

The Bitter Pool



Life's Bitter Pool (Part 1)
by Derek Prince

It's good to be with you at the beginning of a new week, sharing with you Keys To Successful Living which God has placed in my hand through many years of personal experience and Christian ministry.

For my talks this week I've chosen a theme with a rather unusual title: "Life's Bitter Pool."

But first, let me say thank you to those of you who've been writing to me. Before I finish this talk, we'll be giving you a mailing address to which you may write. It means a great deal to me to hear how this radio ministry of mine has been helping you and blessing you. So please take time to write—even if it's only a brief personal note.

Now, back to our theme "Life's Bitter Pool." This is based on an incident in the history of God's people, Israel, just after they had been miraculously delivered out of Egypt and had passed through the waters through the waters of the Red Sea as though on dry land. The incident is recorded in Exodus 15:19-26. First we'll look at the climax of their miraculous deliverance. Exodus 15:19-21:

> "When Pharaoh's horses, chariots and horsemen went into the sea, the Lord brought the waters of the sea back over them, but the Israelites walked through the sea on dry ground. Then Miriam the prophetess, Aaron's sister, took a tambourine in her hand, and all the women followed her, with tambourines and dancing. Miriam sang to them: 'Sing to the Lord, for he is highly exalted. The horse and its rider he has hurled into the sea.'" (NIV)

That really was a tremendous triumph, wasn't it? Israel had passed through the waters of the Red Sea miraculously as if it was on dry ground then their enemy, the Egyptians, had followed them in, and God had brought back the waters over the Egyptians, swept them away, and put an end to that entire force of the enemy that was pursuing His people. Not one Egyptian survived.

I'm sure the Israelites concluded that now all their troubles were over and the rest of their journey to the Promised Land would be easy and uneventful. As a result they were

unprepared for what lay ahead. Now I'll read the thing that followed after this tremendous deliverance. We're still in Exodus 15 reading verses 22-24:

> "Then Moses led Israel from the Red Sea and they went into the Desert of Shur. For three days they traveled in the desert without finding water. When they came to Marah, they could not drink its water because it was bitter. (That is why the place is called Marah.) [In Hebrew Marah is the word for bitter.] So the people grumbled against Moses, saying, 'What are we to drink?'" (NIV)

Picture that scene for a moment. They had experienced that glorious deliverance. They were triumphant, exulting, they felt everything was under God's control. And then it says, they were led into the wilderness of Shur, led by God through Moses. And in that wilderness they went three days without finding water. Of course, they had an emergency supply of water in their water skins with them, but that must have been running low; the children and the cattle were beginning to become thirsty; they were all weary with the hot and dusty journey. And then in the distance they saw the gleam of water in this pool called Marah. And I'm sure some of them started to run to get there to quench their thirst. But, oh, what a bitter disappointment when they stooped down to drink. The waters were so bitter they couldn't drink.

Now the people were totally unprepared for that situation. They couldn't conceive that such a thing would happen to them when God was actually leading them and when God had just granted them such a tremendous deliverance and victory.

The people were unprepared, but there was one person who was not unprepared and that was God. Let me tell you, no matter how many times we may feel unprepared, God is never unprepared. God never has an emergency. God is never confronted with a situation that He doesn't have an answer to.

Now the people grumbled but one man, Moses, had the sense to pray. Scholars estimate that there were probably something like three million Israelites there. Think of the noise of three million people all grumbling at one time. I'm sure it must have been hard for Moses to hear his own voice in prayer. But Moses did the sensible thing—he prayed. And this is what followed. Now we are in Exodus 15:25-26:

> "Then Moses cried out to the Lord, and the Lord showed him [a tree] a piece of wood. He threw it into the water, and the water became sweet. There the Lord made a decree and a law for them, and there he tested them. He said, 'If you listen carefully to the voice of the Lord your God and do what is right in his eyes, if you pay attention to his commands and keep all his decrees, I will not bring on you any of the diseases I brought on the Egyptians, for I am the Lord who heals you.'" (NIV)

First of all I need to say a word about that word "tree." In the Hebrew language the word tree is used for a tree while its growing, but it's still used for a tree when it's cut down—when it becomes a long plank or a beam or whatever that may be. So we don't know from the words there whether the tree was growing and Moses had to cut it down or whether it was a tree that had fallen—just a long beam. But whatever it was, it was the key to the situation. And when Moses picked that tree up and threw it into the water, the water became sweet.

It's important to see that the scripture does not say the tree made the water sweet. There was noting magical about the tree. It was the supernatural power of God that made the water sweet. But the casting in of the tree was the act of faith that released the miracle-working power of God into that water. And that's how God's miracle-working power is usually released in our lives. It takes a specific act of faith to release the miracle-working power. The act of faith is the key that unlocks the miracle-working power of God and makes it available in the situation where we need it. This particular principle is illustrated many times in the ministry of the prophet Elisha, later on in the Old Testament. For instance, there was a stream near Jericho of which the waters were bad, they didn't make the ground fertile. The people couldn't drink them. Elisha just took some salt, threw it into the water, and said, "Thus said the Lord, these waters are healed." And they were healed. Not by the salt, but by the supernatural power of God. But casting the salt into the water released the supernatural power of God. That's the principle. The act of faith is the key that unlocks the miracle-working power of God. And interestingly enough, you can go to Jericho today and still see that stream flowing. They call it Elisha's stream. The water is still pure and fresh today. So that was a miracle that had a long-lasting effect.

