

The Exodus - From Egypt to Canaan - Sermon 3 of 5

by Roy Hession

The sermon emphasizes the importance of faith and trust in God's original purpose, which is to bring believers out of spiritual Egypt and into the Promised Land of spiritual Canaan.

Duration: 54:40

Scripture: Exodus 14:21-22, Numbers 21:4-7, 1 Corinthians 10:7-11

Topics: "Exodus"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker reflects on a time when he was on a tour abroad and longed to be back home with his family. He emphasizes the danger of lusting after things for a long time, as God may grant those desires, which can ultimately be detrimental. The speaker also mentions how Israel lusted for a king, even though they already had the Lord as their king, and how this decision brought about negative consequences for them. He encourages listeners to repent of their sins and trust in God, even in the midst of difficult tests and trials.

Transcript

1 Corinthians chapter 10. I want us to look at it yet again this morning. Moreover brethren, I would not that ye should be ignorant that all our fathers were under the cloud and all passed through the sea and were all baptized unto Moses in the cloud and in the sea and did all eat the same spiritual meat and did all drink the same spiritual drink.

For they drank of that spiritual rock that followed them and that rock was Christ. But, that's the point, big, they all came out, then there's this but, but, with many of them, literally with the majority of them, God was not well pleased. For they were overthrown in the wilderness.

Now these things were our examples to the intent that we should not lust after evil things as they also lusted. Neither be ye idolaters as were some of them. As it is written, the people sat down to eat and drink and rose up to play.

Neither let us commit fornication as some of them committed and fell in one day three and 20,000. Neither let us tempt Christ, Revised says, neither let us tempt the Lord as some of them also tempted and were destroyed of serpents. Neither murmur ye as some of them also murmured and were destroyed of the

destroyer.

Now all these things happened unto them by way of types of us. For they are written for our admonition upon whom the ends of the world are come. Now yesterday we saw Israel brought out of Egypt, got thy God's mighty hand, bringing them through the Red Sea but overthrowing their enemies under those waters.

And we heard Israel singing on the far side of the Red Sea. We hadn't time to read that song, it's a wonderful song of praise, only excelled by the song of praise which the soul sings when it first comes to know its complete emancipation and redemption in the Lord Jesus. Oh what a song of praise goes up from the newly emancipated soul as he sees Jesus.

I wonder if you've, yes I'm sure many of us have sung that song. And in that song they not only look back and celebrate the victory that's been won on their behalf but they look forward. And in their song by faith they've already anticipated their entry into this good land and alive.

By faith they already see their Jehovah who's done so much vanquishing their enemies and themselves in possession of that land. For they understood God didn't bring them out merely to bring them out. He brought them out that he might bring them in and they understand that fact and they anticipate it by faith.

Well how did they get on afterwards? Was it all peaches and cream? Was it just victory after victory? And in no time at all did they get into the land that God had promised them? Alas they didn't get in all that quickly. But it wasn't God's fault. It was never his intention but through their own fault.

Through their own subsequent doubting and murmuring and rebellion they took a long time before they got in to that land of milk and honey. Now let's just tell ourselves what was God's original purpose for them? Well his purpose was that having brought them out they should find that he was enough for their daily hunger. That he would provide that manner every day.

And out there in the wilderness there wasn't much water but they were going to discover that he could smite rocks for them and bring water for that great multitude of about two million souls. They were to prove him. And then they were to go to Mount Sinai.

This was part of the first purpose of God. God wasn't in so much of a hurry. He had that land for them but he had to teach them things.

And so he took them to Mount Sinai. And there they spent no less than a whole year around the mount, all part of the original purpose. At Mount Sinai they were given the moral law through Moses.

At Mount Sinai they were given a most complete civil law. And at Mount Sinai they were given that glorious how shall I call it, religious law. I hate that word religion.

Their ceremonial law. The priesthood was instituted. And the tabernacle set up.

And all that was essential. They were being made into a nation. And an ordered nation such as few other nations were ordered.

And having received all that from their God then the pillar of cloud moved them on. And we're told that it was but 11 days journey from Sinai to the borders of the promised land, Kadesh Barnea. And God's intention was that having got to the borders of the promised land they would go in and possess the land

which he'd given them.

Of course there were enemies. But was he not enough? The one who had provided manna from heaven, water out of the rock and much else through the wilderness. He would surely go before them and bring down those cities and bring down those enemies and they would possess that land which God had intended.

But it was at that point that there was that basic breakdown. They sent their spies. They saw there were giants in the land and they panicked.

