

THE WATERS OF CHALLENGE

INTRODUCTION

We are in our month of consecration and sanctification. God has led us to spend time examining ourselves and to allow Him to set us apart for the purpose He has for our lives – and He has a great purpose:

Our mission statement is “**Flourishing in faith, growing in love**”. Doesn’t that speak of a sanctified people.

Moreover, our vision statement is: “**Our vision is to grow and thrive, becoming a church of irresistible influence, reaching those God has in this city and elsewhere, as we love God, love people and make disciples.**”

None of these can be achieved if we are not sanctified and consecrated to the Lord.

We are clearly moving into a new level of relationship with God, a new level of spirituality and spiritual impact on our community. We are rebuilding the walls of our lives and our church as we are learning about it in our studies on Nehemiah. But like the people in the days of Nehemiah, we are also like a people who were once in captivity, but now are free.

One of the greatest accounts of being freed from captivity is the one recorded in the book of Exodus. The people were not only freed from physical captivity, but also from spiritual captivity. **God sanctified them and consecrated them to be the nation of promise that He had called them to be.**

Israel had several obstacles to overcome on their way to the Promised Land. Today we can learn from four of those challenges, with particular reference to water:

- The waters of destruction.
- The waters of obstruction.
- The waters of bitterness.
- The waters of discontent.

As we go through our month of consecration, I believe God wants us to deal with all of these same four CHALLENGES and approach them with faith!

MESSAGE

THE WATERS OF DESTRUCTION

In Exodus 1, we see God’s promise to Abraham unfolding – the Israelites had multiplied over a period of 400 years, in fact, they multiplied so greatly that they became extremely powerful and filled the land. Eventually an Egyptian king came into power and said to his people: “Look, the people of Israel now

outnumber us and are stronger than we are. We must make a plan to keep them from growing even more. So the Egyptians made the Israelites their slaves. **But the more the Egyptians oppressed them, the more the Israelites multiplied and spread, and the more alarmed the Egyptians became.**

Then Pharaoh, the king of Egypt, gave this order to the Hebrew midwives, "When you help the Hebrew women as they give birth, watch as they deliver. If the baby is a boy, kill him; if it is a girl, let her live." But because the midwives feared God, they refused to obey the king's orders. They allowed the boys to live, too.

Exodus 1:22 (NLT) Then Pharaoh gave this order to all his people: "Throw every newborn Hebrew boy into the Nile River. But you may let the girls live."

Thus, for Israel, the Nile River became the waters of destruction!

When Moses was born, his mother could simply not do this, so she prepared a basket made of papyrus reeds and waterproofed it with tar and pitch. She put the baby in the basket and laid it among the reeds along the bank of the Nile River and Moses, this little Hebrew boy who was destined for destruction by being thrown into the river Nile, was placed right in the middle of God's plan for his life.

- Instead of being drowned, Pharaoh's own daughter found him, adopted him and had his own mother nurse him. She even paid Moses mother to do it.
- **Exodus 2:10** (NLT) Later, when the boy was older, his mother brought him back to Pharaoh's daughter, who adopted him as her own son. **The princess named him Moses, for she explained, "I lifted him out of the water."**

As we continue with our Exodus and our Nehemiah experience, **we may face what seems to be waters of destruction!** Satan may be trying to destroy us, **but we have God** on our side!

Psalm 40:2 (NLT) He lifted me out of the pit of despair, out of the mud and the mire. He set my feet on solid ground and steadied me as I walked along.

We may be in deep trouble, facing absolute despair and lack of hope, but God... but God!

- **When we face the waters of challenge, we must not just accept them – we need to do something!**
- He lifts us up out of the dangerous waters and the pit of despair.
- He sets our feet on the solid ground and steadies us.
- His love is higher, deeper and wider than what we can ever comprehend. Let Him lift you up today!

No matter how great the enemy's attack, God is able to rescue us and help us. He will save us from the waters of destruction!

THE WATERS OF OBSTRUCTION

Going forward some 80 years, Pharaoh, after finally conceding that he could not win against the one true God had let the Israelites go. But he only relented for a moment, then he sent his army with their chariots to chase the Israelites and bring them back.

This is just like the devil – don't let your guard down for one moment!

- **1 Corinthians 10:12** (NLT) If you think you are standing strong, be careful not to fall.
- **1 Peter 5:8** (NLT) Stay alert! Watch out for your great enemy, the devil. He prowls around like a roaring lion, looking for someone to devour.

The Israelites were running for their lives but they finally arrived at the Red sea – **the waters of obstruction** - and it seemed as if they had reached the end of the road.

Exodus 14:10-11 (NLT) As Pharaoh approached, the people of Israel looked up and panicked when they saw the Egyptians overtaking them. They cried out to the Lord, 11 and they said to Moses, "Why did you bring us out here to die in the wilderness?"

- They looked back and saw the dust of Pharaoh's chariots.
- They looked forward and saw an immovable barrier.
- They panicked and started to cry and complain.

Because they didn't look up to see the pillars of cloud and fire!

So often we face difficult situations. We know God has seen us through in the past, but **all we can see is an impenetrable barrier** and we even start to question our faith "Why did you bring us out here to die in the wilderness?"

But God is more than able, why then do we start to doubt?

Because we don't look up!

