

The Bitter Waters Sweetened

by J.C. Philpot

The sermon explores the spiritual significance of the bitter waters of Marah, highlighting the embittering effect of sin and sorrow on all aspects of life, and the importance of prayer and submission in times of affliction.

Scripture: Exodus 15:23, Psalm 30:5, Psalm 34:17, Isaiah 53:5, Romans 8:28, 1 Corinthians 1:18, Hebrews 12:11, James 5:16, 1 Peter 2:24

Topics: "The Cross", "Spiritual Comfort"

Description

J.C. Philpot preaches about the bitter waters of Marah experienced by the children of Israel, likening them to the disappointments, sorrows, and embittered circumstances in our lives caused by sin. He emphasizes the need for a revelation of the cross of Jesus Christ to sweeten these bitter waters, bringing healing and comfort to our souls. Philpot highlights the importance of turning to God in prayer, like Moses did, when faced with trials and bitterness, and how crying out to the Lord leads to the discovery of the tree of life, the cross of Christ, which brings sweetness and sanctification to our daily struggles and sorrows.

Transcript

Preached at Providence Chapel, London, on July 28, 1850, by J. C. Philpot

"And when they came to Marah, they could not drink of the waters of Marah, for they were bitter; therefore the name of it was called Marah. And the people murmured against Moses, saying, what shall we drink? And he cried unto the Lord; and the Lord showed him a tree, which when he had cast into the waters, the waters were made sweet." Exodus 15:23-25

The children of Israel, after the flesh, were a 'typical' people; and therefore the dealings of God with them were typical and figurative of His dealings with the spiritual Israel. When we see this, and read the Old Testament Scriptures with an enlightened eye, what beauty does it add to the sacred page! We read these records then, not as so many historical documents, but as descriptive of the children of God, and of His mercy, love and grace towards them. And thus their experience becomes brought home to our own heart and our own bosom. We can see in them our own features, and read in the dealings of God with them the dealings of God with our own souls now.

I need not run through the history of the children of Israel to prove this. Every step they took is, more or less, a proof that the Lord dealt with them outwardly as He deals with his spiritual Israel inwardly. Their state, for instance, in Egypt typified the death and darkness of the people of God before they are

quicken by the blessed Spirit. The Paschal Lamb of which they partook, and the blood sprinkled upon the lintel and sideposts, showed forth the redemption of Christ, and the application of His precious blood to the conscience. The passing through the Red Sea signifies the baptism with which they are baptized, when the love of God is shed abroad in their hearts by the Holy Spirit; and their seeing their enemies dead upon the seashore, signifies the rejoicing of a child of God at finding his sins cast into the sea, and overthrown into dead carcasses by the mighty power of Christ.

But we come now to a strange passage in their history. They little expected, as we should little expect, that so heavy a trial would come immediately upon the back of this astonishing deliverance. And what was this trial? "They went three days in the wilderness, and found no water." In this humid climate, we can scarcely conceive what a privation this must have been. But we would not like even in this wet climate, and at this dripping season, to be without water for three days. No water to drink, no water to wash with! But look at this vast multitude, amounting to two million, wandering in a barren desert, with a scorching sun above and parched sands beneath; men, women, children, cattle, languishing, and all but for dying of thirst! And this for three days!

One can scarcely conceive what a privation, what a scene of horror it must have been. But, at the end of three days, water is discovered. They catch a glimpse of palm trees in the wilderness, and perhaps see the glimmering of streams beneath them. You may well conceive what joy would fill the camp. We may well imagine what a universal shout of exultation there would be. What hurrying on to partake of the waters that glistened before their eye in the distance? But alas! when they came there, a further disappointment awaited them. "They came to Marah, and they could not drink of the waters of Marah." Though for three days they had been without water and were dying from thirst, yet when they came to these waters, they were so bitter and brackish, that absolutely they could not drink! What a blow! what a stroke upon stroke! This was indeed striking the dying dead. This was indeed adding grief to their sorrow and heaping calamity upon calamity.