Instead of seeing God they saw the difficulties. Instead of comparing the difficulties with God and seeing the difficulties in comparison with nothing they compared the difficulties with themselves. And said we can't go in.

And they said we'll even go back to Egypt. And they got as far as wanting to appoint themselves a leader. What an affront that was to the God who'd done so much for them.

What a thwarting of his gracious purpose. And God gave them their most severe chastisement. He said if you won't go in then you shan't.

And you're going to wander in this wilderness for a whole 40 years. Until all this generation has died out and your children will be the ones who ultimately will know the fulfilment of my promise. And so it is we read here in this passage in Corinthians that Paul says they all came out of the Red Sea.

But they didn't all enter into the Promised Land. Could we have that door shut please? Indeed out of that whole nation of two million that came out, the original two million, no I'm sorry, of course that includes the children, out of the 600,000 able-bodied men who came out, only two of them went in. As I said the other day, Caleb the son of Joshua the son of Nun and Caleb the son of Jephunneh were the only two who ever got through to that land of Milchathunneh.

And the rest, we're told here, were overthrown in the wilderness. That word overthrown I gather from the amplified means they were strewn in the wilderness. You could tell the track of the Israelites by the bleached bones that were left behind.

Well now the obvious message for us in this that we too have been brought out of our spiritual Egypt, many of us, perhaps as yet not all, but I believe we're all going to come out in these days. Shall we pray that every last one in our house party who hasn't found Jesus by the end of this week, every last one will be singing that song on the other side of the Red Sea? Well that's wonderful if it should be and why not? But many of us already have known that. And as we've seen God brings us out but he might bring us in to our full inheritance in Christ.

Not merely something negative. We've given up this, we've been saved from that. But what are we being saved into? Into finding the Lord Jesus as a completely satisfying portion.

That we don't need to supplement what he gives by the empty doubtful things of the world. A life in which we see the Lord Jesus undertaking our all to be. The government all the time on his shoulder.

The Lord Jesus all the time undertaking the battle and winning battles for us which we could never do for ourselves. The land of Canaan, that's what he brought us out for. But we know that whereas many of us

come out, the same number don't get in.

And instead of living in the full enjoyment in the present tense of the grace and sufficiency of the Lord Jesus as God intended, we are spending our days in the wilderness. In a dry place where there's little water, where we're not really satisfied and we have much the same experience as these folks did. However, I want to make one point.

None of these pictures are perfect. And there's one point in which I think this picture breaks down. It will give you the impression that you come out and then subsequently you come in.

And some come out who never get in. Well, I think that may be true, but not as a rule. If a man has been truly born again, he does come in.

I did, but I didn't stay. I tell you, the one who to my mind is most patently filled with the Holy Ghost is a man who has seen himself to be a sinner, fled to the cross, being born of the Spirit. He hasn't learned to have a righteousness of his own.

He hasn't learned to gain some experience in the Christian work and be something and try hard. He knows he hasn't got a stitch of righteousness or a stitch of strength. Christ did everything to him.

When you find a man like that, you say, if that isn't the promised land, what is? Oh, yes. I very much doubt and wonder where we've got to. We haven't had a taste of that.

Jesus is enough for the penitent sinner without necessarily a second experience or a second blessing. Jesus is enough. And all he wants is the confession of sin and helplessness and grace brings us into everything that his blood purchased for us.

I don't want us to fear. Now there's a second blessing. I had the first, but I haven't had the second.

I don't think that it is really quite true to experience this fact. And yet, of course, it is in another way. Because whatever we may have tasted of grace in the past, we may not be in Canaan today.

We may not have been there for a long time. We may not have been there for years. We may be in the wilderness.

Maybe it wasn't long after those early days that something went wrong and we've never really found our way out of the wilderness back into that sweet Canaan that we had a taste of. Or it may be we've had a long taste of it, but just recently. We're not there now.

It may be by the other week. It's since the last week you've been in the wilderness. That's how it works in practice.

So it doesn't matter how it was in the past, it's how it is with us now. And the whole truth may be that now we are in the wilderness. But that's not God's purpose.

And he's made every provision to bring us in to the promised land. Now, what really was the basic reason for their difficulties? And I think it was this, that there was in Israel a basic reluctance to be saved by Jehovah. A basic reluctance to be his people.

You know, they never really desired their deliverance from Egypt. You would think they did, but they didn't really desire it. You know, they never even prayed for it.

Oh, I know the Lord said, I've heard their cry and I've seen their sorrows. Yes, but there wasn't a prayer. It was just copious tears about their present misery.

