

## LVIII. JESUS,

*The Rock of Our Salvation, Is Struck in His Passion  
and Yields Living Water for Our Souls (Exod. 17:6).*

The Israelites set forth and pitched their tents according to the commandment of the LORD. This is a good lesson. Order all Your daily errands, all Your business and affairs, according to the commandment of God, and it will be well for you (Ps. 119:2, 108).

Now, just as the Israelites always had to journey onward, so in this world “we have no continuing city, but we seek the one to come” (Heb. 13:14).

They came to *Rephidim* (which means “banks of grass”) but had no water to drink. This is a mirror of the present world. Like green banks of grass, it has a fair appearance outwardly, but in the end it lacks what is most important. There is always lamentation and weeping to be had. Blessed, therefore, is the man whose walk is in heaven, like St. Paul’s (Phil. 3:20), where there will never lack for water of comfort.

Although the Israelites were sorely afflicted with thirst (for thirst is more painful than hunger, as noted above),<sup>316</sup> yet as always, if one must choose, it is better during this life to suffer thirst and misery with Christ, serve God faithfully, and have eternal salvation, than to pursue the good life in this world, anger God, and suffer eternal thirst with the rich man (Luke 16:24). If the cross seems bitter and heavy, think how hot it will be in hell!

The Jews are an example of the kind of people who simply will not endure anything for God and His truth, but only crave a full pot and a full belly. Oh, avoid earnestly whatever evil is seen in them! If those who are friends only for the sake of some benefit—mere dinner friends and tavern companions—are a disgrace to the world, I need not say what they are to the Lord our God. As for us Christians, our good days are stored up in heaven.

<sup>316</sup> See also p. 126 above.

It is a tragedy that the Israelites trusted the Lord God so little when they had seen His gracious presence so plainly and repeatedly. Yet you are in no position to chasten the Jews. Look at your own heart. It seems to your own eyes that you have the power to sustain yourself, while you talk much about faith and trust in God's grace; but when all your outward means are taken away, you find in Your own breast the very same unbelieving Jew. There you will see a skeleton and weep yourself to death. Therefore get to know the mischievous nature of your heart. When the sick man knows he is sick, he is half way to healing. Luther expresses this with superb skill, beauty, and expertise (Mansfeld ed., vol. 1, fol. 378a, etc.).<sup>317</sup>

The common people cursed Moses and said that he had ruined everything. The lamb muddled the wolf's water.<sup>318</sup> This was their gratitude for Moses' faithful service. Such is the usual reward in the world.

Moses had risked life and limb for them. Now he feared he would be stoned. Instead of food and wages, he was to get the "pears" of St. Stephen (Acts 7:58). Take warning, then, and do no good for the world's thanks, or you will be shortly disappointed and stop altogether. Rather, do good to God's glory. Then you have solid ground. Whatever pay the world withholds from you, God will recompense. The world is not worthy of rewarding faithful service, nor should you always seek repayment in the world. What good would God and heaven be to you then?

Yet what blindness this was! Day and night the Israelites had seen with their eyes how "the LORD led them out of Egypt," and still they forgot. They cast all the blame on Moses. We would hardly believe if we did not still know of such ungrateful birds today to whom God has

<sup>317</sup> See ErA 3:343, WA 16:317, AE 62 (forthcoming): "Someone might mock and laugh at the Jews, and say, 'Fie on them! To think that they did not pay attention to these things and believe in God!' But listen for yourself. Search your own bosom and you too will find such an unbelieving Jew inside, and will say fie upon yourself, should you not be ashamed, too, to find such a crude ass in yourself who considers it no miracle that God daily provides you according to your need with your bread, clothing, life and limb, and gives you food and sustenance? But no one considers it or gives Him thanks for sustaining his life. . . ."

<sup>318</sup> Cf. *Aesopi Phrygis* 21: "De lupo et agno."

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done much more good than they themselves can number, and yet not one peep is heard from their lips, but God and every good are forgotten.

Moses warned them, “Why do you test the LORD?” “Do not be deceived; God is not mocked” (Gal. 6:7). Cease to murmur against God, for it does you no more good than grass does a dog. And so it was; for in Psalm 95:10–11 the Lord God says, “They are a people whose heart ever desires the erring way, and they will not learn My ways: so that I swore in My wrath that they would not enter into My rest.” Blessed is he who learns from the pains of others!