Well, what did they do? What you and I no doubt would have done. They murmured and rebelled, and cried out against Moses for bringing them out of Egypt, with its beautiful Nile, and leading them into this wilderness, where for three days they had no water; and when they came to water, it was so bitter they could not drink. And what did Moses do? Did he join with them? Did he encourage their murmuring, or take part in their rebellion? No; he did what he ever did, and what every child of God must sooner or later do--he "cried unto the Lord." And did he "cry" in vain? Was the Lord a "God afar off, and not at hand?" Was His hand shortened that it could not save, or His ear heavy that it could not hear? No! The same almighty arm that had brought them through the Red Sea found a way of escape. "The Lord showed him a tree, which when he had cast into the waters, the waters were made sweet."

Now, upon this foundation I shall, with God's blessing, endeavor to raise a spiritual building. Four things seem to strike my mind as connected with, and flowing out of our text:

- I. The bitter waters of Marah.
- II. The murmuring of the people.
- III. The cry of Moses.
- IV. The healing of the waters.

May the Lord enable me to speak this morning in such a way as He shall condescend to bless to our souls.

I. The bitter waters of Marah.

In looking at these waters of Marah, it seems that we have to consider two things respecting them--first, what these waters spiritually and typically represented. Secondly, what is intimated by the bitterness of these waters.

We cannot understand by these waters the water of life. There is nothing analogous in the waters of Marah to the streams that gushed out of the rock when smitten by the rod of Moses; for those waters were and ever must be intrinsically sweet. Nor do they resemble the waters seen by the prophet Ezekiel that flowed out of the temple, which when they went into the salt sea healed its bitterness. Eze 47:1-9 These waters, then, cannot be the waters of life, the streams that flow out of the bleeding side of the Redeemer.

What then are they? Why, they seem to my mind to denote things in themselves perfectly suitable and adapted to our natural constitution, and yet embittered by sin; because by the bitterness that is in the waters, I mainly understand sin, and as its necessary consequence and never-failing attendant, sorrow.

When God created the world He pronounced it "very good;" the waters then were sweet. Man, in his primitive innocency, was adapted to the world in its original purity; but "sin entered into the world, and death by sin." Satan was allowed to cast bitterness into these waters; and ever since, sin and sorrow have embittered all circumstances, states and conditions, in a word, everything that would have been otherwise sweet and adapted to our present state of existence.

Let me illustrate this by a few particulars, and show how sin, and its consequence sorrow, have embittered all the streams that otherwise would have been sweet and innocent, healthful and pure.

A. First, look at the world generally. It is a fair world, even in ruins. There is a natural beauty in it, though shattered by the fall. Yet, though outwardly lovely, sin has marred all. We might, in traveling, see a beautiful prospect; a village, for instance, nestling in a valley, by some picturesque mountainside in Switzerland, or lake in the North of England, and say, "Beauty is here; and with beauty, there must be happiness and innocence." But, if we penetrated beneath the surface of this external beauty, what would we see but sin? This beautiful village is probably but a den of drunkenness and profligacy. Thus these waters, which naturally were adapted to the constitution of man, made suitable to him, and he suitable to them, have all been polluted, defiled and embittered by sin cast into them. So, wherever we go, we find sin embittering everything. There is not a country, not a town, not a village, not a family, not a bosom, in which sin is not, and which sin has not embittered--embittered by alienating it from the source of all true, real happiness.

B. Again. There is your lawful occupation in life; your business, your shop, your counting-house, your farm; the calling that God has appointed for you to gain your daily bread by. These are streams of water necessary to your actual existence. You could no more live without them than you could exist without the bread and water that perish. And yet, sin and sorrow embitter all; disappointment, vexation, temptation flow out of and mingle with everything you set your hand to. So that when you would satiate your thirst at these streams they are "waters of Marah" which you cannot drink. If not actual sin, yet disappointment will attend them. I do not believe that you can carry on your lawful calling without sin being intermingled with it. I do not mean open, allowed sin. But sin will interfere, will intrude, will creep in, will work. You can scarcely

attend to your lawful calling without in some way partaking of the evil mingled with it. And if not sin, yet there will be sorrow and disappointment. If there be nothing in conscience against you in carrying on your daily business and concerns, yet there will be losses, crosses, bad debts, disappointments and vexations from others. Thus when you would take a sweet and luscious draught from the occupations of life, the cup is dashed from your lips by the bitterness of its contents.