They hadn't got the faith to pray and to expect God to. When Moses came to tell them that God was going to do it for them, they were melted and full of praise and worship. But the moment there was the first bit of a test, they drew back, even when they were in Egypt.

You remember when Moses first went to Pharaoh to ask them to be set free? Pharaoh put the screw on instead. And you ought to see the dirty looks he got from Israel. They said, the Lord look on you, look what you've done.

And even in the incident that we read of yesterday, when they got out, but the river was still hemming them in. They said to him, was not this the word that we spoke to you while we were in Egypt? Let us alone, that we may serve the Egyptians. I know I said that.

Let me alone that I may serve the Egyptians. Don't keep bothering me, don't keep on to me. Let me alone.

I didn't want to be saved originally. The whole initiative in my salvation was taken by another. It didn't begin with me.

It didn't begin with me longing to be saved. It began with Jesus longing to save me. And the first initiative was taken by him, and the first thing he was met with was reluctance.

Let me alone, that I may serve the Egyptians. I praise the Lord, he overcame that reluctance. His love won my heart.

And yet, I think there was a corner of it that still left. Because do you know, it's popped up several times since. Do you know, when I've told people of how I found the Lord, and I told how I was pursued by grace, pursued by the saints, and rejoiced over by the saints, when at last this reluctant prodigal gave in.

Do you know, I can have a faint reflection of that old reluctance. I didn't like being rejoiced over when I came in. And do you know, I found, I didn't quite like telling the story.

Even now, how I was rejoiced over. C.S. Lewis, in his autobiography, *Surprised by Joy*, says that for him, he was brought into the father's house as a struggling, reluctant prodigal. Although, I think he used a struggling, kicking prodigal.

He was brought in, but rather in that condition. Weren't you? Wasn't this the basic thing? A deep reluctance, a desire to have your own way, even if your own way was causing misery, and you'd cried over it. When it came to being saved, being brought out, there was a reluctance.

You were, perhaps, brought in as a reluctant kicking prodigal, and listen. There's still something of the kick there. It remained in Israel, right the way through.

The kick was there, and it's remained in us. So much so, that the moment there was a test, and things didn't go easily, they said, why do we ever come out? Why don't you dumb Moses and bring us out? Let's make a capital return. Oh, how true this is to experience.

And I think this was the basic thing that caused all the other things that we shall look at. That's what he's really dealing with in us. A little bit of a citadel that's never really completely given in.

And it shows us, when things are wrong, you have self-pity, you say, well, why ever did I embark on this? Why did I let God have his way? But he knows how to deal with that last unconquered citadel. And maybe there'll be a little bit he'll have to be going on dealing with, right to the gates of glory. Isn't it extraordinary? He's so intent, we so unwilling.

He wants to bring us to himself, to find in himself all that we need. C.S. Lewis again says, it is natural to wish that God had designed for us a less glorious and arduous destiny. It is a burden of glory, not only beyond our deserts, but also, except in rare moments of grace, beyond our desiring.

So he's got something on his hands, hasn't he, with us. But he's not ready to get us going. He knows what is our highest blessing.

And although sometimes we don't really desire it, we would like him to stop short. He's not going to stop short. As Spurgeon said, we are going to persevere in holiness because God is going to persevere in grace.

But now this basic attitude, Paul says here, expressed itself in five things. The people of Israel were overthrown in the wilderness. And that, he's led by five things.

There were other things too, but he picks on five. And I want us to look at the things. The things that overthrow us in the wilderness.

Some of the things that deprive us of our promised land and leave us empty, dissatisfied, miserable Christians. No glory to God, so often, and not a blessing to men. This being overthrown in the wilderness, it really meant not only they were excluded from the promised land, but they died in the wilderness.

And that, not by natural means. Again and again, God had to chasten that people. And terrible plagues hit them.

And thousands died at a time, and their bones were left behind. All because of some of the things we see here. And God has to bring us under chastening sometimes.

We're not only deprived of the sweetness we might have in the promised land, but we're brought under chastening too. Look at them in 1 Corinthians 10. Now these things, he says, were our examples to the intent, one, that we should not lust after evil things as they also lusted.

Well, now that is a reference to Numbers 11, if you'd like to keep your finger in and turn back. There they were in the wilderness, on their appointed path. Thus for in the mixed multitude that was among them fell a lusting.