By these words Moses also identifies the comfort of his heart: he relied on the Lord. He knew that the cause was not his but the Lord’s, and He would take up his cause, as Jesus Christ took up that of Damascus (Acts 9:5). Moses did like Luther. When news spread swiftly that the pope had excommunicated him and he had fallen out of favor with the emperor, Luther did not fear, but went into the garden and sang a cheerful song. The prior of the cloister, Master Eberhard (who was later ordained a pastor in Altenberg), noticing this, said to him, “Good doctor, have you not heard the news?” Luther said, “It is no concern of mine but of the Lord Jesus. If He will let Himself be thrust from the right hand of His Father and His Church be overpowered, let Him see to it. I am far too weak to defend Him and His cause against the prince of this world and his horde.” All who are faithful in their calling have the same comfort. If they encounter some trouble in service to God, the same God will take up their cause.

It is also noteworthy here that it says, “Moses cried to the LORD.” Distress teaches prayer, and prayer drives away distress. Prayer is also better than worry or punishment. “The prayer of the righteous man avails much when it is in earnest” (James 5:16). Here is a clear example in this faithful man of prayer, Moses, who was able to draw water from a rock. When you pray, then, do not doubt. If you have faith as a mustard seed, you will move every mountain of distress (Matt. 17:20).

Now behold what a wonderful God our God is! “His right hand can change all things” (Ps. 77:10). He can squeeze water from solid rock. Who could have imagined this? It truly is a wonder above all wonders—

as common as fire springing from water or water from fire. Yet how comforting it is that He can aid us in every trouble, even when it defies our reason! Is it not a wonder that He makes grain grow from the earth each year, only we never consider it! Therefore trust in the Lord your God. He will not forsake you, but will help you by means and ways that you never imagined in all your days.

Yet notice also that this place was given the name *Massah*, that is, “field of provocation,” or else *Meribah*, “meadow of strife.” By this are we reminded that God would not forget the disobedience, impatience, and impudence of the Israelites. Great lords have good memories. While they may let a villain run up his debt for a while, old debts gather no rust. Oh, how often the people were reminded of this! “Today if you hear the voice of the LORD, harden not your hearts, as happened in Meribah, and as in Massah in the wilderness,” etc. (Ps. 95:7–8; cf. Deut. 6:16; Ps. 78:15, 17; 105:41). Hebrews 3:15 and 4:3 also use this account to warn us, in grave and heartfelt terms, that we should guard ourselves most earnestly against unbelief, and not bring ourselves to be exiled from the resting place of eternal life by enmity with Christ and His Gospel. And this is why the Church begins early every Sunday by singing in the Invitatory the words of Psalm 95, “O come, let us sing to the LORD, and make a joyful noise to the rock of our salvation. Let us come before His presence with thanksgiving, and exult in Him with psalms. . . . O come, let us worship and kneel, and fall down before the LORD who made us.” Oh, God, grant that every heart may be mindful of this to its own blessedness!

Pause here, dear heart, and contemplate Your Savior Jesus in the smitten rock as St. Paul teaches in 1 Corinthians 10:4: “The Israelites,” he says, “all drank the same spiritual drink, but they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them, which was Christ.” In other words, St. Paul says that while the Israelites drank of the visible rock and so quenched their physical thirst, it would not have been so had they not together with us believed in the Messiah, Jesus Christ. Therefore they too drank from the fountain of the Rock of mankind’s salvation, Christ Jesus, who in time to come would through His suffering on the cross obtain for us everlasting life. See how aptly Luther discusses this

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(*Mansfeld ed.*, vol. 1, p. 382a, etc.).<sup>319</sup>

O Lord Jesus Christ, You are a mighty Rock. Whoever trusts in You is like the wise man who built his house upon a rock (Matt. 7:24). You are the Foundation of my salvation (Isa. 28:16). When I confide in You, I am a solid rock, like Peter. The gates of hell shall not prevail against me (Matt. 16:18). Oh, what a blessed immovable ground my heart has for eternal life! I will let no one take this ground from me, even on pain of death. You are not a beguiling foundation of straw, but one which solidly carries every believing heart to eternal joy and bliss.

The rock stood in the wilderness far from men and unheeded. So, Lord Christ, You were little heeded by the world. Reason could hardly believe there was anything great in You.

