

*Call to Worship*

Welcome to worship with Feilding Baptist Church!

Welcome to Rachel, Sam, Theo, Sadie, Luka who are leading us this morning.

Welcome to our friends from Knox. May we be caring and kind as you grieve, and transition from what was familiar. You're in good company, there are very few here that grew up in the Baptist denomination. Who? Who was with the Salvation Army? Methodist? Who had no church background growing up?

1 Timothy 1:15-17 (NIV – UK)

15 Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners – of whom I am the worst. 16 But for that very reason I was shown mercy so that in me, the worst of sinners, Christ Jesus might display his immense patience as an example for those who would believe in him and receive eternal life. 17 Now to the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honour and glory for ever and ever. Amen.

We pray now to our eternal King, our immortal, invisible, patient God. Father, thank you for your great mercy, your grace, your love. Thank you for Jesus, the very expression of your grace, mercy, and love. Thank you for Your presence, your interest in us, your concern for us. You know what has gone on for us this week, please forgive us, cleanse us, set us back on the right path. Holy Spirit, please fill us, help us to exude Your fruit. Please help us to exude worship too, may we worship freely this morning, Amen.

*Message – Lessons in the Desert*

God's leading isn't always through a land of milk honey, but we can trust the purposes of God, and know that God is good.

Without water, life in the desert is always on the brink of death (Buckingham, 72). This is the case for humans, animals, and plants.

Species of the acacia (wattle) tree grows roots 10 metres deep to find water.

Desert animals can survive a long time between drinks. Take the camel, ah, but which camel?! Dromedary or Bactrian? One hump or two?! Well, the two hump one lives in Mongolia. The one hump ones are in Australia, Africa, and the Middle East. Despite the apparent manger in the photo, the wise men probably didn't come from Mongolia...

A camel can live in the desert 21 days between drinks. In this time they can cover 1000 km's without a drink. 50 kilometres a day! 1000 kilometres, over 21 days between drinks.

Camels can drink 225 litres of water at a drinks stop, that's 300 Mizone (750ml) bottles. Of course everyone knows that camels stores that water in their:

- a) humps
- b) stomachs
- c) bladders
- d) blood
- e) all of the above
- f) none of the above!

The 225 litres of water is immediately distributed through the camel's body, with red corpuscles in the blood expanding 240 times.

Now for humans. True or False; Black clothes actually lower your skin temperature. It's true, black clothing saves body water.

How long can humans last in the desert? Three days is the maximum time the human body can go without water in the desert (Buckingham, 62). Death from dehydration doesn't come quickly, it creeps up on you. Humans can lose 4.5 litres, (4 quarts) of water in an hour on a hot day. In the shade this is half. If you will only drink Coca Cola or coffee, you'll die in the desert. Warm water keeps you alive. You have to drink whether you feel like it or not.

The people of Israel were facing a new experience. They were now in the desert, having come from a country with the Nile River. They had always had water, and plenty of it. The Nile never ran dry.

After the plagues, the Israelites left Egypt, with God leading them with a pillar of cloud by day, and fire by night (Exodus 13:21-22). They got to the Red Sea, and all looked lost with the Egyptian army right behind them. The cloud and angel separate the people from the Egyptian army (Exodus 14:19) and God brought them through the Red Sea, safely, and unscathed. Exodus 15 begins so positively as the people give praise and thanks to God. And then they follow the cloud into the desert.

It's hardly surprising that after three days, they were getting a bit thirsty. Actually, it was more than that, they were pretty desperate. They needed water not only for themselves, but for their animals. And where does God lead them? Let's read;

Marah – Exodus 15:22-27

Exodus 15:22-27 New International Version - UK

The waters of Marah and Elim

22 Then Moses led Israel from the Red Sea and they went into the Desert of Shur. For three days they travelled in the desert without finding water. 23 When they came to Marah, they could not drink its water because it was bitter. (That is why the place is called Marah.[a]) 24 So the people grumbled against Moses, saying, 'What are we to drink?'

25 Then Moses cried out to the Lord, and the Lord showed him a piece of wood. He threw it into the water, and the water became fit to drink.

There the Lord issued a ruling and instruction for them and put them to the test. 26 He said, 'If you listen carefully to the Lord your God and do what is right in his eyes, if you pay attention to his commands and keep all his decrees, I will not bring on you any of the diseases I brought on the Egyptians, for I am the Lord, who heals you.'

27 Then they came to Elim, where there were twelve springs and seventy palm trees, and they camped there near the water.

Footnotes

Exodus 15:23 Marah means bitter.

God is leading the people, they are desperate for water, and they come to Marah, the bitter waters. Is this a sadistic joke? Is this a mistake? Or are they exactly where they need to be?

Is God good?

