

Have you ever studied a foreign language? Maybe you studied Spanish or French in high school. Maybe you took a couple semesters of German in college. Maybe you even studied Latin at one time. But if you have, you would know that whenever you try to translate something from one language to another, it's never exact. Something gets lost in translation, which of course is where we get the expression. Because there's something about a word in one language--and all of the color and all of the ideas that come with it--that you just can't really express in any other language. Yeah, you can get the meaning. You can get the general idea of what's going on, but you lose something. You lose all of the things which are connected to it. This is why, for example, jokes in one language aren't really all that funny in another language, because everything that made it funny in the first language gets lost when you try to bring it into a new one. And also with poetry, whenever you try to translate poetry, you lose what makes it beautiful--its cadences, its rhythms, even its rhymes--all of which you just simply can't reproduce. And so you get something close to it, but not quite exact.

This also happens from time to time in the Bible. Sometimes there are words in Hebrew or in Greek where we don't get the full picture of what God is trying to say, and so we misunderstand something that is happening in our text. Now don't misunderstand me. I don't mean that we can't trust our translations. These are good. This is still telling us what God wants us to know, and we should trust them. But every now and then you'll get a word which when translated you lose something of its color, something of the bigger picture of what's going on at work. And you have that happening today in Exodus chapter 17, especially with that word "quarreling." Now quarreling is a word that, when we use it in English, we use it to mean something like "fighting," something like "squabbling," right? We use it the most often in an expression like "a lovers' quarrel." It can be intense, the way that only lovers can fight, but that's all it ultimately is. It's just a quick little spat, a quick little squabble that quickly comes to an end. And if we think that that's all that it means, we might think of what's going on here as a kind of lovers' quarrel, that the people of Israel are quarreling or just simply fighting and squabbling with Moses, and then that's all that there is.

But the word which we translate here as "quarreling" actually means a little bit more than that in the original Hebrew. It means something closer to an accusation, something closer to even a lawsuit. They are bringing a suit against Moses. They are accusing him of being faithless to his promises. You can hear the accusation here in verse three, where the people say: "Why did you bring us up out of Egypt, to kill us and our children and our livestock with thirst?" So in other words, the accusation is: "Moses, you promised that we were going to go to a land flowing with milk and honey. You promised that you were going to take care of us out in the wilderness. But now here we are, and we don't even have water! You have not been faithful to your promise." And so they're ready to carry out the judgment against him too, when Moses says in verse four: "They are almost ready to stone me." Because that was the punishment for a covenant breaker: to stone them to death. They took their promises very, very seriously.

But Moses points out here that their accusation is not really against him. Yeah, he's involved in it, because he's kind of the front man. They're quarreling with him, but ultimately their quarrel is with God. Ultimately, their accusation is against the Lord and his promises. God had promised them all of these things and yet now here they are out in the wilderness, seemingly thinking that they're going to thirst to death. God, it seemed, had lied to them. God, it seemed, was not

keeping his promises. And so the people of Israel wanted to put God on trial. He would have to answer to them.

Christians, that's a very common way of thinking among the world too, to want to put God on trial, to make him answer for the things that we think that he has done or that he has not done. There was an inscription in a World War II war camp that I think captures this idea perfectly. It said that God would have to beg them for their forgiveness. That God when he finally met this person who suffered all of these things in this war camp, he would have to explain himself to them, to beg them to forgive him, as if God was the one on trial, as if God was the one who ultimately had to make some explanations. And the world comes at this in many different ways, Christians. The world may say, "Well, why is there evil? If God is so good, why is there so much bad? Doesn't he want to do something about it? Can't he do something about it? Otherwise, it seems like his creation is so broken." The world might say, "Well, why do I have to answer for my sins? Why should I be held accountable for the things that I have done? Aren't they just part of being human? Aren't they just part of what it means to live in this world, where nothing ever seems to be black-and-white, where it always seems to be morally gray? Why should I have to answer to God?" Or the world might even say, "God, where were you during this disaster or during this atrocity, when thousands of people died either in some disaster or the hands of their fellow men? Why should I have to answer to God? God," the world says, "has to answer to me. God is going to have to beg for my forgiveness."