C. Look again at the social relations of life. All are embittered. Let us picture for a few moments a young couple. How roseate is the hue which invests their life! how happy they are going to be, never dreaming of sorrow and trouble! All is bright sunshine. Let them live a few years; let them have children; let them get into middle life, and the cares of a family come upon them; and then see whether their young visions have been realized--whether all has been of a rosy color, whether dark clouds have not hovered over those domestic scenes from which they once thought to drink so much happiness. How often children grow up to be their parents' disappointment and misery! Wives and husbands, instead of being mutual sources of happiness and comfort, prove mutual plagues. Friends, who once seemed so true, turn into enemies; relations, from whom we would expect every kindness and help, grow cold or hostile. How all these domestic relations in various instances are marred and embittered by sin or sorrow! So that, when like the children of Israel, we would gladly stoop down, and drink at these sources of happiness, and they would be sources of happiness but for the marred state of the world, and the sin in men's hearts, we cannot drink the waters; they are embittered; they are "Marah."

D. And so with the human body. God made the body healthy, as He made the soul pure--but when sin entered into the soul, sickness came into the body. How many of God's people have their lives embittered through ill health, and all their pleasing prospects disappointed, broken up, crushed, and thrown down by a load of illness and bodily infirmities.

Now here are the waters of "Marah"--sorrow, vexation, bitterness, disappointment marring everything; so that we cannot drink of the otherwise sweet streams of life. And it is a mercy that we cannot. Could we drink of them we would want no other waters. Could we assuage our thirst at these earthly rills, we would want no streams of that river which "makes glad the city of God." If we could take our fill of earthly comfort and worldly happiness, we would never want to have the consolations of the blessed Spirit, or to drink out of the fullness of the Lord Jesus Christ.

But this is very disappointing. To have bitterness in everything, and bitterness in those things most from which you would gladly derive most pleasure; that directly you are looking forward to some worldly happiness, as the children of Israel hurried onward to the waters glimmering under the palm trees, yet no sooner do you come to that scene of anticipated pleasure, than you find it embittered; some disappointment, some sorrow, some vexation, some sin mars all. Is this very pleasing? Is this what nature loves? Does this go down very smoothly? Not while man is what he is. Did the children of Israel like it? No; they "murmured."

II. The murmuring of the people.

And this brings us to our second point, which is- the murmuring of the rebellious flesh against these dispensations. When the Lord is not present to bless and smile upon the soul, is it not very hard work to have so many trials, vexations and disappointments; to find everything here embittered; that God will not let you have a gourd to rejoice in; that you cannot sit down and say, "Come, now I am going to be comfortable; here is at last a little rest?" Is it not very vexatious, very disappointing, very contrary to every

feeling of our natural heart, that the Lord will never let us take comfort in anything but Himself? that when we would gladly stretch forth our arm and embrace an earthly joy, there is a hand that dashes it from our lips? when we would stoop, and drink the waters that glimmer in the desert, they are so salty, brackish, and bitter, that we cannot slake our thirst at them?

1. Now, say that you have many disappointments in business. Are they pleasing? When the postman brings you a letter, for instance, full of bad news--that someone has failed who owes you a large sum of money; do you feel very comfortable under it? Is it not much against the grain? And does not this raise up in your carnal mind murmuring and fretfulness, and a rebellious feeling that you should be so hardly dealt with? You can look abroad, perhaps, and see how others get on in the world- men whom you have known in poverty riding in their carriages--and you always crossed, disappointed, ground down and everything going against you. This is not very pleasant to flesh and blood; this is contrary to nature; and therefore nature murmurs, frets, repines, rebels against these dispensations.

