

Bethlehem Well Waters

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[0 : 00] As we go to 1 Chronicles chapter 11, we see these verses then, 17 to 19. David longed and said, O that one would give me drink of the water of the well of Bethlehem that is at the gate.

And the three break through the host of the Philistines and drew water out of the well of Bethlehem that was by the gate and took it and brought it to David. But David would not drink of it, but poured it out to the Lord and said, My God forbid me that I should do this thing.

Shall I drink the blood of these men that have put their lives in jeopardy? For with the jeopardy of their lives they brought it. Therefore he did not drink it. These things did these three mightiest.

And towards the end of this passage that we read in 1 Chronicles 11, David is hiding in the rock Adullam as we read it there in verse 15. Now it might be that this is taking place once David is king as part of a military campaign against the Philistines, or perhaps more likely this section is a flashback to when David was on the run from Saul and from the Philistines as well.

Now apart from this incident, which is also recorded in 2 Samuel 23, the only time that David is explicitly described as sheltering in the cave of Adullam is at 1 Samuel 22, when he comes there as a fugitive from both Saul and the Philistines.

[1 : 28] At that point, the narrative makes clear that was in fact his lowest point of all time. When he flees there, he is completely alone. He is trying to make himself mad or appear mad in front of the Philistines so that he would save his life and they just throw him out, which they did.

And then he knew he had nowhere to hide. So he fled to the rock Adullam. And gradually as word spread that he was there, people came to him. His family came to him, those who were in debt, those who were in trouble.

And he gathered a band of people around him. And his fortunes began to build up. His providence began to improve from that point on. But when he went there, he was at his lowest point of all, where he had nothing and nowhere else to turn to.

He quite literally has nowhere else to go. And when David has nowhere else to go, he flees to the rock. When he knows there's no one else to whom he can turn, he turns to the Lord, who throughout the Psalms David continually describes as his rock.

We'll just take one example in Psalm 18, where there's three particular instances of it. Chapter 18 of Psalms and verse 2. The Lord is my rock and my fortress and my deliverer, my God, my strength, in whom I will trust, my butler and the horde of my salvation and my high tower.

[2 : 43] And again at verse 31. For who is God, save the Lord, or who is a rock, save our God. And at verse 46. The Lord liveth and blessed be my rock and let the God of my salvation be exalted.

God is described as the ultimate source of unbreakable safety and protection. Now it may seem a very small thing, a very small point, but I think nonetheless the point is vital that we get the comparison the right way round.

It is not that God is like a rock, but rather the rock is like God, who is the ultimate rock. He is the reality.

The physical rock is the pale creative reflection. The material illustration of God in his unmovable strength and character and restrained power.

Now it might not seem very important which way roundly put it, whether God is like a rock or whether the rock is like God. But in truth it is vital that our worldview be rightly orientated and not skewed from a worldly angle.

[3 : 55] If our worldview is to be accurate, it must be God-centered. So in the same way, as with the title Father, Jesus did not teach his disciples that they should pretend God was like a father and that that would help them to understand things about him.

It is rather that God, nor that God is like a human father, he is the father. He is the father and we are taught by Jesus to address him in precisely this way.

His fatherhood is the reality. Human fatherhood is the pale and imperfect reflection. We read in Matthew 7, for example, verses 9 to 11.

Our worldview must become God-centered.

As it was for Jesus and his apostles and for the former, putting the glory of God first and foremost. Going back to the rock, in the New Testament, Jesus is explicitly described as being the rock of his people, which is exactly as we would expect if God is the rock of his people in the Old Testament.

[5 : 23] We would expect God the sun still to be that rock under the new. So we read in Romans 9, verses 32 and 33. It said about how the Jews that didn't believe, they stumbled, they quire for it because they saw this not by faith, but as it were, by the works of the law.

For they stumbled at that stumbling stone, as it is written, quoting from Isaiah 8 and 28 here, Behold, I lay in Sion a stumbling stone and rock of offense, and whosoever believeth of him shall not be ashamed.

A rock of offense. Romans 9, verse 33. Again, we read in 1 Corinthians 10, verse 4, that the Israelites, wandering through the wilderness, they'd all eat the same spiritual meat and they'd all drink the same spiritual drink.