And the children of Israel also wept again and said, who shall give us flesh to eat? We remember the fish we did eat in Egypt, the cucumbers, melons, leeks, onions, and garlic. And now our soul is dried away, for there's nothing at all beside this manner before our eyes. And as a result of that, though God granted them their request, he sent leanness into their soul.

That's Psalm 106, 14, and the Amplified gives the more accurate translation. He granted them the request. He said, all right, I'll give you flesh.

So much you won't know what to do with it. But, he said, I'm going to thin your numbers. That's what leanness is.

And what a terrible thinning of numbers. There was that day, as people died by a terrible epidemic, and the great corporate grave was called by a name which means the graves of love. That was the one thing that overthrew so many of them in the wilderness, and they never saw the promised land because of it.

Lusting. Now, lusting in the Bible isn't merely something that applies to sex. It does apply to that.

It applies to much else. I can only define lusting as wishing, wishing, wishing for something that God hasn't given you. That's lusting.

Maybe that thing is never to be his purpose for you, but you want it. Maybe it is to be his purpose, but later on, but you can't wait, you want it now. Have you seen that to be a sin? I've had to see it.

And I know nothing that overthrows me so quickly in the wilderness as wishing, wishing, wishing for something that God hasn't given me, at least not now. But I want it now. It may be a legitimate thing.

It could be an illegitimate thing. It matters not. Wishing, wishing, a girl wishing, wishing, wishing for a boy that God hasn't given her.

It's quite clear he hasn't given it to her because if God had, he would have, they would be joined and happily going together. The fact that there isn't such a boy means that at the moment, at least, God hasn't given her one. But oh, be a man wanting a girl or somebody wanting a position.

If it was God's will, he would have given it to you. The fact that at the moment it's not being given you means it's not his will. But we're not content that way.

We lust after it. Works out in the smallest details. Sometimes when I've been abroad on a tour, I'm thinking now of William and again of myself in Indonesia or somewhere else.

Oh, as it drew to a close, how we began to wish, wish it was all over and we're back home with our families. But it wasn't over. Our place was there, but our hearts were there.

And you know, we lost our vision for the present. We had nothing to give. We were overthrown in the wilderness through this sin of lusting, lusting, lusting.

Do you know what the most dangerous thing is? If you go on lusting long enough, God may give you what you want. And that can be the worst thing in the world for you. Israel, long after, lusted for a king when they'd already got a king, the Lord himself.

God said, all right, you'll have a king. And I'll tell you what he'll do to you. And it was the worst thing that ever happened to Israel when God gave them their request.

It destroyed them, did that first king. And you know, it may be just simply that that's overthrown us in the wilderness for so long. Something that you're wishing, wishing, wishing for, getting out of a different, to a different situation, wanting to get out of the present difficulties, wanting some possessions you haven't got, or it matters not, wishing for what God hasn't given me.

It's really rebellious, it's deep, I'm broken. And I tell you, it overthrows us in the wilderness. I want you to notice in Numbers 11, when they were lusting for the things of Egypt, they lost their taste for the manna.

And when you and I are lusting for the things of Egypt or lusting for whatever God hasn't given us, you cannot say that Jesus is satisfying you. You lose your taste for Jesus, the heavenly bread, nothing except meeting, nothing except reading the Bible. Oh, I want a different sort of life than that.

Yes, you're lusting after something else and you've lost your taste for the manna where we've all been. And who knows, God may have to take us back to something. That's the thing that's been at the bottom of it all, for which we are overthrown in the wilderness.

Yes. Then the next thing in 1 Corinthians 10, neither be ye idolaters, as were some of them. As it is written, they sat down to eat and drink and rose up to play.

Which that of course is reference to that terrible incident at Mount Sinai. The heartbreak to God, Moses had gone up into the mountain to receive a wonderful ritual for them. Wonderful passions of things on the mount were getting to be constructed on the earth, the tabernacle, the priesthood.

Some of them would really thrill and satisfy them along that line. But Israel couldn't wait, he was six weeks up there. He says, as for this Moses, they say, we don't know what's happened to him.

Here we are out of Egypt, we don't know what to do. And they couldn't wait. And they said, come on Aaron, you make us gods.

Let them be the things that are going to go before us. And they gave him their gold and he put it into the furnace and in his own words, out came this car. He was trying to excuse himself when Moses accosted him.

And Aaron set himself up as a little tin pot priest. Not knowing of that wonderful vision that was being in process of formation for him in the mountain. What a fool he must have felt.

Couldn't wait for God and erected an idol instead. Please turn the cassette over now. Do not fast wind it in either direction.