And if you're not careful, Christians, it's very easy to also fall into that sin, to want to put God on trial, to make him answer for the things that we think that he should've done. And that happens especially when we're dealing with difficult times. Because think about what was going on with Israel. Israel, while they were in slavery in Egypt, yeah, they were slaves, but at least they had a stable life. After all, they had food. They had a place to live. And yeah, as long as you put up with all the negative stuff, it wasn't so bad. At least you could survive, right? But now, out in the wilderness, that's all gone. They don't have a field to go to to get food. They don't have anywhere to get help. And now they're threatened with death! It seemed like everything had gone wrong. How could God bring them into this circumstance?

But Christians, when we look at our own situation, we can fall into a similar trap, a similar way of thinking. Because maybe you'll say something like, "Well, God, why am I sick? Why am I suffering with ill health? Why does it seem like I have to put up with all of this? Didn't you used to take care of me? Didn't you used to give me good health? Where has that all gone?" Or maybe you would say, "Well, God, why am I struggling? Seems like I can't make my finances meet anymore. I'm struggling to pay the bills. I just don't have as much money to take care of things. Don't you want to take care me?" Or maybe you would even say something like, "God, why is the world the way that it is? Twenty years ago it wasn't this bad. Now it seems like every day gets worse and worse and worse." But behind all of these is one basic question: "Don't you want to do something, Lord? Don't you want to take care of this situation? Why are you so far away?"

Now, we could ask that question in the right way, the way that the Psalms do, asking why God hasn't come and done something knowing that he will eventually in his own time and in his own way. But it's when we fall into this wanting God to answer us, wanting to put him on trial, wanting to place ourselves above him, that we fall into the sin that Israel did. Think of Job, for

example, in the book of Job. Job did nothing wrong. He didn't suffer, because he had sinned. He was suffering because God had sent that suffering into the world. And Job didn't sin with his mouth up until the point when he finally tried to make himself more righteous than God. When he finally said: "God, you have to explain yourself to me, because I am the one in the right, and you're the one in the wrong." That's the temptation that we face, Christians, to want to place God on trial and to try to make him answer to us as if we were above him.

But even despite that, Christians, God is still faithful to his promises. There is no reason to put him on trial. He is the one who has shown us time and time again that he will not fail us. We see that happening today in our reading, because God tells Moses: "Take some of the elders of Israel and go to the rock at Horeb. And I will stand there on the rock before you." Horeb, if you remember, is the same place that God had first appeared to Moses in the burning bush. And so in the same place where he had first made his promises to his people, God shows himself faithful again. Because he commands Moses to strike that rock with his staff, and when he does so, God gives them water without measure so that their thirst is taken care of for that time. God had provided for them there in the wilderness, because God does not forget his promises.

And Christians, God is taking care of you too. God will not fail you. God will provide for you in every single circumstance. So why do you think that this time is any different? Because think of it this way. God in the past has provided for you in so many ways. He has taken care of you and brought you out of far worse situations than this one. What makes you think that this one is going to be any different? God has brought you safely to this moment through many dangers and toils and troubles. What makes you think that he's going to forget that? What makes this moment any different? And God can provide for you in every circumstance, because if he can give water to his people out there in the wilderness, do you think that he has forgotten you? That he will fail to provide the things which you need? What makes you think that this circumstance is any different? God is faithful, Christians, and God will provide.

And he has provided for you above all in his Son Jesus Christ. Because, as Paul tells us in our epistle reading, "the rock was Christ." Christ, who was struck for our sins, wounded for our iniquities, has given to us a living water welling up to eternal life. So that even in those moments when we don't have earthly water, we have a heavenly water, one which will never fail us. God has given us his Word and his Holy Spirit and has made us his own. And if we belong to him, Christians, do you think that he will fail to take care of what is his? God is faithful. God has proven himself time and time again. So there's no reason to put him on trial.

So don't be afraid, Christians. Don't give into worrying or fretting. Put away your fears, fears of sickness, fears of what might happen, fears of not having enough. God has proven himself faithful to you time and time again, and this time is no different. He has not forgotten. He has not abandoned you. God is with you always. And God will be with you and provide for you, because he is your king.

Let us pray. Lord God, heavenly Father, you open your hand and satisfy the desire of every living thing. Pour out your Holy Spirit upon us this day, that we may always remember your goodness and your mercy which is new to us every morning, knowing that you will take care of us always; through Jesus Christ, in whose name we pray. Amen.