

GOD IS KEEPING HIS PROMISES BECAUSE HE IS WITH HIS PEOPLE

Exodus 17:1-16

Please review this week's catechism question.

INTRODUCTION

Who would you want to be with you in the following circumstances and why?

- Your car broken down at night on a dark country road
- Celebrating your birthday
- Your child taken into emergency surgery with severe stomach pain
- Your first performance with the orchestra after being accepted

It would be safe to say that most people don't want to be alone all the time. All of us want others with us on a fairly regular basis. This is especially true during the crisis moments and the joyful moments of our lives. We need others present for strength and help and to share in our joy. The core of the good news of the Bible is that the greatest person in the universe, God himself, promises to be with his people. Beginning in the OT with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and coming to climax in the person of Jesus, God promises to be with his people. In fact, the final words of Jesus prior to ascending to the right of the Father were, "And surely I am with you always to the very end of the age." This is the astonishing good news of the whole Bible. The God whom we have ignored and despised since Adam and Eve took and ate the fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil has made a way for he and us to live together. He is with us, his church, to do us good, always. That is what this chapter seeks to emphasize and to describe. God is with us and because he is with us, certain things are true. God acts in certain ways and wants us to respond to his actions in certain ways because he has chosen to be our God and to make us his people.

STUDY

1. Summarize how God has shown Israel that he is with them from the beginning of Exodus through 17:1.

He sent Moses to lead them out of Egypt. He proved that he was with them by sending the ten plagues against Egypt and forcing Pharaoh to let them go. He passed over their blood stained homes and did not kill their firstborn sons. He destroyed Pharaoh's army in the Red Sea but brought Israel safely across. He made the bitter water sweet at Marah. He fed the entire nation with a supper of roast quail while they camped in the Desert of Sin. He daily manifests his presence by sending manna every morning and by appearing in the pillar of cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night. He is personally and visibly leading them through the desert.

2. How do the Israelites respond when God leads them to Rephidim where there is no water (vv. 1-7)? (Note: the word translated "quarrel" in the NIV is most often used with the meaning, "to file a lawsuit against" or "to contend with someone over property or other legal rights." See Genesis 26:20-22, Exodus 23:2-6.)

They demand that he give them water as their legal right. They are so angry that there is no water that they are on the verge of killing Moses. When do people bring a lawsuit? When they believe that another person has deprived them of something that belongs to them or when someone has harmed them through intentional action or negligence. The people act as though Moses/God owes them water. They have a right to water and Moses has an obligation to give it to them. They are testing God to find out, "Is God among us or not?" Essentially they are saying to God, "put up or shut up." They are demanding that he prove that he is really with them by giving them what they have a right to have, water. Moses names this place Massah and Meribah. These are the two Hebrew words for testing and quarreling. They are doing two things here. First, they claim to have a right to water. It is their legal right to drink and so they bring a lawsuit against God claiming that he is not dealing with them justly. Second, they demand that God prove that he is with them, that he loves them, that he is powerful, by giving them what they demand. They test him, requiring him to prove his presence by providing water, now.

3. Have you ever questioned God's presence, power and/or love when some difficulty has come into your life?

4. Are the people of Israel justified in their angry demands? Why or why not?

Absolutely not. God has showered them with kindness and has proven that he is with them and will care for them. He leads them and promises to bring them safely to the land of Canaan.

5. What does their anger and their demands reveal about them?

Their anger reveals what their heart loves and it is not God or goodness. They are not grateful for all that God has done. They do not believe his promises. They do not care about him. The only thing that fills their vision is the need they have and how unjust it is that they do not have water to drink. They demand that God prove his love, his presence and his power by doing what they want, immediately.

6. What does our anger reveal about us?

Anger is an infallible diagnostic tool. It reveals the condition of your soul. When we feel anger or frustration it is because something we believe we must have to be happy is being taken or kept from us. Anger is the emotion we experience when we believe our rights have been trampled upon, when we have been treated unfairly. When something we believe we must have is not provided our rage boils over. We demand our rights. We demand that God and others prove they love us by meeting our needs. "It's not fair." "I don't deserve to be treated like this." When you are angry you reveal what your heart really loves, what you truly believe you must have to be happy. When you are angry, with few exceptions, you are bringing a lawsuit against God and testing him, requiring him to prove he is real and he loves you.

