All for my sake, my peace to make, now sleeps that sword for me." So, smite the shepherd, and that I think is marvelously illustrated by this.

Now in verse six we read, "And Moses did so in the sight of the Lord, and God had told Moses there shall come water out of it that the people may drink." That I think

John testifies to as being illustrative of the coming of the Holy Spirit. Remember, John 7 and verse 39 where John writes an interpreting what happened or what our Lord meant by his words says, "But this speak ye of the Spirit, which they that believe on him should receive for the Holy Ghost was not yet given because the Jesus was not yet glorified." And so the water is flowing out, which our Lord said are representative at Him, for He is the rock, are illustrative of the presence of life and the Spirit.

Now that's interesting that because Exodus 16 and Exodus 17 are chapters in which we have unfolded the manna and then the smitten rock and the water and if you will go back and read John chapter 6. In John chapter 6, we have the feeding of the five thousand and then the sermon on the bread of life. And in John chapter 7, we have our Lord standing at the Feast of Tabernacles and the water being poured out and then our Lord saying, "I am the rock." So, it seems likely to me that the Apostle John in writing his Book of John as he thought about the things in the past made the connection too and saw our Lord as the manna, the true manna, that came down from heaven and also saw Him as the water that came from the smitten rock and identified that with the life that comes from the permanent indwelling of the Holy Spirit. Something that Old Testament saints did not enjoy.

Now, let's for a few final thoughts regarding the nature of this remedy that the Lord God provided for the children of the Israel and I think we'll see further illustration of the spiritual truth. First of all, this was not a human remedy, it was a supernatural remedy. In fact, the Lord didn't say to Moses, now Moses tell them to forget all about the thirst that they're feeling. He didn't say, develop some new purposes in life. He didn't say what you need is a new ritual and if you'll go through a new ritual, some things will happen for you. He didn't say improve your mind. He didn't say, really take a look into what makes for an integrated personality and if you have an integrated personality you will find that you won't care about the thirst. No, none of that is the recommendation, no recommendation of enjoying the pleasures of life or enjoying the riches of life or getting

education or religion. They needed something more fundamental than all of those things that people some how or another think that we really need. We need something more fundamental, we need the forgiveness of the sins, we need deliverance from the penalty and guilt of our condemnation, we need deliverance from ultimate hellfire. All of the attempts to in a sense paper over human need are ways by which ultimately we deny important trues in the word of God.

Certainly, we live in 1985 and people don't like to hear about Divine judgment. In fact, if someone is said to be preacher of hellfire and damnation, that's a very poor recommendation for a preacher in 1985. But let me tell you the apostles don't think that is so and our Lord certainly doesn't think it so because out of the 13 times or so that hellfire is mentioned in the New Testament you may remember our Lord is the one who mentioned it every time, but one. In other words it's almost as if God has put Gehenna or hellfire on the lips of our Lord to just be the thwarting of the kind of criticism that one hears in the 20th century. So, this was not a human remedy, this was something that was given by God, it was a divine remedy.

It's like Isaiah chapter 45 and verse two, “Look unto me and be ye saved all the ends of the earth.” The fundamental biblical truth is that salvation is of the Lord. Notice too it was on the basis of grace. These people didn't deserve any water at all. The Lord has been marvelous to them, He has been marvelously gracious to them, He has provided for them, He has delivered them from the Egyptians, what more could the Lord God have done. They certainly didn't deserve any grace, but that's what they get, Grace from God. Who everyone that thirsteth, come ye to the waters and he that hath no money; come, buy and eat. Yea come, buy wine and milk without money and without price. That's the way the Lord God deals with us. And it was miraculous, too.

In 1 Timothy chapter 3 and verse 16 discussing the work of the Lord Jesus, Paul begins by saying, “Great is the mystery of godliness.” And right here there is a mystery. Moses, I want you to go the rock in Horeb and take that rod that you smote the river with

and just smite that rock. That was a ridiculous kind of remedy, wasn't it? We need water, we don't need broken rocks. In fact, one would think perhaps that the rod would be broken by striking the rock. So, it's a miraculous kind of remedy and the way the Lord God meets the needs of the children of God is miraculous. It is also of course, a real remedy. The children of Israel thought it was so real that they celebrated this event in the time of our Lord. It was real to them. The giving of the manna was real, the giving of the water was real; it was an authenticated miracle of the Lord God.

It suggests Peter's words. "We've not followed cunningly devised fables when we made known to you the things that happened on the Mount." It suggests the words that Luke, the historian of the Christian church, wrote in Acts chapter 1 and verse 3 when he talks about the infallible proofs by which the Lord God has showed himself alive after his passion. There is an authenticated memory of the things that had happened to the children of Israel and it was a sufficient remedy for their need. There came water out of it.