In another situation, Elisha was confronted by some food that had been poisoned. The people were about to suffer, perhaps even death. Elisha took some flour, threw it into the pot and said, "The pot is healed." It wasn't the flour that counteracted the poison. It was the supernatural power of God. But the supernatural power of God was released by that act of faith.

And so it was here with these bitter waters. Moses threw the tree in and that act of throwing in the tree released the power

of God that turned the bitter waters into sweet.

Now this story, of course, goes back three thousand years. But the truths it contains are as vivid and as real today as in the time of Moses. Today and for the rest of this week we're going to look together at some of these truths and see how they apply to our own lives and our own situation at this time.

Two lessons stand out for me from this story of the bitter pool that we've just been looking at. The first lesson is great victories prepare us for great testings. The fact that God has given you a tremendous deliverance or a tremendous victory, a tremendous blessing, a tremendous healing—whatever it may be—does not mean that the rest of your life is going to be without further testing. The greater the victory, the greater the test that you'll be able to face on the basis of that victory. That was Israel's mistake. They thought that because they had had this tremendous deliverance, nothing else could happen that would ever challenge their faith. Consequently they weren't ready when they came to the bitter pool—instead of praying, they grumbled.

The second lesson, and this is vital, is that the bitter pool was in God's program. God actually led them to the bitter pool. He had a purpose in bringing them to that bitter pool. And this is true in our lives. God from time to time permits us to be confronted with a bitter pool, but He has a purpose.

Let me just give you a few contemporary examples of the kind of bitter pool that you and I may have to face. The first example I think of is a broken marriage. Alas, how many people today have had to face that bitter pool of a marriage that ended in divorce, the bitterness, the agony, the embarrassment, the wounds that are left so deep in human personality.

Another kind of bitter pool is a business failure. Perhaps you may have worked for years to build up some kind of a business, to establish yourself financially. And then through circumstances you couldn't control—the economy changed, other things changed—and you find yourself just broke, maybe quite well on in life. That's a bitter pool.

Or you may have a health breakdown. A physical breakdown—or worse still a mental or emotional breakdown. And now you're kind of putting together the broken pieces of a life that was strong and healthy and victorious.

Another kind of bitter pool is disillusionment with a human leader. You followed somebody, you gave them you best in service. It may be a religious leader. It may be a political leader. Or it might be a parent. And this person, in whom you had confidence, whom you looked up to, suddenly one day you realized they weren't what they seemed to be. The had feet of clay. They failed you. Your confidence was misplaced.

The question I'm going to ask you. Are you willing to learn the lessons God has for you in the bitter pool? If so you need to listen to the rest of my talks in this series.

Our time is up for today. I'll be back with you again tomorrow at this time. Tomorrow I'll be speaking about the purpose of testing.

Radio Program

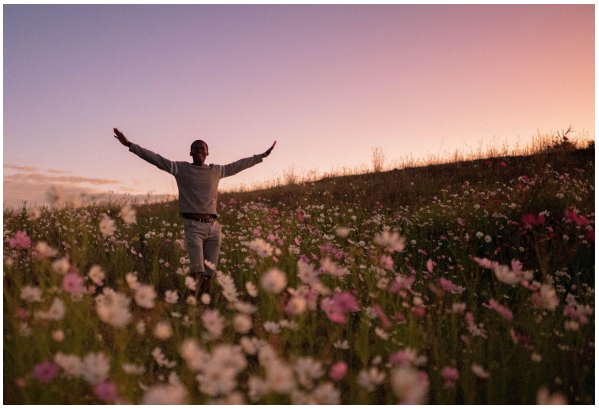
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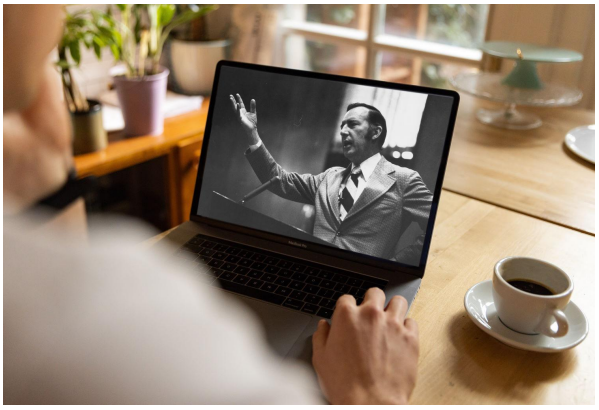
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