2. Or, you have ill health, and cannot do things as others do them--exertion is a pain to you; your nerves are shattered and your whole frame disorganized from constitutional debility; everything is wearisome--the "grasshopper a burden." You look round, and see people walking about in such health and strength, and you perhaps racked with pain, or your frame altogether shattered, and constitution gone. Why, this will raise up in the mind, at times, some very unpleasant feelings. There will be murmuring, rebellion and fretfulness against God when you see others dealt with so favorably, and you dealt with, as you think, in a way so contrary.

3. Your own family, perhaps your sons and daughters, are not what you wish them to be. You look abroad and see the sons of others steady; their daughters doing well, married and settled comfortably in life; while, as regards yourself, things are just the contrary--everything is opposed to what your nature wants, and what your carnal mind loves. And, instead of sitting down quietly, and bearing these afflictions and sorrows, there is a heaving up of the carnal mind against them, a working of rebellion, a repining, a murmuring, as though the Lord dealt with you very harshly, and nobody ever had such a weight to carry as yourself.

4. Or again, you have a continual cross, and feel a body of sin and death always plaguing you; so as never to be let alone, but are vexed and tried day after day. There is some temptation, and you entangled in it; some bait, and you entrapped; some discovery of evil in your heart which you had never seen before. And you think there never was anybody like you; so harassed, so exercised, so tried, so tempted, so cast down; having withal so little grace, so little spirituality, and finding so little in your heart of which you can say, "Thank God, I have some real religion now." Now, when the mind is thus exercised, tried and cast down with a thousand things, unless God be present, and His grace intervene, there will be much of this fretfulness, repining and murmuring in the carnal mind.

But is this all? Would it do to leave you thus? Can a living soul stand here? No! There must be something more than this. It is sad work to have nothing but bitterness and murmuring; and therefore, we will pass on to our third point; which is what a living soul sooner or later must do and does.

III. The cry of Moses.

"Moses cried unto the Lord." And this is what we do when we have no one else to go to. When we come to the waters of Marah, and find we cannot drink; when there is nothing but bitterness and disappointment, then there is at first a struggle, a murmuring, a rebelling, which only makes matters worse than before.

But, in tender mercy, the Lord is pleased to raise up a sigh and a cry in the soul, and to cause supplications to go up out of the heart. But this is hard work, because it seems as though we ought to have done this before. Conscience begins to say, "Why, you only pray to God when you need Him; you ought not to have murmured and repined; you ought not to have rebelled and fretted as you have done. How can you expect God to hear you now? You have tried all you could to creep out of it, and get the yoke off your neck; and not being able to do it, then you come to the Lord."

Yet this is what we are obliged to do; and I may add, what grace enables us to do, because trials in themselves will not raise up prayer; they rather crush it. We might be in the very belly of hell, and have no prayer except God put it there into our souls. We might have blow upon blow, stroke upon stroke, but no prayer. Afflictions without the grace of God only stupefy, harden and deaden. People think sometimes, "O, when I grow old, or get ill, then I shall pray, and seek, and serve God." Why, you would find your very illness and age would only stupefy the mind; and if you were in pain, you would have little to think of but pain. Your very sufferings would only harden your heart, and stop prayer instead of encouraging it. Therefore, it is not all the afflictions we go through, which can raise up one prayer to God; they only make us fight against Him; they only make us murmur, rebel and despair. It must be 'grace in sweet operation' that softens the heart in these trials, and the Lord's pouring out upon the soul "the Spirit of grace and supplication." The two go together, enabling us to "cry."

And what a mercy it is, that in all our rebellion, and in spite of all our rebellion, there is a God to go to; that though our rebellions do and will bring a cloud upon the throne, yet they do not push Jesus off the throne. Whatever darkness, whatever confusion, rebellion may bring upon our mind, Christ is still there. It is like a London fog. When you Londoners in November are wrapped up in fog and smoke, we that live in the country are perhaps enjoying the sunshine. All your fog does not blot the blessed sun out of the sky; he is shining upon others, if he is not shining upon you. So spiritually. When we get into a fog, we think sometimes that the sun will never shine again. We judge by our feelings, and the exercises of our minds; as though now there were no Christ; as though all He had promised were false, all His mercy had failed, and there was no longer anything for the soul to rest upon.