What a fool he must have felt. Couldn't wait for God and erected an idol instead. And thus it was another great company of people died by the plague before the Lord.

And they were overthrown in the wilderness. And that's yet another thing that overthrows us in the wilderness, idolatry. Something that's taken God's place in our lives.

Something that we're worshipping rather than him. Something that means more to us than him. It can be a person, it can be a thing.

I've had problems with idolatry along the line of hobbies. And I've had to repent of certain things that have gripped my attention and gripped my heart and taken a place that belonged to Jesus only. Seen very often that when I've got a choice between the one and the other over a certain issue, over a certain bit of time, I know what I ought to be doing.

But this thing got me. Idolatry. Idolatry.

It overthrows us in the wilderness. And we're deprived of the sweetness and joys of the Lord Jesus. You know that great hymn? Oh, for a closer walk with God.

He goes on to say, what peaceful hours I once enjoyed. How bright their memories still. But they have left an aching void the world can never fill.

And then the writer goes on to say, the dearest idol. I have known. Whate'er that idol be, help me to tear it from its throne.

And give its place to thee. I've had problems with idolatry over the years. If it isn't one thing, it's sometimes another.

And there have had to be some real surrenders of things that weren't necessarily wrong in themselves. But they got me. They absorbed me.

C.T. Studd said, what grips the heart wags the tongue. The thing that wags your tongue is the thing that's gripping your heart. And sometimes it isn't Jesus that's wagging our tongue, it's something else.

I confess it, I know it myself. And just as long as that's there, I'm in the wilderness. Oh, it doesn't mean to say there isn't a right and proper place for legitimate things of earth and interests.

But you and I need to be open to the Holy Spirit to convict us when it's become an idol. I can't tell you at what point, but he can. And who knows that there's an idol.

A person, or a thing, or an interest, or a house, or a plan. It's interesting that the word is I, doll. It's some doll that's very connected with I. Wretched, silly doll.

And will you notice that this idol can be a religious thing? It was in the story. It was a religious idol. This was to be a representation of the God who brought them out of Egypt and who was going to bring them into the Promised Land.

It wasn't entirely a departure from the Lord himself. It was a representation of the Lord. But they were told not to have representations because soon the representation would take the place of the one represented.

And oh, what idols we can have in the spiritual realm. Our church, an idol. Our denomination, idols.

I believe the church is an idol. There's so many people who hear about the church, this and the church, say, I'm tired of hearing about the church. Tell me about Christ, the mission of the church.

Don't tell me about, it's an idolatry. The church, the church, the church, even the ecumenical church, it's idolatry. We want Jesus.

This thing. This puny thing. What does that do for the needy sinner? It's Jesus.

Oh, the church has its place when Jesus is central. But the church takes the place of Jesus. Your denomination can take the place of Jesus.

I can spot it sometimes by the way people speak. We've got to be loyal to where God's put us. But oh, how easy would that be to take the place of the Lord Jesus.

And when that does, that man is in the wilderness. He's not on top. He's not a winner of souls.

He's not testified. Idolatry that overthrows us in the wilderness. And then thirdly, we're not to lust as they lusted, nor to be idolaters as they were idolaters, nor to commit fornication, verse eight, as some of them committed and fell in one day, three and 20,000.

The reference to this incident, we didn't turn to it, but for your information, is in Numbers 25, where the children of Israel committed fornication with the daughters of the Moabites. I don't know if there's something special that attracted them about the daughters of the Moabites, but there seemed to be a whole epidemic of this vile impurity amongst the Israelites. Actually, it was a ruse put out by Balak to destroy Israel.

He knew that as long as Israel were loyal to their God, they were impregnable. So he said, I'll tell you, Balak, what to do. Let the girls go around the camps, look as nice as they can.

Let them attract the men. And then when you've got as far as that, you can invite them to the worship of your gods, and then they're finished. You can do what you like.

But I know as a prophet, as long as they're Lord of Jehovah, they're invincible. Now, it's an interesting thing. Do you know there isn't a single epistle of Paul to the churches of his day in which he doesn't speak of sexual impurity? Not one.

And every one of these epistles are written to Christians. And judging by the depths to which he takes them, they must be quite mature Christians, even to understand it. And yet in every single one, he has to speak to them about sexual impurity.

The simple fact is the most mature saint is not beyond temptation along these lines. You must expect God to be going on talking to you about this thing. I don't think victory will rise any higher than victory over hell.

It isn't the only form of sin. It isn't the only form of defeat. Of course not.

