

**“Thirst”**

Exodus 17:1-7

I’ve been to Las Vegas once. Only once. That’s enough for me.

Not that Las Vegas isn’t impressive; it is. It’s a feast for the eyes.

But when you look up at those huge massive buildings glimmering in the desert moon and neon lights, when you stop for a moment on the blazing-hot sidewalk to take in a city that is home to a million people living in the barren desert of Nevada, you find yourself saying, “There is no way a city of this size, using this many resources should be able to exist in a barren place like this.”

But it does exist. It’s not a mirage. And the main reason its able to exist is because of one body of water: The Colorado River.

Using the massive Hoover Dam, the state of Nevada has been able to harness the power of the Colorado River to power their neon lights and illuminated billboards that advertise Wayne Newton and Cirque de Soleil.

And The Colorado River also provides water for their fountains and drinking water for the parched throats of their residents.

Las Vegas, and much of the American Southwest, couldn’t make it without The Colorado River. It’s absolutely central to humanity’s survival in that region. You can’t make it without water.

No one knew this better than the Israelites who made their home in the arid climate of the Middle East.

In the passage we just read, we find them on their way to The Promised Land in the middle of a vast wilderness.

Not too long ago, they were in Egypt where they slaved along the shores of The Nile River, a body of water that was the lifeline for the most powerful empire in the world.

Just like The Colorado River, The Nile was absolutely essential for their existence. They depended on it for irrigation, bathing, and for drinking water.

But now, the Israelites found themselves far away from Egypt with no Nile River.

No one knew the directions to the closest river, spring, stream or puddle. The sky was clear, the sun intense and

not a cloud could be seen in the sky. The future looked ominous.

I remember how difficult it was when we moved from Southern California to Texas. We missed our friends, our church, the school where I had attended, the palm trees and... the mountains.

In Pasadena, you knew which way was North, South, East or West by where you stood in proximity to the San Gabriel Mountains that were just North of the city. So, if you could find the mountains, you knew where you were.

But in suburban Dallas, there were no mountains. There were a few hills, but none so tall that you could actually discern which way was North or South. You had to live there long enough before you figured that out.

And I think that the loss of the mountains was a big reason we found ourselves hating Dallas so much in that first year.

Whether you who have moved here from your hometown, from other states, or from other countries, you know what it's like to walk out your front door to discover that the natural landmarks have changed.

The familiar view that brought you such comfort has changed, and you have to get through some significant

discomfort and disorientation until you get used to your surroundings.

That's kind of how the Israelites felt, except it wasn't just because they missed the pretty landmarks of their hometown. They missed something they had depended on and based their lives upon.

And the thing that kept reminding them of the loss of the Nile was their nagging and intensifying thirst. As their tongues began to feel thicker and their lips began cracking – they wondered, where was the water?

When they just heard their 5 and 7 year old say for one-hundred and sixteenth time, "I'm thirsty." They wondered – where's the water?

When they coax a meager drop from their goat's udder, when grandma passes out from heat exhaustion, when another oasis on the horizon proved to be yet another mirage – they asked, where's the water? Where's the water? We're tired and thirsty! WHERE'S THE WATER, MOSES!

"Have you brought us into the desert to kill us, our children and our livestock?"

Thirst is a basic instinct, a powerful uncontrollable desire that everyone has. When our bodies realize that

there is a lack of fluids or an increase in salt, the brain signals thirst.

But thirst is more than just a feeling; it's more than a longing for refreshment. Thirst, along with all desires, can be like a window to God. Cravings are connected to hunger of the soul.

So, for example, a lonely person may think they need friends, parties, and hot exciting dates. But those are band-aid solutions. What their soul really wants is genuine friendships AND a friendship with the one who created them.

A sudden impulse to go shopping is more than a desire for things it's really a thirst for stability, contentment, for peace, for comfort, for fulfillment and spiritual satisfaction that can only come from God.

Feelings, like thirst, are windows that are meant to point us to God. They are meant to remind us that we are more than flesh and bone, that we are more than men and women.

We are children of God who have been made just a little lower than the angels. And when we thirst we thirst for something more than water. We are thirsting for God.

This is the reason Christians occasionally fast from food. Because,

we believe that hunger for food indicates a hunger for God.

This is the reason, many monks and saints of the church have gone out into the barren desert, because the conveniences of life and even the basic necessities of life can become substitutes for what we really desire and what we were created to do – and that is to be in a relationship with others AND with God.

So, the great saints and heroes of our faith have gone out into the wilderness to separate themselves and reorient their appetites and desires.

And as a result, the thirst and hunger makes us quarrel and complain like it did to the Israelites doesn't put a wedge in between us and God. Instead, what it does is drive us closer to God forcing us to lean and depend on God.

It says this in the Bible. Jesus said in his beatitudes, "Blessed are those who hunger for righteousness for they will be filled."

In Isaiah, the prophet urges people who are thirst to come to the waters, to come and buy wine and milk that doesn't cost a cent. And when they do, their souls will live.

And in Psalm 42, David writes about a panting deer that is thirsty. David

says he is like that deer, panting and thirsting for God, for the living God.

We need not fear the thirst we may feel in our lives. We, instead can look forward to how thirst is shaping us.

Ken Gire is a Christian who writes books; good books that many people read today for comfort, guidance and wisdom. But it wasn't always this way.

After Ken graduated from seminary, he helped start a small, rural church, and then wrote a small children's book.

The experience of writing his first book was exhilarating, making him think that writing books was the career he should pursue. So, he left his church and took a job working on an oil field in the middle of Texas to support this new career he had chosen.