For they drank of that spiritual rock that followed them, and that rock was Christ. Not only in terms of shelter and protection, but in provision of the life-giving water that Christ was the one who provided for them.

So in the New Testament, as in the Old, whether it is God the Father, whether it is God the Son, we have God described as the rock of his people. So if Christ, then, is the rock, the clefts of the rock, the gashes, the holes and caves of the rock, are often taken as pointing to the wounds of Christ.

[6 : 53] Here, David, the man after God's own heart, can take shelter in the holes, in the clefts of the rock. And here, also, likewise, in the real spiritual reality, every child of God is invited to flee to their rock, when no one else will receive us, when there is nowhere else to turn.

Because the fact of the matter is that unless our pride and selfishness so often stops us from being to Christ, until and unless there is nowhere else to go.

This is our normal way in human nature. We like to think we can manage ourselves. We like to think, well, I can get by, I don't need to bother God, I'll just do the best I can. And finally, we get to the stage where we are reduced, to the stage where there is nothing and nowhere else for us to turn.

And it is so often in extremity that we cry out to the Lord, and we finally come, as it were, crawling to him, because we have nowhere else to go.

And such is God's love. That he doesn't turn us away and say, oh, I didn't want anything to do with me when you're fine and strong. I don't want anything to do with you now. No, God sometimes has ordered his providence in such a way precisely as to bring us to that stage of extremity, so that we have nowhere else to turn but to Christ to save us and to help us.

[8 : 14] And often, as you say, our pride and our selfishness won't allow us to run to him any area of a matter. That when no one else will receive us or shelter us or protect us or help us, Christ, the rock of our salvation, is ready to receive all who will come to him by faith.

This is something we should bear in mind as we approach a communion season. Christ, our rock, is ready to receive all who will come to him by faith. Secondly, we should notice that David is not far from his home in physical terms, but far enough to be not within sight of it.

Because he is so comparatively near, his thoughts turn homeward. And he remembers the good and uncomplicated days of his youth and the things that he so enjoyed about Bethlehem.

It's worse because he's near. And his life now, as he hides in the cave of Adullam, is so very complicated and pressurized. And he longs literally for a taste of those good times before.

Sometimes, friends, we may have had the benefit, maybe, of our Christian upbringing. We may have been trained up in the ways of the Lord. But often, as we grow, we leave home, we go away, we sometimes get drawn away by the things of the world.

[9 : 36] And we seek our own ambitions, our own desires. And we forget. We forget, maybe, the things of Jesus that we learn, maybe, from a loving mother or a grandparent or a faithful and dedicated Sunday school teacher.

And maybe we loved the things of Jesus when we were young. But we grow up and we think, well, there's so much to do. And we're so busy with our lives and that we can forget the simplicity of Jesus, who was so real to us then, but which the world with its noise and smoke and mirrors and its bright lights and its dark habits, has obscured from our vision.

If the Lord had abandoned you, you would not have any desire after him. You'd have no such recollection or desire for Jesus, whom you may have known in younger days.

If you were content in your own soul with the empty pursuits of the world, you'd have no such longings for something, someone better, nor sorrow for how things may have turned out, perhaps, in your life without Christ.

In the midst of such longing, the Lord declares to us in his word, not the nearness of our childhood home. Because sometimes, even if it were you, you can never go back.

[10:57] You can never turn the clock back. Often the people that meant so much about to us are no longer there. The home is not as it once were. The location may not be as it once were. The old family home may have gone. Whatever the case may be, God is not declaring to us the nearness of our childhood home, but the nearness of our loving Father, and the home he has laid up for us.

We read in St. Mark's account of the Gospel, when the lawyer, Ami, having asked Jesus a question, and he answered him, and the scribe said unto him, Well, Master, thou hast said the truth.

For there is one God, and there is none other but he, and to love him with all the heart, and with all the understanding, and with all the soul, and with all the strength, and to love his neighbour as himself, is more than all home-burnt offerings and sacrifices.

And when Jesus saw that he answered his feet, he said unto him, Thou art not far from the kingdom of God. And no man after that thirst asked him any question.