7. How does God respond to the angry demands of Israel?

Look at the grace of God that now follows. He does not mention the unbelieving, unjust, cruelty of the Israelites. He does not reprimand Moses for his whining. He tells Moses to go out ahead of the Israelites, taking with him the staff of God and a few of the elders of Israel. He is to go out to the large rock at Horeb. God will meet him there, presumably in the pillar of cloud and stand by the rock. Moses is to take the staff and strike the rock and water will immediately begin to flow, forming a vibrant, crystal clear, gushing river into the camp of Israel. So God graciously provides for Israel in spite of their unbelief and demanding that he prove himself once again.

8. In 1 Corinthians 10:4 Paul says that this rock is Christ. What does the provision of water from this rock tell us about the person and work of Christ?

Just as the NT tells us that the bread from heaven (manna) is Christ so it tells us that the rock from which water flows is Christ. We see here in this provision of water that God provides for his church, through Christ, the living water that we must have if we are going to gain eternal life. Jesus says this in John 7:37-39, that the Holy Spirit is the living water that he gives to everyone who believes in him. God's kindness is not a response to human goodness or human faith. God is kind and gracious prior to any goodness in humans. The point is that Christ is not given for us and the Holy Spirit is not sent to us because of who we are but because of who God is. God's plan to save us did not begin with God seeing something good in us. He gives Christ as a Savior, who gives the Holy Spirit to his people, by grace, not by works. We are recipients of the greatest gift that can be given in spite of who we are. God has come to us and lives with us because he has given Christ for us. God is with us by his Spirit whom he has poured out from Christ as the river of water gushed from that rock for Israel.

9. If the pleasures of life and the salvation of Christ were given to you in proportion to your love for God and others, what would your life be like, would you ever be saved?

If you are honest, you know that if God were dealing with you in proportion to your love for him, you would be living in worse conditions than the refugees in Sudan. God is not dealing with any living human being as their sins deserve. He gives all men life and breath and everything else irrespective of how "good" we are. The fact of the matter is that all of us have been given far more than we deserve. We all deserve what we know that Israel deserves, eternal suffering, because we have all treated God just like Israel is treating God.

God is vitally connected to and identifies himself with the church therefore He graciously provides what we need, the living water of Christ who is the Holy Spirit.

10. Describe what happens when the Amalekites attack Israel at Rephidim.

Moses instructs Joshua to gather a few chosen men and go out to fight against Amalek. Then he goes to the top of the hill overlooking the battle with Aaron his brother and another guy named Hur. On the top of the hill Moses holds up his hands with the staff of God in his hand. As long as he holds up his hands, Israel is winning the battle but when he puts his hands down due to fatigue, the Amalekites are winning. So, Aaron and Hur roll a large boulder to the edge of the hill for Moses to sit upon and then they each hold up one of his hands with the staff in it. His hands then remain raised up with the staff in them until the sun goes down. Therefore, Israel overcomes Amalek and defeats them.

11. What is the point of this little story? Clue: What has happened prior to this every time Moses has stretched out his hand with the staff of God in it (7:19, 8:5, 9:22, 10:22, 14:16, 21, etc.)?

Whenever Moses stretches out his hand with the staff in it, God acts. Many commentators make this a story about the power of prayer. However, we are not told that Moses was praying. Rather, we see here that as long as Moses holds up the staff of God, Israel is winning but when he takes it down, Israel loses. We know that the staff is the visible symbol of God's power. The staff has no power in it. It is simply the symbol of God's power. What we have in this story is an incredibly clear picture of the fact that God's work is the important work, not human work. Yes Israel has to go out into battle and fight. But their success does not depend upon their strength or ability. Their success and their failure is due entirely to God's presence and his work. The power is not in Moses. He does not have the strength to hold up the staff of God. He himself needs help to do his part. The whole point of this story is to show that while God's people have work to do, we must fight, we must hold up the staff of God, yet the success of the work is entirely dependent upon God.

12. How do the following verses teach the same thing?

- Psalm 33: 16-18
- Psalm 127:1-2
- Proverbs 21:31
- John 15:5
- 1 Corinthians 4:7
- 1 Corinthians 15:10
- Philippians 2:12-13

We must work, but our work is only fruitful because God is working through it. All we have comes from God's working through our work.

13. Read Psalm 90:16-17, Col. 3:23 and 1 Peter 4:11. What do these passages tell us about how we should go about our work in light of the fact that God's work is what matters?