After two years of hard labor, Ken was able to save enough money so that he could support his wife and four kids and take some time off to write. So, he went into the local college library and wrote every day from 8 to 5. Ken thought that his ship had arrived.

But it hadn't.

After two years nothing sold; two years of working every day and never

bringing in a paycheck. His savings ran dry, his family had to sell their car, some furniture and eventually, their house.

It was a dry time for he and his family and he kept a journal during those days. Here's what he wrote on Feb. 20, 1985:

*I have come to a point of emotional and spiritual exhaustion. Drained dry, a drop of life at a time. I can no longer read my Bible, feeling forsaken. I can no longer pray, feeling ignored. It is a great hurt. If God is truly a great God, he can love me even though I can no longer look into His face or call out to Him in prayer. If He cannot, then my prayers and devotions are ill-spent anyway, and my time is better used elsewhere.*

Have you ever felt like that? Like God has forgotten you, like he's stood you up or forgotten to put you on his busy schedule? Have you ever thought that it doesn't matter whether you pray or not? Have you ever thought that you could use your time better than reading the Bible or prayer?

A year later, still facing many difficulties, Ken discovered a family of stray cats beneath the pier and beam foundation of his house. There was a mother and three kittens.

And Ken kept trying to coax them to come closer so that he could give them food, some milk, or some shelter from the cold. But the cats would dart away every time he approached.

So each night he would attempt to lure them closer to the house by leaving a trail of food, hoping they would come close enough for him to catch one.

Well, one day, Ken was ready for them. He pulled out a big cardboard box, set out a food trail and hid himself, waiting for a kitten to approach.

Ken waited and waited and waited for one of the kittens. Eventually, one bold one came further than all the others. And he waited and waited. The kitten drew closer, closer, closer... Ken flipped the box over... Gotcha!

Ken took the box inside with his kids excitedly following behind him. He put on some leather work gloves and let the kitten out.

Immediately the kitten shot to the corner where it arched its back hissed, swiping at Ken's hands and biting his fingers whenever he tried to hold it.

What the kitten didn't know was that all Ken wanted to do was to draw it close, to give it a safe and warm place in their house. He wanted to feed it

so that it didn't have to hunt. He wanted to take care of it and look after it so that it would have a better life.

But the kitten didn't know that; it couldn't know that. The wild, after all, was the only life it knew.

Ken wrote that at that moment, he realized that he was that kitten, "scared stiff one minute; spitting mad the next."

God wanted to satisfy his hunger, his thirst. God wanted to look after him and draw him close, but the shelter he was seeking was the security of the job, not of God's arms. He wanted to satisfy his thirst and his hunger from the things at the grocery store, not from God's hand. And Ken felt like he could look after himself, he just needed a break from it all.

And then Ken Gire writes this: "The God who now held me in the clutches of His hand was so foreign to the God I had once held in mine. Was it His face I was scratching at, His hand I was biting?"

When the people "quarreled" with Moses about the water, scratching like a scared and thirsty cat, Moses asked them, "Why do you test God?"

And then with his staff in hand and some of the elders he led the people to a rock. And it says that God was

standing there at the rock. Moses would go to that rock, the one where God was standing, and water would come from it.

gushing the water of eternal life quenching the thirst each of us has.

And they called it, Meribah and Massah, which literally means “test” and “quarrel,” because they hissed, slashed and spat all the while wondering if God was there at all and if God was going to satisfy their thirst or not.

What have you been craving? What have you been complaining about? What have you been wanting? Wishing? Searching for? Looking for? What have you been worrying about? What have you been quarreling about?

Could it be that what you really are thirsting for is a deeper more intimate relationship with God? Could it be that what your soul really wants is to be at peace with the one who created you?

Stop fighting it. Stop procrastinating. Begin that relationship today. Ask God to forgive you of your sins. Commit to live for Christ in the best way that you know how. Join a lifegroup. Ask someone to study the Bible with you.

Christ said, that anyone who is thirsty can come to him and that if they come to him, he will be like a spring

**LIFE APPLICATION QUESTIONS**  
**For Sunday, September 25, 2011's Sermon**  
**Foundational Scripture: Exodus 17:1-7**

**Featured Scripture Reflection:** “The Lord said to Moses, ‘Go on ahead of the people, and take some of the elders of Israel with you; take in your hand the staff with which you struck the Nile, and go. I will be standing there in front of you on the rock at Horeb. Strike the rock, and water will come out of it, so that the people may drink.’ Moses did so, in the sight of the elders of Israel.” – Exodus 17:5,6

**Opening Icebreaker:** What sorts of things do you do to get yourself “out of a funk?” (i.e. – take a nap, eat good food, talk to a friend)

**Scripture Questions**

**What is the scripture saying?**

- Read Exodus 17:1-7. What stands out to you about this story? What questions does it raise?
- Read Exodus 17:8-16. What words or phrases stand out to you when you read this passage? How did the experience you read about in the previous passage prepare the Israelites for what they experienced in this passage?
- Read Revelation 21:1-7. Think about what you’ve just read. How does it compliment what was read in the previous passages?

**How is God speaking through Scripture?**

- What is the “Good News” in these passages of Scripture?
- After discussing and pondering these passages, how do these passages affect me?
- How are these passages troubling or confusing?

**God's word**

- What is God’s invitation to you?

**A prayer**

God, we know that you are able to satisfy our hunger and thirst. We know that only you can truly satisfy the spiritual appetites of our souls. We invite you to come and fill us with your Holy Spirit and give us strength for the journey ahead. Amen.