God is not far away from those who truly seek him. And likewise, in the Acts of the Apostles, when Paul is speaking to those who are not themselves of any background in the Scriptures, to the Greeks and so on, he says in Acts 17, verse 96, that God hath made of one blood, all the nations of men, for to dwell on all the face of the earth, and hath determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of their habitation, that they should seek the Lord, and happily they might feel after him, and find him, though he be not far from every one of us.

[12:29] For in him we live and move and have our being. He is indeed nearer than you know, having been waiting patiently for the hour when sinners like us would come to the senses that he has given us.

And look at our lives, and the emptiness of the rags in which the world has clothed our lives without the Lord, and that the Lord suffers not pearls, but only pods to be cast before swine.

Like in the parable of the prodigal son, you know, he's feeding the pigs there, and he's wishing he could fill his own stomach with the pods that the pigs were eating. God doesn't let his pearls be cast before swine.

The pods get cast there, but the Lord enables us likewise to by grace to be able to say, like the prodigal of old, I will arise and go to my father.

He is not far from you. Indeed, like the father in the parable, whilst you'll get a long way off, he was running to meet every penitent sinner that would turn to him by faith.

[13:37] Your true home is not here, of course. But your true home is nearer now than it has ever been, for better or for worse. Whatever it is that we're going to spend eternity, it's nearer to us now than it was yesterday, than it was last week.

But if we are, by grace, and able to close in with Christ in our true home of blessedness, it's nearer than it has ever been. But still you can't see it.

You can't go there yet. It's not yet time. But refreshment for the moment is not far away. It's indeed in the process of being prepared and brought, just as David is longing for this drink of cold, clean water from the well of Bethlehem.

The man will bring it, even as he's longing for it. And we may be longing for something to strengthen us on our pilgrim way here. And it is being, in a sense, prepared even now, as we prepare for the Lord's Supper next Lord's Day.

And all the preparatory services that you know about and that are there in your program, refreshment for the moment is not far away. And it's being prepared even now. But in physical terms, the distance of David to Bethlehem is much further than probably we imagine.

[14:52] I used to read this story in the Bible when I was young and imagine that David was hiding up in caves, almost overlooking Bethlehem, that he could see the Philistine garrison and yearn to

be able to get through to the well of his boyhood memories, or at least that it was just over the hill, perhaps, in the next valley.

In fact, Adam is a good 15 miles from Bethlehem as the crow flies, and perhaps further in real terms of travelling.

When David sighs for a drink from the well of Bethlehem, he obviously doesn't seriously imagine that anybody's going to go and get it for him. And he's not actually really asking for it.

He's just dreaming out loud. You know, when he thinks of home, he says, oh, home, it would be so good to have a drink from the well of the water of Bethlehem that's at the gate. He's dreaming out loud.

It was a considerable distance anyone would have to go, 15 miles or more. It's like me saying to somebody here, you know, oh, if only I could drink from that burn that flows past the Lusk entire road end.

[16:01] You know, it's a good 15 miles away. That's where you're driving it. If you're walking, if you're walking, not just in an out-comparatively temperate climate, you're walking in the Middle Eastern heat, a journey that's going to be a 30-mile round trip is going to involve you travelling through the heat of the day as well.

It's going to be 15 miles there, 15 miles back, and water, as you know, is not a light thing to carry. Sometimes, maybe if you like to love the big sort of cartons of water, the great big two-weeker things of water for Sunday school picnics or whatever, then you might know how heavy a thing water is to carry.

And even if they're not carrying so much of it as that, it's still going to be some weight and in the Middle Eastern heat and climate, this is going to involve travelling through the hottest part of the day as we say, it's going to be on foot, there's also the small matter of evading capture by a garrison of enemy soldiers on their patrols because they have to break through the enemy lines to get through it.

All in all, it's a fairly arduous demonstration of sheer love and devotion by these three Israelite soldiers for David. It would be at least a day later before they go back.

Maybe more. And what does David do? He pours it out on the ground. He refuses to take it. Now, honestly, deep down in your heart of hearts, reading aside what we know we should think about it and how spiritual, how good it was, what do you really think about that action?