But this is where God wants to help us all the time. Sometimes it's in the realm of thoughts and imaginations, mental indulgences. Sometimes it's indeed.

And you know, it has such a fascination that you cease to call it sin. You learn to live with it. It's very easy amongst women not to see it as sin.

I think it hits men perhaps a little more intensely and they can't kid themselves. They know what's in their hearts. But not always a woman.

You see, very often for a woman, it's just being made a fuss of. She doesn't want much more, but it's impurity nonetheless. I remember Nancy Cape, Nancy Butler, giving her testimony.

She was a hot bit. She was Bill Butler's wife. In England, now has been in Africa.

But I heard her giving her testimony to a little group of us. And when she was a nurse in hospital, she said God convicted her of impurity. And this is how she was convicted.

The moment the doctors came round the ward, each day she was a different person. She was just very ordinary otherwise. Bit grumpy maybe.

But once the doctors came round, she was so charming, so kidney, so full of fun. So, and God said, why are you different in front of men than you are with women? And she said, this is sin. This is impurity.

And she repented of it. Well, I mention that because it isn't so easy, it isn't so difficult to convict a man of impurity, he knows. But it's more veiled, but nonetheless just as deadly in women.

And we want to be those, we're not going to take a terrible stick to ourselves when we find these tendencies. God says, now tell me, admit it, judge it, take it to the cross. Happy the person who is repenting.

I believe if you're not repenting of impurity, you're probably indulging in it. For in one way or another, it comes to all of us. And I think a man ought to be open and honest with his wife, give her his testimony.

Where he's had to go to the cross. Some wives, you know, my husband, obviously he never seemed to be troubled, you know, he never had to tell me these things. If he isn't, he's probably indulging.

If not, enact, please God, he's not. May be in heart and mind, and eyes. But my friend, we don't get away with it.

We get overthrown in the wilderness by it. And yet I want to tell you this, there's no sin for which grace is more readily available. There's no class of person that Jesus dealt more tenderly with than those that were overtaken in peace.

He knows our friends. He knows our physical makeup. He knows this point where the physical and the moral do merge.

And he's tender and compassionate. But he does ask us to take sides with him against it. And you'll find all the sweetness of grace and mercy and forgiveness and many a sweet help available to us.

And although we have these tendencies and we have often to repent, we can nonetheless walk with Jesus in Kenya, repenting of inclinations, having a testimony along these lines. I could pass on to the fourth thing that overthrew them in the wilderness. Neither let us tempt Christ, as some of them also tempted and were destroyed of serpents, tempting the Lord.

If you'd like to turn back to, with your finger there, to Exodus, chapter 17, verse five, 17, verse two, rather. Wherefore the people did chide with Moses and said, give us water that we may drink. And Moses said to them, why chide ye with me? Wherefore do you tempt the Lord? And then in verse seven, and he called the name of the place Massa and Meribah because of the chiding of the children of Israel and because they tempted the Lord saying, is the Lord among us or not? And in one of the Psalms, it talks about them tempting God in the wilderness.

Now here's a sin that we've got a spot in ourselves, tempting God. And they tempted him by saying, is he among us or not? Here we are in this desert, there's no water. Is he among us or not? He seems to have blessed us.

And God says, you know, you're tempting me. You're tempting me to act towards you according to your low thoughts of me. That's what I take, tempting God to be.

My friends, what a temptation would be to him. We've only got to have a test, only got to be stuck out on a limb for a little bit, only got to be suspended by a thread and not know how the future's going to turn out in

God's divine. After all, we've done all these years being Christians and now look at our things.

And you know, we're tempting him in the wilderness. We're provoking him. We're tempting him to act according to these terrible thoughts of unbelief.

Oh, thank God his love helps him, if I may put it that way, to resist that temptation. But my friend, it overthrows from the wilderness and it often brings chastening upon us and certainly lack of peace and loss of his fellowship, tempting God. I remember some years ago how God had to help me with tempting him in the wilderness.

Going through various things, I had to leave the evangelistic society with which I was working. And I found myself without, as it seems, support. And then I found that door after door all over England was closed against me for various reasons.

I didn't like the sort of message God had given me. I wasn't altogether blameless. I was a bit lopsided, maybe, but be that as it may.

And I remember lying awake at night saying, Lord, I'm finished at 40. You've just finished. You've forgotten us.

Nothing ahead. And oh, what times I had. Tempting God in the wilderness, saying, is the Lord among us? Have you done that? You may.

You don't know what tests are waiting for you around the corner. You're not rejoicing in Jesus when you're tempting him with your unbelief and your dark thoughts of his love. And they did that after wonderful manifestations of his grace.