But how blessed it is in these seasons to find a little submission and prayer; a sighing, looking, longing, hungering, thirsting, waiting upon the Lord! This is what we must do; and what we shall do, if grace be in our hearts; for without it, we cannot expect any relief.

The Lord works generally thus. He brings afflictions, and lets us feel what we are in our carnal mind under the cross, to humble us and prove us. He then raises up and draws forth a spirit of prayer in the soul; and then He answers and blesses. The very power to pray is a gleam of light upon the soul; the very pouring out of the heart brings a relief; the very sight of Christ upon his throne dispels the rebellion that works in the carnal mind. The very coming to Him as filled with all grace; the very looking unto Him, interceding for us as our Advocate with the Father, seems to drive away the clouds of darkness and rebellion. It may not be, indeed it is not a complete deliverance, but it is deliverance from rebellion and murmuring. To pour out the heart before God brings a measure of relief, as Hannah and Hezekiah found. If it does not fill the soul with joy and peace, at least it brings it out of that stupefied state in which it was sunk through rebellion; it softens the heart which before was hard; it thaws the spirit which before was frozen; it communicates contrition where before there was little else but hardness and desperation. And thus, the very power given to the soul to seek, supplicate, cry, beg and pray, though it may not bring deliverance from the trial itself, yet is a help and encouragement enabling it to bear up. A praying soul will in due time be a praising soul. He that seeks shall find; he that asks shall receive. "To him that knocks, it shall be opened." The Lord has

given many sweet promises to those who seek His face.

It is not only a mercy to have a God to go to, but to have a heart to go to Him. It is an inestimable favor not only to have a throne of grace, but to have grace to go to the throne. It is not only a blessing that there is a mercy seat, but that there is mercy reaching the heart to bring us there. And when there is this real heartfelt cry, then in due time comes a blessed, gracious answer; which brings us to our fourth and last point; and that is, the healing of the waters.

IV. The healing of the waters.

Now, in the healing of the waters, we may observe certain marked steps. "The Lord," we read, "showed Moses a tree, which when he had cast into the waters, the waters were made sweet."

1. The first thing to consider is, "the tree." I need not say what this signifies. Your hearts have pronounced it already. It is the tree of life--the cross of the Lord Jesus Christ. This is the tree; for "Cursed is every one that hangs on a tree." "He bore our sins in His own body on the tree." This is the tree--the tree of life; the cross of Jesus; salvation through blood; pardon through the atonement which He made upon Calvary's tree; reconciliation through the offering which He there once offered; for "by one offering He has perfected forever those who are sanctified."

2. But this tree was shown to Moses. It was there before; but Moses knew it not. It needed to be revealed to his eyes and heart. The tree was standing there before Moses saw it. So with us. The cross of Christ is the same, whether hidden from our eyes or not. If we are God's children, we are even now reconciled, pardoned, accepted, saved. Our salvation is already accomplished; the work is finished; everlasting righteousness has been brought in; Christ has saved us from the wrath to come. "Who has saved us, and called us."

But what we need is a discovery of this tree to our soul. It does not say that God created the tree for the first time; but that he "showed" it to Moses. He took the veil off Moses' eyes and heart, and showed him the tree. And what is this but a blessed revelation to the soul of the cross of the Lord Jesus Christ; seeing Him by the eye of faith as the Lamb of God slain from before the foundation of the world; a viewing Him by the eye of faith suspended as it were between earth and heaven, accomplishing our salvation by His own precious blood?

Now in all our murmuring, rebellion and fretfulness we do not see this. It is hidden from our eyes; and we have no union, no communion then, with a suffering Lord. If we could go to the cross, clasp it in our embrace, lay hold of a crucified Jesus, feel sweet communion with Him, gaze upon His sufferings, and see that face which was marred more than the sons of men, it would thaw away the rebellion, it would remove the murmuring, it would melt the heart down into contrition, brokenness, and love.