We should ask God to make our work effective. We should consciously do all of work as if we were working for the Lord, not men, because we are working for the Lord. We should consciously depend upon the Lord's work to make our work effective.

14. What difference would it make in your life to work as if God is working through your work?

God is vitally connected to and identifies himself with the church therefore he works through our work.

15. This is the first time that Joshua is mentioned. Who is he? See Exodus 24:13, & Num 27: 12-23.

Joshua is Moses' apprentice. He has been his aide since youth and has experienced all that Moses has experienced. He went up Mt. Sinai with Moses when he received the law and met the Lord, "face to face" with Moses in the tent of meeting. He was the man appointed by the Lord to lead Israel after Moses died. He was the general who led Israel in her wars against the Canaanites.

16. Why would the Lord want an account of this battle written down and regularly read to Joshua?

He wants Joshua to remember that while he must fight, God is the one who fights for him. He will be successful in carrying out the Lord's battles because the Lord will make him successful. In short, this written account is given for the purpose of building Joshua's faith. God wants Joshua to live, to fight by faith. He wants him to go into battle because he knows the Lord goes with him and will fight for him.

17. How is the purpose of this written account in Joshua's life the same purpose God's written word is to serve in our lives? See Matthew 4:8 & Rom. 10:17.

This is the reason God has given us a written record of his works from the beginning of creation. The written word of God is given to us for the purpose of building and strengthening our faith. If you want a reason to read the Bible personally and to show up in church and go to Bible studies, this is it. The Bible is the "food" which sustains our spiritual life.

18. What do you need to begin doing in order to get God's word into your life with greater regularity?

19. Why does Moses build an altar? What does this point to in our lives?

He does it to offer thanks to the Lord for the victory he gave them over the Amalekites. This is the logical response we are to have to the good that comes from our work. If our work produces any good, it is only because the Lord has worked through our work. Therefore, he is to be praised for all the good fruit, the good results that come from our work. We don't get the credit, God does. Christian people are to be thankful people because we know that the Lord is with us and he is working on our behalf, all the time. That is why we thank God for food, clothing, shelter, paychecks, jobs, our desire to know him, the desire of our children to know him, salvation, etc. He is the author of all the good that is in our lives, not us.

20. A banner is the flag that accompanies kings and their armies into battle. What does it mean for Moses to say, "The Lord is my banner?"

He is stating what the source of his joy and gratitude is. When a king marched onto the battlefield he was preceded by his banner. It symbolized his power. God himself is the banner of the church. God doesn't send something else to represent his people, he goes before his people as the symbol and the substance of their ability. God is completely identified with his people. He is what marks them and sets them off as distinct on the field of the world. God is what makes us great. This is what causes Moses to give thanks. Remember v. 7? Israel asks, "Is the Lord with us or not?" Moses answers, "Are you kidding? The Lord is our Banner. He goes before us and marks us off as his own people. To see us is to see God, who goes before us as our battle flag."

21. The ESV has the literal translation of the first part of v. 16: "A hand upon the throne of God." Whose hand is on the throne of God and how does that fact relate to God's eternal opposition to Amalek?

He means that when Amalek attacked Israel he was laying his hand on God's throne. To attack the people of God is to attack God, the place where God rules. That is why God has pledged that he will be at war against Amalek from generation to generation until he wipes Amalek off the face of the earth. We see here God's eternal hostility against those who oppose him and his people.

22. How do Matthew 25:40-46, Phil. 1:29 and 2 Thess. 1:6 show the eternal nature of God's hostility to those who harm or refuse to assist his church?

Those who oppose Christ's church and bring harm to it are opposing God and will be destroyed by God, just like Amalek. It is a dangerous thing to oppose local churches and to criticize or seek to harm Christians.

23. What difference should it make in our lives to know that those who seek to harm or oppose Christ's church are attacking Christ and therefore will be opposed by Christ unless they repent, like Paul did?

All of us ought to take this very serious as we relate to other Christians and are involved with the church of Jesus. To bring harm to Jesus' church by dissension, gossip, false teaching, sinful behavior or persecution is to attack Christ himself and that is not something you want to be doing. That does not mean we cannot question one another or our leadership. We must make sure that we are doing all we can to support and encourage the health and holiness of not only our church but all other churches that are faithful to the gospel of Christ. If you love Christ, then you love his church as it is expressed in a local church because the Lord is our Banner.

God is vitally connected to and identifies himself with the church therefore he wants us to trust, thank and fear him.