The rock was struck. Oh, Lord Jesus, how hard You were struck that I might be eternally spared! Isaiah saw well Your strokes: “We counted him as one smitten by God and afflicted” (Isa. 53:4). O Lord Jesus, Your heavenly Father struck You in Gethsemane with the wrathful, iron hand of His fierce anger so that blood seeped from all Your pores (Luke 22:44). In the Jewish court, Your face was struck as if it were flint. In Pilate’s Praetorium You were struck with rods—yea, Your holy brow was violently struck by the crown of thorns (John 19:1–2). Iron nails struck through Your hands and feet. The power of hell struck You with such force that You cried in lament, “My God, my God, why have You forsaken Me?” (Matt. 27:46). You were struck with the rod of Moses. The curse of the Law preached by Moses struck You that the blessing might come upon us. So should we have been struck forever. You suffered all for our good. Who can begin to repay You for this?

The elders of the Israelites had to be present when the rock was struck. Here I see Your judgment, exit from the city, and crucifixion. I connect the elders of the people of Israel to those chiefs who were present when You were so vilely smitten for our sins (Isa. 53:4). Your

319 ErA 36:356f., WA 16:330: “And here, Paul relates the rock to Christ, and means that even there they drank both the spiritual and the physical drink: the physical from the natural rock to refresh the body and quench the thirst. But this benefit would not have come to them, nor the water been given them, if they did not have faith, even as we still believe in the same Christ . . .”

body was struck by men, and Your heart and soul by God, that we might be fully redeemed in body and soul.

When the rock was struck, water ran forth. Oh, what blessed water dripped from You, Lord Jesus, when You were struck! In Gethsemane You ran with blood (Luke 22:44). In Pilate's Praetorium, and when You were nailed to the cross, blood and water flowed from Your pierced side (John 19:34). This is all depicted in the cleft, smitten rock. O Lord Jesus, according to the counsel of Jeremiah 48:28, my soul is to act like a dove and hide in the cleft rock of Your side until the terrible storm of Your Father's wrath for my sins pass by. Oh, what a blessed chamber of rest for my heart (Isa. 26:20)!

The water that flowed from You, Lord Jesus, is Your precious, bloody merit, through which I pray and am heard, and obtain comfort in cross, protection in tribulation, and in death, eternal life.

"Come then, all you who are thirsty, to the water; and you who have no money, come and buy; come and buy without money, and freely!" we ought to say after Isaiah 55:1. Remember, dear heart, Your Lord's own words: "Whoever thirsts, let him come to Me and drink. Whoever believes in Me, as the Scriptures say, from his body shall flow streams of living water" (John 7:37-38); and: "Whoever will drink the water that I give him shall never thirst again, but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life" (John 4:14); and: "Come to Me, all who are weary and burdened; I will refresh you" (Matt. 11:28). Fly, dear heart, to the blessed Fountain of all grace! "Draw out now," as the Son of God says (John 2:8). When you wish to pray, in every cross, distress and tribulation—and indeed, in your last hour, fill the measure of your heart full with the abundance of the grace of Jesus Christ. Receive the grace for grace to which John bore witness (John 1:16), drink with the mouth of your faith, nourish your heart from the rock and foundation of your blessedness. In every evangelical sermon, in the baptismal font, in the confessional, in the most worthy Supper—in all these places imagine yourself standing beside the cleft Rock, filling the cup and vessel of your heart with the water of life of Christ Jesus, and you will be glad and righteous.

O Lord Jesus, let this be my art of dying. When my last hour comes,

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help my heart to step beneath Your cross and to be filled with the living water of consolation from You, the smitten Rock of my salvation. Refresh my weary heart, quench the eternal thirst of my soul, and restore my strength like the Israelites' rock in the wilderness. This, even this, will give comfort. When Emperor Charles' wife was about to die, a Spanish monk talked at length about the intercession of saints. This pained Emperor Charles, and he called for his son's preceptor to come and talk about Christ. That is what you call going to the water-spouting rock of consolation which is Jesus Christ. O Lord Jesus, implant such thoughts in my heart when I bid this world farewell, and my soul will be healed. Yet one thing more I would ask of You, Lord Jesus. Many Israelites drank of that rock and claimed You by a show of faith, yet not all entered the Promised Land, since they deserted You in the wilderness. Oh, preserve me from such wickedness! "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. 7:21). Oh, let me not have heard Your Gospel to my damnation, but grant Your blessing that as certainly as I have been given frequent joy at Your consolation in the Word and Sacrament, I may so certainly enter the promised land of eternal life! Amen.