They'd only got to wait. God had got it all ready. I'd only got to wait, but I couldn't wait.

And the waiting seemed so long and nothing seemed to open up. And oh, what low time I was in, in spirit. Tempting God in the wilderness.

No Canaan experience when you're there. My dear friend, you've got to learn to repent in those special things. The only time when you can score runs is when you're bowled against.

This is your chance. When the test is over, the innings is over, you've lost your chance. This is our chance to trust, to repent to those low thoughts.

As though he slayed me, yet when I trusted the God who gave Jesus for me, is not at this late hour going to forsake me. The God who gave him is going to freely give me with all things. And though he withholds it for some time, I'm going to trust.

But before you start trusting, you'll have to be dealing with the sin of this terrible unbelief, tempting him in the wilderness. It is a test. Oh, he knows it.

He's tender with you, but he knows he's the only way in which we're going to grow in the knowledge of him. Amy Carmichael in one of her poems talks about, listen, the age-long minute when thou art silent and the winds are high. She's referring, of course, to the incident in the boat when the storms had come and Jesus was still asleep.

It was only a moment, only a minute, between the coming of the storm and his awakening to their relief, but she calls it an age-long minute. Do you know that age-long minute? How long is it going to go on for? How long is this test going to last? And in that age-long minute, how down you can fall. What low thoughts you may be living with for some time.

Dear one, you'll never enjoy Jesus in his fullness until you recall that as sin and doggedly repent of it every time it comes and take it to the fountain where sin is washed away. And then you found peace, even while the situation is agitated. When in God's time relief comes, I knew it was coming.

I knew God dealt with me over it all. Yes, remember, it's only when you're being bowled against you can score any rounds. And then the fourth, the fifth, rather, thing that overthrew them in the wilderness, neither murmur ye as some of them also murmur, and we're destroyed as servants.

Now, this last one is the most recurrent sin that they committed in the wilderness, murmuring. It's a lovely word, murmuring. Murmur, murmur, murmur, murmur, murmur, murmur, murmur.

I hope it won't happen in a house party, but you'd have it in a house party. Murmur, murmur, murmur, murmur, murmur, murmur, murmur. Maybe something goes wrong with the meal.

Well, we'll have to put that right as far as we can, but it can happen. It can happen in a church. Murmur, murmur, murmur, murmur, murmur, murmur, murmur.

Buzzing all round. And oh, it only needed them to run into a test. They never gave God a chance to fulfil his promise.

They started murmuring. It's complaining, complaining. And my God had to chasten them.

Thousands died because of the discipline he had to bring upon them for their murmuring. Do you know, I've counted it out, there are 13 occasions where Israel murmured in the wilderness. My dear friends, what about you? Murmuring about what God allows.

Now that's what we've got to see. When I'm murmuring about situations, or even about people, I'm murmuring against the Lord. This is something that he has allowed.

Someone has given this illustration that we're in the centre of a circle. The circle is the will of God. And nothing can touch me in the centre of the circle, but it has to come through the circumference, the will of God.

In other words, no matter how that thing began, somebody else's manners, or some terrible mistake, you want to blame them. It could never have touched you, but God allowed it to come through that circle. And by the time it reaches you, or me, it is God's permissive will for us.

And in resenting that, and complaining of that, and murmuring against that, I'm murmuring against the Lord. If you want to see that clearly stated, turn to Exodus 16. Exodus 16, verse eight.

The Lord, halfway through that verse, the Lord heareth your murmurings, which ye murmur against him. And what are we? Your murmurings are not against us, against Moses and Aaron, but against the Lord. Now we very seldom blame the Lord.

We just haven't got the face to do it. But we're adepts at blaming somebody else. And the Lord has to show us, you're not murmuring against him, it's against me.

Even when a person does wrong things, God's allowed it to happen. Maybe to teach you something. As far as they're concerned, it's not his will that they should act like that way.

And you should have a burden that for their sakes, not to yours, God will help them. But as far as you're concerned, if you're going to have peace in the midst of somebody else's behavior, you've got to see that this is something he's permitted to teach you something. And when we murmur against him, we're really murmuring against the Lord, who's permitted this or that.

I tell you, you can't say that you're rejoicing in the Lord Jesus when there's this. And if we're to live in this promised land, we are to repent and go to Jesus and judge this thing. May God reveal it to us.

Now just a moment or two more. And once again, the last moments are so important, but God can give us the meaning. Two things about these things that overthrew them.