But we cannot see it; we only see our disappointments, our vexations, losses, crosses and sorrows. The mind is so wrapped up in darkness; there is such a fog over the soul that we can only "grope for the wall like the blind." We think ourselves harshly dealt with, wonder that God should be so unkind, and have no eyes or heart to look beyond all these things, and to see the Lord Jesus Christ reconciling us to God, and bearing our sins and sorrows in His own body on the tree. And therefore, we need it to be shown to us; we need the blessed Spirit to take of the things of Christ, and reveal them to our soul; to bring into our hearts a sight and sense of the bleeding Lamb, of the suffering "Man of Sorrows," of the crucified Immanuel.

3. But there is another step. It was not sufficient that there should be a tree, nor enough to show Moses the tree. The tree must be cast into the waters. The boughs of the tree might overshadow the streams; that did not heal them. Those too that stood on the banks of the stream might gaze upon the tree; that did not heal the waters. A further process was necessary. There was another step to be taken; and that was, the tree was to be cast into the waters. And does this not signify spiritually the bringing in of the cross of Christ into the soul; the revelation of a crucified Savior to the heart; the manifestation of Jesus in His sufferings and blood to the conscience; and this, by bringing the cross of Christ into the soul, as the tree was cast into the waters? Now nothing but this can heal the waters. But when the tree was cast into the waters, when it sank, and the waters covered in, then they were made sweet; their bitterness was taken away, and they could be safely drunk.

Let us APPLY this. I have endeavored to show you what these waters are, and how they were made bitter; and I must therefore just cast my mind's eye a little back, to show you how they are made sweet.

1. Now there are many things that are vexatious and disappointing in our daily calling. You have many things in business very plaguing, very trying. You cannot, therefore, take that pleasure in it which worldly men can; or if it much occupies your mind, you find guilt resting upon your conscience; you cannot take, as it were, a good draught of your worldly occupation, drink it down and enjoy it; but there is some disappointment, or some guilt of conscience connected with it, that when you would gladly take pleasure in it, you cannot succeed. Well, how is this to be sweetened? If there be some discovery to your soul of a precious Jesus, and you be indulged with some knowledge of, and communion with a suffering Immanuel, does not that sweeten to you your daily occupation? Does it not sanctify the lowest employment? Yes--sanctify it! Why, a man may be a garbage-collector, a chimney sweep, a nightman, and if he have the grace of God in his heart, the visitations of the Lord's presence and the bedewings of His love and favor will make this calling a holy calling, aye, much more a holy calling than many a bishop preaching in lawn sleeves, or a priest bowing before the altar. Aye, a poor old washerwoman, rubbing her stockings over her tub, may be worshiping God in spirit and in truth, and have her soul filled with happiness and holiness, when choristers and priests are mocking him with lies and hearts full of uncleanness. Thus, washing stockings may be a holier employment than chanting psalms. It is not church or chapel that makes us holy, but the blessed Spirit making our bodies His temple.

2. Or you may almost constantly have bad health, which may be your daily cross; and when the Lord does not favor you with His presence, a very hard cross it is to carry. But suppose the Lord is pleased to bless your soul, lead you to Jesus, give you communion with Him, show you the sufferings of "the Man of Sorrows," and that you have a saving interest in His precious blood and love--is not the bitter water sweetened? Can you not then bear your aches, pains and infirmities? Do you even see good springing out of your afflicted body; and would sooner have sanctified illness than unsanctified health?

3. Or your "house," like David's, does not "grow" as you wish. You have rebellious children, dissolute sons, carnal daughters, servants that plague your life out; with other domestic things that try your mind; and it seems as though you were always grieved and vexed. Well now, if your soul were blessed, watered, sanctified with some of the manifestations of the dying love and atoning blood of the Lord Jesus Christ, do you think it would sweeten even these waters? If you felt Jesus to be your brother, and God your father, would you not be so swallowed up in this spiritual relationship, that you could say, "As to my worldly relatives, my earthly ties, compared with all this, what are they? Jesus is more precious to me than all worldly things--than husband, wife, or children." Is not this sweetening the bitter waters?