[17:35] You know, if you look in your heart of hearts, what do you really think? David's pouring out in front of the eyes of the men who've laboured so hard and gone 30 mile round trip in the heat, let them jeopardy of their lives and he's poured out the ground.

Well, we'll ask about that, we'll think about that again in a wee minute. But first of all, let's be as charitable and devoutly minded as possible here. and recognise what it is that David is probably doing here.

David is effectively repenting of his rash and wistful thinking out loud, recognising that his own thoughtlessness had put these men in danger of their lives.

He is deeply conscious of the sheer cost of what they have undertaken and is genuinely shocked by the notion of his benefiting selfishly, drinking his fill, of the cold, clear water of Bethlehem at such a cost.

He feels completely unworthy of it. And in his eyes, the only person worthy to actually receive a sacrifice of such high and noble cost is God to whom he dedicates the water.

[18:50] That's what he does. That's what we read. He pours it out to the Lord and said, my God forbid it me. That I should do this thing. Shall I drink the blood of these men that have put their lives in jeopardy?

He poured it out to the Lord. So that's his response. That's what he does here. He knows that only God is worthy of such a sacrifice.

And whilst at the same time he's really declaring to them that such a feat was never to be repeated on his behalf, at the end of the day, David knew that he was not worthy of such a sacrifice.

Now, that's the ultimate spiritual and faithfully biblical understanding of this event. And at its spiritually purest level, it is of course not wrong in this life.

But David and his men, you and I, are not pure spirit. We are in the flesh. And our Lord, of course, became flesh that he might become as we are, though without sin.

[19 : 51] So now I ask, again, honestly, deep down in your heart, hearts, what do you really think about this action of David's? Now, we may hazard a guess at what we think the men themselves might have thought.

From the human point of view, a purely human point of view, it implies ingratitude. Is it not? Insensitivity, waste, or at the very worst, indifference.

Now, we know that that's not what David was doing, but that's what it can look like. And when the worshippers at the tabernacle brought sacrifices to the Lord, in the overwhelming majority of cases, a portion was bound on God's altar, a portion taken by the priest, and a portion returned to the worshipper with which to have a feast to the Lord.

Might not the man after God's own heart have received with all thankfulness and humility a good swig of the precious water? Pour out a portion before the Lord, first of all, perhaps, and then offered back a rewarding drink to the faithful servants who had brought it?

You know, we might think, well, that would have been so much nicer. That would have been a much better way to deal with it. He might have, but he didn't. And what I want us to do this morning is to lay aside what we know we should think about David's action and search our hearts about what, in all honesty, we truly think about it.

[21 : 19] And hold on to that thought for a moment as we consider how the men themselves, who had given so much, probably would have felt.

David may have been right. He may have been wrong. He may have been absolutely spiritually above board in everything he did. But the men themselves, having gone to such cost, might have felt a little bit differently.

But we'll leave that aside for now. Because now I want you to consider another sacrifice. A deeper, harder, more costly sacrifice.

The cost, not merely the sweat and blood and tears of the one offering it up, but his very life in agony upon the cross at the place of the skull.

Now you and I both know, and God himself knows, that there are many who turn away from this sacrifice, pleading unworthiness. You know, if we think in terms of what David says, you know, in 1 Corinthians 11, he says, you know, God, my God forbid it me that I should do this thing.

[22 : 31] Shall I drink the blood of these men that have put their lives in jeopardy? Well, this is what Jesus says about his own sacrifice.

In John 6, verse 53 onwards, then Jesus said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, except ye eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, ye have no life in you.

Whoso eateth my flesh and drinketh my blood hath eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day. For my flesh is meat indeed, and my blood is drink indeed.

He that eateth my flesh and drinketh my blood dwelleth in me, and I in him. So we have to have a care of what we do, and how we do it, and how it may be viewed by heaven.

Just as David, yes, he's giving this sacrifice to the Lord, maybe he did, maybe he didn't think, how is this going to look to the guys who have made this sacrifice of, you know, hazard in their lives to bring this precious water to me?

[23 : 35] How would they feel? Okay, we can only speculate on that. But we do know how God himself will feel and respond about the sacrifice that he has made if we pass it by.

