

**B.C.H. H.C.**  
**28.9.14**

**EXODUS 17:1-7**  
**MATT. 21:23-32**

## **BIG EXPECTATIONS**

The story of Exodus 17 is not mainly a story about lack of water. It is a story about expectations.

What do we mean when we speak about expectations?

In the UK we expect to live an average of 81 years; human beings expect a baby to be born around 9 months after conception; you might expect your intelligent child to do well at school, or feel that based on experience and performance you can expect to be in the running for a job promotion; and you may expect that someone who says they love you will help you, support and commit to you.

All those expectations are about reasonable assumptions that things will happen based on past experience or information that others have gathered and taught.

But sometimes it doesn't work that way. Disease cuts life short, the baby comes early, the child is bullied and grades plummet, lack of funding means there's no job at all, or the person you relied on doesn't give what you hoped for.

Often, then, our instinct is to blame someone else. Yet sometimes it's not about whose fault it is. It may just be that we didn't look at life as being completely about a gift of grace, with no reason for our assumptions at all.

The Israelites had assumed they would be slaves in Egypt all their lives. Then there was a dramatic escape, a life-changing event. It altered their view. *'The Israelites went through the sea on dry ground...and when they saw the great power the Lord displayed....the people put their trust in him and in Moses his servant' (14:29,31)*

In the next chapter we read the song of joy, about how they can trust God: *Who is like you- majestic in holiness, awesome in glory, working wonders?*

*...In your unfailing love you will lead the people you have redeemed(15:11,13).*

This God is fantastic! He can do anything! He's amazing! We're free! We'll trust him and go wherever Moses tells us now we know what a powerful and loving God he is!

It doesn't seem to take long to change their minds. *For three days they travelled in the desert without finding water and when they came to Marah they could not drink its water because it was bitter. So the people grumbled against Moses...(15:22-24)* God makes the water sweet. Moses tells them to listen to God and do the right thing according to him, and all will be well. On they go.

And later *they set out from Elim....and the whole community grumbled against Moses and Aaron....you've brought us to this desert to starve us to death..(16:3)* God gives them quail and manna, enough for each day. They don't listen to the instructions they're given, the food goes off. They try again.

Some time later they set off *from the Desert of Sin travelling from place to place....but there was no water for the people to drink, so they quarrelled with Moses... "give us water to drink" (17:1-2)* And perhaps there is the most telling statement of all: *they tested the Lord saying "Is the Lord amongst us or not" (17:7)* Just think about it! Freedom from slavery, escape from cruel enemies, water and food when you need it. Is the Lord amongst you? If only they could look at where they'd come from! But looking for someone to blame they turn to the human representatives and shout about God.

God gives them water. Personally I think I would have been so fed up with them by this point that I would have told them to find their own way back to Egypt if it was so much better there. God, however, gives them water.

What is the problem? It's the same one we suffer from today. We don't seem to have what we think we need when we think we need it. So if God really is amongst us, if God really is powerful, if God really is good and

loving, then shouldn't we be able to expect that he'll give what we want and need? It does seem reasonable. On the basis of what he did in the past we expect him to act a certain way now.

That's the problem. A relationship founded on what we think we deserve or what we think we can expect will so often disappoint. A relationship based only on what you learned in the past rather than what there is to learn now will often falter. Sooner or later they will not do what you expect, they will not do what you want. Then you will feel the insecurity or the anger or the fear.

The Israelites had done nothing to deserve God setting them free or helping them so far but he had done. If they could somehow have gone on remembering the good gifts and treating them as just that – good gifts to be thankful for, which they hadn't earned, then maybe a relationship of trust and grace and gratitude would have developed more easily than it did.

If you ever had to suffer that phrase *'I expected better of you'* you'll know how damaging that can feel when you fail to live up to the standards of others. How many children have crumpled under the weight of expectations at school or home?

If we can't do what others expect, we certainly can't do what God expects. That's why it's all about trust in what Jesus Christ has done and continues to do for us. That alone gives us any hope of renewed life now and heaven when we die.

Instead of expectations of how God would behave based on their own ideas of what they deserved and how they thought they'd got his character sorted, the Israelites needed *expectancy*. Where expectation demands a certain outcome, expectancy lives in the belief that there is something to be discovered and learned and received whatever happens. It has a hope, yes, but it is all going to be a surprise! It's a better way to find contentment.

It doesn't make it easy, but just perhaps for the person with a disease there may well be a greater sense of wanting to get the most out of life; the person overlooked for the job who can be thankful for the years he held it

might find it a little easier to avoid blame and anger; the person who can see how much good there was in that relationship may find it easier to forgive when the other person disappoints.

So this is not a story about food and water. It's a story of expectations and learning to trust that the God who seemed to be powerful and loving still is. God isn't abandoning his people in the desert but he'd like them to relate to him better. He'd like them to see what they've already been given and to trust for what's to come.

*Expectations* make us want a certain outcome; hold someone to behaving as we've decided they should.

*Expectancy* makes us thankful for all we have and all we experience of them.

Where do we think we have a right to God's attention in the way we demand? Where do we place expectations on others that will weigh them down because they can't fulfil them? Where do we need to live more in expectancy and hope than in expectation and disappointment? Wouldn't it transform our world if we could be more thankful and place less of a burden of expectation on other people's shoulders?

Thank God that he keeps on giving anyway! The bread of life, the water of life, and the Way, the Truth and the Life for all who will go with him.