Exodus 14:13-14 (NLT) 13 But Moses told the people, "Don't be afraid. Just stand still and watch the Lord rescue you today. The Egyptians you see today will never be seen again. 14 The Lord himself will fight for you. Just stay calm

God is speaking to us today. We may be facing the waters of obstruction:

- We don't have finances.
- We may not have money.
- We may be struggling in our marriages.
- It seems like there is no way out.

But God says today "LOOK UP, I AM WITH YOU! I WILL FIGHT FOR YOU, JUST STAY CALM".

THE WATERS OF BITTERNESS

Exodus 15:22-25a (NLT) Then Moses led the people of Israel away from the Red Sea, and they moved out into the desert of Shur. They traveled in this desert for three days without finding any water. 23 When they came to the oasis of Marah, the water was too bitter to drink. So they called the place Marah (which means "bitter"). 24 Then the people complained and turned against Moses. "What are we going to drink?" they demanded. 25 So Moses cried out to the Lord for help, and the Lord showed him a piece of wood. Moses threw it into the water, and this made the water good to drink.

- Life is not always a walk in the park.
- People are not always kind – they can be terribly hurtful.
- Unforgiveness and bitterness can easily take root in our lives.

If we want to be sanctified and consecrated to God, there is no place for the root of bitterness to creep into our lives – one of the areas God wants to deal with us about in this season of rebuilding is bitterness and unforgiveness.

- We may be searching for a deeper relationship with Jesus, we may be thirsting for His living water, but it's going to take the wood of the cross, to deal with the bitterness in our lives.
- Jesus can give us that sweet living water, but we need to first deal with the bitterness and unforgiveness in our lives and that can only be done by faith in the power of Jesus sacrifice on the cross.
- As father has forgiven us, let us also forgive others!

Dealing with bitterness **will release God's covenant of healing** in our lives!

Exodus 15:25b-26 It was there at Marah that the Lord set before them the following decree as a standard to test their faithfulness to him. 26 He said, "If you will listen carefully to the voice of the Lord your God and do what is right in his sight, obeying his commands and keeping all his decrees, then I will not make you suffer any of the diseases I sent on the Egyptians; for I am the Lord who heals you."

- We need to listen carefully to our Lord's voice.
- We need to do what is right in His sight.
- We need to walk in obedience.

Then He will protect us from sickness and disease.

Hebrews 12:15 (NLT) Look after each other so that none of you fails to receive the grace of God. Watch out that no poisonous root of bitterness grows up to trouble you, corrupting many.

Are we willing to let go? Are we willing to forgive? Let the cross of Christ remove the waters of bitterness in our lives today!

THE WATERS OF DISCONTENT

Exodus 17:1-2 (NLT) At the Lord's command, the whole community of Israel left the wilderness of Sin and moved from place to place. Eventually they camped at Rephidim, but there was no water there for the people to drink. 2 So once more the people complained against Moses. "Give us water to drink!" they demanded. "Quiet!" Moses replied. "Why are you complaining against me? And why are you testing the Lord?"

- By now the people had seen God's miraculous provision, protection and grace over and over and yet again they complained...
- For some people, a day without complaining would really be unusual, we find all sorts of excuses to complain.
- Just turn on a talk radio station and you will find that discontent far outweighs joy, happiness and contentedness.
- It's possible to have it in the church too – we have God's blessing and presence, but people will focus on the negative instead.

God is calling us out of discontent – a sanctified and consecrated people are a people of joy and contentedness, they are also a people of faith.

Jerry Skosana has been working in the church assisting with maintenance and he said something that struck me – he gave the example of the media where bad news results in more and more negativity... then he said, "all it takes is for one or two to start helping and working around the church, and in the same way as discontent spreads, so good things can spread too – all of a sudden we will have a lot of people saying "what can I do?".

- Let me ask you this – what happens with discontent in a situation like that?

Exodus 17:5-6 (NLT) The Lord said to Moses, "Walk out in front of the people. Take your staff, the one you used when you struck the water of the Nile, and call some of the elders of Israel to join you. 6 I will stand before you on the rock at Mount Sinai. Strike the rock, and water will come gushing out. Then the people will be able to drink."

- The LORD was right there! He was standing before them.
- The water was right there!
- **There was no need for discontent!**
- All they had to do was to trust God and He would provide water from the rock.

Ecclesiastes 1:8 (NLT) Everything is wearisome beyond description. No matter how much we see, we are never satisfied. No matter how much we hear, we are not content.

What are we discontented about today? Are we guilty of unsanctified thinking? **Have we been complaining in the presence of the Lord?** All we have to do is ask God and trust Him to bring water out of the rocks of our lives! Are we willing to do deal with our waters of discontent today?

CONCLUSION

We face four waters of challenge in this journey we have into our Promised Land – during our month of consecration and sanctification, each one can be overcome by faith as we look to God our source and our joy!

- The waters of destruction – He can rescue us, don't accept them!
- The waters of obstruction – He can move every obstacle – look up!
- The waters of bitterness – forgiveness and the cross of Christ will deliver us.
- The waters of discontent – Why be discontent when God is right here with us!

As we go through our month of consecration, I believe God wants us to come to terms with each of these four areas and approach them with faith!

I close with this. Moses asked God who He was and God replied "I AM THAT I AM", or "I WILL BE WHAT I WILL BE".

Let's spend a moment thinking what this message means to us this morning:

- Who is God to us this morning?
- Are we letting Him be who He wants to be?
- God is with us, there is nothing we can't face with Him and deal with through Him – He is YHWH, Jehovah, our Living God and He is with us today!