And if we say, oh, no, no, I couldn't possibly, no, no, no, I'm not worthy, it's not for the likes of me. You know, if you think in terms of the fact that this is done, this sacrifice has been made for the sinful, for the unworthy, and for the lost.

It's not been made for the good and the righteous, there are any. You know, nobody is righteous in the sight of God. Because we're all fallen, and because we're all sinners, if anyone is to be redeemed at all, they're not going to be redeemed by their own good works.

They're not going to be redeemed by how good they think they are, what they've done in the world. They're only going to be redeemed by the blood of Christ. That is the only thing that is going to save them, his sacrifice upon the cross.

Now, none of us is worthy of that. None of us can then turn and say, oh, no, no, I couldn't take that, because that's only for people who are worthy of it. There's nobody who's worthy of it. This has been done for sinners.

[24 : 46] Think of the parable of the marriage feast. If you think, you know, of all that the king of the king did in preparation for the marriage feast for the son, and he sent out his invitation saying, ah,

my three beasts and fatlings have been slain, the feast is all prepared.

Remember that in those days you can't just stick something back in the freezer if people don't turn up. You can't just sort of say, oh, well, we'll put it in the cupboard for another day. Once you have slaughtered your beasts, once your meat has been prepared, once your sacrifice has been made ready, in the Middle East it's going to go off pretty quick if it doesn't get eaten punctually.

So the sheer cost of slaughtering your calves or your rams or whatever the case may be, that is a huge cost, which you're happy to do if it's for a marriage feast for your son or whatever the case may be, and for guests to come and then to partake because this is what you've prepared for. But if they say, oh, no, I can't come. No, I've bought a field. I've bought 12 yoke of oxen and I need to go and try them out. I've married a wife. I cannot come and so on. And they say, oh, no, I don't think we'll bother.

Then the cost is already being bought. You can't unslaughter the beasts. You can't put them back in the store again. The cost has been paid. You have already prepared this banquet and it's not cheap.

[26 : 07] Anybody who's had anything to do with weddings knows they're not cheap. But this is prepared for the people who've been invited. Now, have you been invited? They've been, oh, no, don't think they will. No, they made light of it and they went, one to his merchandise, another to his field and so on.

Now, that was perhaps rejecting the Lord with a high hand. There are, we know, all of us know, many people who not reject the Lord but shy away from receiving what he has done because they feel unwell.

Because they feel this can't possibly be for me. But consider the sacrifice that has been made.

Consider that it has been made for sinners.

It's been made for those who are unworthy, for those who are lost. Consider the longings of your heart. Don't you actually want to be saved?

Don't you actually hope and want that when this life is over, that may be near, it may be far away but eventually it will come. This life will be over. Don't you want to be able to face eternity with the assurance, with the knowledge that the price of your sin has been paid, that you are right with God, that you have nothing to fear?

[27 : 23] Don't you want to be in heaven? Well, this is the only way. Not by coming to an outward sacrament and partaking of bread and wine but by entrusting our souls to Christ.

Letting yourself fall and trusting that he will catch you. And if we don't let ourselves fall into his arms, the day is going to come when we don't have a choice about falling.

The day is going to come when the ground will simply be taken from others and then we will fall. But if we have not made provision for our souls then, by then it will be too late.

Here and here only is our time of opportunity, our time of grace. And this sacrifice that has been made has been made at huge cost to the one who has made it.

The cost of his life. And not just a nice quiet sort of injection and painlessly go to sleep. This is crucifixion we're talking about. I could go into great and gory detail about the reality of crucifixion but now is not the time or the place for that.

[28 : 29] But consider the longings of your heart. Consider the nearness of God who has moved heaven and privileged the earth to come down upon it to live and to die that the ultimate needs of sinners like us may be eternally met.

And when all the humility and modesty and self-unworthiness, I'm not saying any of it isn't genuine because there are such genuine cases that when all that modesty and humility and self-unworthiness which may have hindered you before has been recognized and acknowledged as genuine and sincere up to now, consider this then.

If it truly is humility that grows in your heart, if it truly is a fear of dishonoring the Lord that keeps you away, then consider if we are so unworthy, then who are we to say no to the King anymore?

That is very important.