Sometimes tough times are evil. Such as forms of abuse. But sometimes God brings us to a tough place to teach us something. I can think of a holiday job that I had. My employer was really tough, unreasonably tough. Actually, they were mean, and nasty. They made my life a misery. I could have chucked it in, but I knew that I needed to be there, and that I had to stay. Fortunately, as it was a holiday job, I didn't have to put up with it for long.

But what was the learning? Well, I couldn't see it at the time, but it was toughening me up, growing in me perseverance. Sometimes you have to grind life out. And years later, a similar thing happened for a much longer period. If I hadn't had that earlier experience, which, when I look back, was like a vaccination, I doubt I would have made it through the much longer one.

Does that resonate with anyone? Has anyone experienced something like that? Tough times that you knew you had to endure?

Look, if you're in a difficult place, and you're hating it, what's the right thing to do? Talk to God! Ask God is you should stay? Ask God if you can go? If God doesn't lead you, step out, and see what whether God confirms, or cautions you. (And seek advice from wise people, not necessarily friends who will side with you.)

What was good about bitter waters?!!! It wasn't undrinkable, it almost was. The results of drinking it were pretty unpleasant. It was full of calcium and magnesium. Do you know what that does to the human body? It causes a quick outpouring! Diarrhoea on a scale you wouldn't believe. The Bedouins have a saying that one spoonful will make you 'go' for a week! It's a powerful laxative! Licking your fingers after putting them in the water will even produce stomach cramps in just a few minutes.!

So why drink it??? Well, there are two reasons.

God wanted the people out of Egypt, and wanted Egypt out of the people. They had brought a lot of Egypt with them, inside them. Egypt was a filthy nation. And it had just endured plagues of flies, frog, boils, impure water... While the people had largely escaped the plagues, they still brought with them the contamination of Egypt. By drinking the water, they would have got rid of all the parasites living in their intestines. They would have been purged! This would have brought much improved health. The bitter water was a cleansing water.

Secondly, magnesium and calcium together are the basis for a drug called dolomite. Professional athletes who have to perform in the hot places take dolomite tablets. It's good for the heart and muscles for those performing in hot sunny conditions. Here God was providing in the bitter waters the right medication, and instant purification, to rid their bodies of ills, and to prepare their bodies for the way ahead.

God is good!

Did the people see it that way, did they trust God? See v24,  
[24 So the people grumbled against Moses, saying, 'What are we to drink?'](#)

What are we to drink? It doesn't seem an unreasonable or unfair question. But look at the way it is asked. The problem here was their attitude (Stuart, 366). They grumbled it says at the start of v24. We can then imagine the whingy way in which they asked. Like brats. They lacked trust, and more importantly respect.

Sometimes we need the waters of Marah so that our crusty spirits can be broken, so that the Spirit of God can get in! We read in v25 that the people were being tested here. And it was a time of teaching. Through the plagues and the dealings with Pharaoh, Moses had learned to trust God. Now the people had to learn too (Exodus 14:13-14).

Moses cried out to God on behalf of the people, and God replies with three things He expected:

V26 'If you listen carefully to the Lord your God and do what is right in his eyes, if you pay attention to his commands and keep all his decrees, I will not bring on you any of the diseases I brought on the Egyptians, for I am the Lord, who heals you.'

If you listen, do what is right, and pay attention, God will do what? God will heal you.

Good times were to come. And they were, for close by, around an hour away, v27 were the springs of Elim.

Spring forward 1300 years, and we find that water is an image that Jesus uses in the New Testament. Jesus saw the gift of the Holy Spirit who was to come, as like a spring of fresh water.

John 4:13-14 (NIV – UK)

13 Jesus answered, 'Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, 14 but whoever drinks the water I give them will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give them will become in them a spring of water welling up to eternal life.'

Note that this is not a well, but a spring. A beautiful source of pure clean clear water.

As we come to our time of Communion, of remembering Jesus, of looking back, so that we can look forward, let us be grateful for the gift of the Holy Spirit, that Jesus foresees.

John 7:37-39

37 On the last and greatest day of the festival, Jesus stood and said in a loud voice, 'Let anyone who is thirsty come to me and drink. 38 Whoever believes in me, as Scripture has said, rivers of living water will flow from within them.' [c] 39 By this he meant the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were later to receive. Up to that time the Spirit had not been given, since Jesus had not yet been glorified.

Jesus had his own time of bitter waters. Remember the bitter cup that Jesus drank, praying that it be taken from Him. It wasn't. So He continued, to the cross. Life isn't always milk and honey. (Exodus 3:7-12), our challenge is to trust the purposes of God, and remember that God is good.

### Benediction

May you now go from our service of worship  
to the service of God's people near and far,  
refreshed by the living water that Jesus offers to you.  
Listen for the parched voices of the least of these;  
search out the dry places and the arid souls,  
and become for them a spring of living water.

And as you go,  
may the blessings of the God of life,  
the Christ of love,  
and the Spirit of grace  
be upon you this day and forevermore. Amen