Every one of them involved chastening. Every one of them brought upon Israel death. Again and again, the pain was sent as a result.

I imagine an epidemic. Goodness knows it would be easy enough for terrible epidemics to sweep those encampments. Thousands died under each of these five incidents.

Their ranks were thinned and their bones were left. Now that wasn't punishment. I've said this before, I say it again.

It wasn't punitive in its intention. It was restorative. It was designed to get them to repent.

And my friends, it isn't only that these things deprive me of my full inheritance in Christ if I don't repent of them, but sometimes they bring me under chastening. I suppose the loss of peace and unhappiness and emptiness is part of the chastening. Sometimes he has to go further with us.

But that is never to be thought of as punitive. Only restorative to help us to see what it is God's after. And then to humble ourselves under his mighty hand.

The second thing I want to say is this. The people never repented in the wilderness except once. And that's the last time they murmured.

There's no occasion, as far as I can see, of a clear-cut repentance of the path of Israel over all these things except on that occasion when they were murmuring in Numbers 21 and the Lord sent fiery serpents and people were dying all around and a deputation came to Moses and said, Moses, we have sinned. We spoke against the Lord and against you. Pray for us that the Lord take away the serpents from us.

That was the last time they murmured. I tell you, the day you begin to repent of a thing is the day when you move out of it. It's the turning of a corner.

But never until Numbers 21 did these people repent. They did these things, they came under chastening and they just took it and they went on. But do you know the moment on this occasion they repented, God said, stop the serpents.

He provided that wonderful remedy and his hand was lifted off them so quickly. A third thing is this. It is on the one occasion when they repented that there was given them a remedy for the chastening that had fallen upon them.

And it's only when you really begin to call things sin that you get a new efficacious sight of God's remedy to sin. And oh, what a lovely picture that is, that serpent lifted up on the pole. You know, the remedy was in the shape of the thing that had caused all the trouble.

It was serpents that had bitten them. It was a serpent made of brass nailed to a pole that was the remedy. And in the hour of repentance, God's going to show you the Lord Jesus like that.

He's going to show you Jesus hung on the cross, yes, but he's going to show you Jesus there in the shape of the thing that's caused all the trouble. In fact, I don't think we really see sin till we see Jesus made an effigy of it on the cross because that's what happened to him. He was made in the likeness of sinful flesh.

You say, well, it's not very bad what I've done. I suppose it's wrong. But when you see that that caused the death of the Lord Jesus, you begin to see sin as it really is.

I remember once putting right a matter of jealousy with a brother. I find it difficult to admit to jealousy, don't you? And to make it easier for myself, I did it with a little laugh, a little giggle. And this dear friend of mine turned on me, eyes in which there was no smile.

He says, Roy, that jealousy of yours is no laughing matter. It cost Jesus his blood. And I saw that sin putting him there.

I saw the Lord Jesus made an effigy of that jealousy. I saw Jesus bearing the judgment due to it and crying, my God, why hast thou forsaken me? And I tell you, it wrought repentance in me. But the great meaning of this lovely sign is this.

Not only the serpent lifted up, but the serpent transfixed, nailed to a pole as a vanquished, defeated thing, was when they saw that, that the dying received life. And what I see at the cross is not only sin there, but sin judged, sin finished. As we said, the blood is a token of judgment met.

There's my sin held up as a vanquished, defeated thing, with Jesus saying, it's finished. Your prayers, your attempts to be better will do nothing. It's already been done.

I think in Israel they were doing everything they could to bind up their wounds. And that sign said, stop, you're trying to bind up the wounds. God's already done for it.

Now you've repented. It's all he wanted. Look, he's finished it.

That's what the sign meant. And as they believed it, new life came. And that's what we have to avail ourselves in the wilderness.

It's the way out to the wilderness. See whatever it is of these things, things I haven't mentioned. I go to the cross.

I see Jesus made in the likeness of my sin, but I see it judged. It's judgment over, finished by him on my behalf. And as without works, without striving, without merit on my part, with repentance, I take hold of the fact that he's finished it for me.

Then life comes. It is not your prayers of repentance nor tears, but the blood that atones for the soul. On him then who shed it, thou mayest at once thy weight of iniquities roll.

Then doubt not your welcome, for God has declared, there remaineth no more to be done that once in the end of the age he appeared and finished the work he began. Then take with rejoicing from Jesus at once the life everlasting he lives, and know with assurance thou never canst die since Jesus thy righteousness lives. Look, look, look and live as life at this moment for thee.

Praise the Lord.

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