4. Or, if sin has marred everything in your soul, made you a wretch, given you a daily cross continually, troubles your mind, and subjects you, as it does all the children of God, to a constant exercise from the workings of evil in your carnal heart, and your spirit is plagued with it day and night, what then is to sweeten these bitter waters--these waters of Marah--but the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ? Pardoning love, atoning blood, a sight of Jesus, an embracing of Him as our all in all, when felt, is a casting of the tree of life into the bitter waters; and when the tree is cast into the bitter waters, they are healed. Now you can drink; you can attend to your lawful calling; you may go about your daily duties; you can enjoy your family and home relationships; aye, and have sweetness in your soul amid all your sins and sorrows, when you realize anything of this grace of the Lord Jesus Christ as sweetening every bitter draught.

5. But there is one draught to come, which in bitterness exceeds all, and that is, the bitter draught of death. How is that bitter water to be sweetened? Die you must, and none know how soon. We know not the circumstances of our death--what long illness, what pain, langour, or suffering may attend it; or what the state of our minds may be when death seems to draw near and hold us in his grasp. This is a bitter draught, and how is it to be sweetened? By looking back to a well-spent life? By thinking of the duties you have discharged, the very religious part you have played, your being a member of a Christian church, having attended a certain chapel, prayed and read, and so on? Why all these things, if only these, would but embitter the draught more, because you would say, "I have been all this, and done all this, and where is my poor soul now?" Nothing but the casting in of the tree of life, the cross of the Lord Jesus Christ into these bitter waters can sweeten them.

Many saints--all saints, I may say in their degree--have found these bitter waters sweetened; and though they shrank from the draught, yet when it touched their lips it went down like honey; it was sweetened by the manifestations of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the shedding abroad in their soul of His dying love.

Now, do you not see how needful it is, to find the waters bitter, that you may have them sweetened? Suppose you were to go through life with no bitterness, no sorrows, no disappointments, no vexations, no temptations, no exercises--might you not drink of these waters until you burst?

There might have been even a temporal mercy to the children of Israel in finding these waters bitter. If, after wandering three days in the wilderness, they had found them sweet, they might have drunk of them so immoderately as to have injured them, and perhaps fatally; there might therefore have been a mercy even in the embittering of the waters before they were sweetened. The water having being bitter, they would drink cautiously for fear of the bitterness returning. Well, so spiritually. If you were to have your own way, your own will, and enjoy what your nature cleaves to, what would you be? What sort of a Christian would you be? Where would be the love of God in your soul? Where would there be any experience either of mercy or judgment? Where any sighs or cries? Where any praises or blessings? You would live and die without God. But when everything is embittered by sin or sorrow, and the Lord does not let us do what we would, but mars all sources of earthly happiness, then we gladly turn to Him. And when He is pleased to drop a little measure of His grace and mercy into the soul, then these bitter waters are sweetened and healed; and you may drink safely of them.

And there is no other way. You may try a thousand ways; you may attempt to doctor the waters; put sugar or honey into them; you may try your best. These waters cannot be sweetened by sugar or honey--they can be sweetened only by the tree of life, the cross of Jesus, the manifestation of dying love, the application of atoning blood. Nothing short of this--nothing but this, can ever heal the bitterness; and to disguise the taste will only eventually make the bitter taste more bitter still.

Then, it is your mercy to have your daily draught of bitter things; to find life embittered, health embittered, family embittered, business embittered, your own soul embittered; so as to lead you to say, "Call me not Naomi, but Marah; for the Almighty has dealt very bitterly with me."

It is your mercy to be a "Marah." It is a mercy to weep bitter tears, to have bitterness of soul, and many griefs and exercises, when they lead us to see and feel that there is only one thing which can sweeten our trials, the cross of the Lord Jesus Christ, under the teaching of God, to embrace and cleave to that, and not be satisfied without its sweet enjoyment and blessed manifestation.

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