I'd like for you to look in the Book of the Psalms for a moment and note how they described it. Psalm 78 and verse 20. As they looked back on their past history, this is what the psalmist in Psalm 78 and verse 20 says about the smiting of the rock. Verse 20, "Behold he smote the rock that the waters gushed out and the streams overflowed". Can he give bread also? Can he provide flesh for his people. Then turn over to Psalm 105 and verse 41, this was something that was very big for them and here in this magnificent Psalm going back over the past again. We read in verse 40, "The people ask and He brought quails and satisfied them with bread from Heaven, He opened the rock and the waters gushed out, they ran in the dry places like a river." So, it was sufficient for them, a provision that the Lord God had made for them.

May I make an application to you? If you are a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ and you have the eternal life that comes from Him, and you enjoy the possession of the Holy Spirit as an indwelling presence, is not that sufficient for you? Is He not sufficient

for you in the experiences of life? Are not your needs satisfied by what the Lord God does for you? Has he not said in effect that just as I provided for the children of Israel and their disobedience and rebellion against me, so I am able to do for you and will do for you. And particularly when you think of the difference between their provision and ours by virtue of the fact that Calvary has intervened. Our blessings are so much better, so much more remarkable, so much more wonderful than a pillar of cloud and a pillar of fire and water flowing out of a rock and a rock that followed them in the wilderness. I'd like to know whether that was really a rock or whether that simply means that He was there whenever they needed water for them to have.

And then one final thing you will notice in the sixth verse, it says, "And Moses did so in the sight of the elders of Israel and the people drank." Now that reminds me of the fact that the provision of the Lord God is for all freely. In fact in Revelation 22 and verse 17, these are the words that we read. Revelation 22 and verse 17 says, "And the Spirit in the bread say come and let him that heareth say come and let him that is athirst come and whosoever will, let him take of the water of life freely, let him take of the water of life freely."

This was one of the famous texts of James Chalmers, a great Scottish missionary, "Let him take of the water of life freely. It is sufficient for all." Now you know of course, you know that I am a Calvinist, but the Scriptures teach that our Lord's provision of life is sufficient for all. And if we are truly following the word of God and truly believing in divine grace, we believe it is sufficient for all and so we invite all to participate. And speaking to a group, largely a Christian group, I can tell because you have that look about you, his provisions are sufficient for all of our needs too. I know that someone may say, but I do have difficulty understanding all on this. Well, when they partook of the manna, they didn't understand about the manna either, but they partook of it and they were satisfied. And they surely didn't understand where that water came from. As far as defining it is concerned, as far as explaining it is concerned; they couldn't give any

scientific explanation of how that water came out of the rock, but nevertheless they partook of it and they learned a great deal more about the provision of the Lord God after they had obeyed and had partaken of the manna and then of the water.

In fact, Paul in 1 Timothy chapter 2 and verse 4 says that “The way we come to understand things is through the partaking; who will have all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.” So, the knowledge of the truth comes after we have come to be saved. Now we have to know some truth before we come, but when we come, we enter into the school of learning the truth of the Lord God. It may have seemed to them very, very foolish to think that food would come down from Heaven and that a person could get water out of a rock. Someone has said this is as sensible as saying that you will drink no more milk, because it’s incomprehensible to you how a black cow can eat green grass and give white milk that makes stronger your red blood corpuscles.

Well, we learn from the experience and we learn through the experience of participation from the provisions that are made for us by the Lord God. Isn't that a magnificent illustration? Moses, taking the rod, smiting the rock, suggestive of divine judgment, divine judgment upon the Son of God, he was the rock, and out of the rock coming the water that they needed, which John identifies as the permanently indwelling Holy Spirit. It is true, for God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten son that whosoever believeth in him should not perish. We are delivered from certain negative things, but also that we might have everlasting life. In other words, have positively the life that God gives supernaturally in ways that we don't understand, but nevertheless may be the experience of every one of us. May the Lord help us to truly respond in faith to his word, and in the experiences of life learn to trust him and experience his deliverances. Let's bow together in word of prayer.

[Prayer] Father we are grateful to Thee for these ancient, simple, but important lessons of spiritual life. We thank Thee for the Rock that was smitten, the Shepherd who

was smitten, that we might have life. And we thank Thee for the daily experiences of divine blessing, the food of the word of God of which we might partake each day, the permanent presence of the Holy Spirit to whom we may turn for guidance and direction, and all of the experiences of life.

And we thank Thee Lord for the privilege of representing him who loved us and gave himself for us, of representing that gracious relationship that the people of God enjoy. And we pray Lord that Thou wilt as Thou didst desire Israel to be witnesses unto Thee, we might be witnesses of Thy grace. In the society in which we play a part, give us boldness, give us courage, and Lord if it should please Thee, give us fruit.

For Jesus’ sake. Amen.