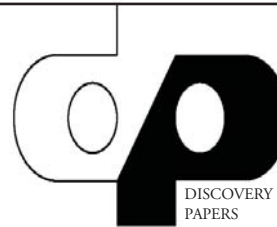


# YAHWEH-ROPHE: THE LORD WHO HEALS

*SERIES: NAMES OF GOD*



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Exodus 15:22-27  
2nd Message  
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We are in the second week of a three-week series entitled The Names of God. Last week we learned the name The LORD Provides (Yahweh-Jireh) from Genesis 22. In that story God provided a ram in the place of Isaac, Abraham's son, when Abraham offered him to God on the altar. This week we will hear a story in which God reveals a new name for himself: Yahweh-Rophe, translated "the LORD who heals." What God thinks Israel needs healing from and how He goes about healing His people may be a little surprising at first read.

Stand up comedy is one of the things our family loves to experience together. Comedians are so good at identifying human quirks—our bigger unspoken and unacknowledged shortfalls. They are able to find the humor in our humanness, making it easier to see ourselves as we really are and not how we would like to appear. One particular skit from the Conan O'Brian show is titled, "Life is Amazing, and Nobody's Happy." What a line. Doesn't that capture our demands and high expectations? When we are in such a hurry, interruptions are only viewed as hurdles impeding progress to our goal, but perhaps these interruptions in our lives are opportunities to slow down and see some new possibilities. Maybe they are opportunities for a kind of healing that we don't even know we need. Is our hurry causing us to miss the miracle of flight? Is our impatience really a more serious condition of the soul than we think? What does our impatience, our hurry, our many expectations reveal about the priorities of our life? Do we need healing?

God interrupts the plans of His people on their spiritual journeys with tests, trials, and unexpected events that cause them to experience discomfort, sometimes extreme discomfort, so they will come to Him to get healthy, to depend on Him. Where God's people turn in times of trouble reveals their heart condition. Do they grumble or turn to God to provide for their needs?

## Bitter Disappointment

Our text for this morning comes from Exodus 15, verses 22 through 27. Let's begin with verses 22 through 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.) So the people grumbled against Moses, saying, "What are we to drink?"**

Israel has just come from a fabulous national victory.

They have been celebrating down by the Red Sea with song and dancing because God had done a great miracle for them by delivering them from their Egyptian pursuers. Exodus 15:19 records it this way: "When the 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." What a miracle! What an amazing thing! How many of us wish we could see such a miracle? Then we would really have our faith in place—right?

Well, three days later Israel was in a very different place and mood. Moses led them from their celebrations at the Red Sea and brought them into the desert to begin their journey up to Mount Sinai and into the land promised to Abraham so long before. Three days into their journey, they were desperately thirsty. They came to a stream at Shur, and found that it was bitter and the water undrinkable. The deliverance they had hoped for in finding this stream turned to bitterness of heart when they found it undrinkable. And so Israel grumbled against Moses.

Moses and Miriam wrote the celebration song which Israel was singing when they began their journey into the wilderness for moments like this. People forget so quickly the blessings they have when they come upon a hard trial. People need reminding, so Moses' and Miriam's song was to remind them for all generations of God's great deliverance at the Red Sea. As our comedian's clip showed us, people all too quickly grumble and complain and forget the miracles in their lives when their expectations are dashed. Here is a little of the song Israel was singing before they came to the "bitter pool" at Shur.

Exodus 15:1-5:

"Then Moses and the Israelites sang this song to the LORD:

'I will sing to the LORD,  
for he is highly exalted.  
The horse and its rider  
he has hurled into the sea.  
The LORD is my strength and my song;  
he has become my salvation.  
He is my God, and I will praise him,  
my father's God, and I will exalt him.  
The LORD is a warrior;  
the LORD is his name.  
Pharaoh's chariots and his army  
he has hurled into the sea.  
The best of Pharaoh's officers  
are drowned in the Red Sea.  
The deep waters have covered them;  
they sank to the depths like a stone.'"

Hebrews 11:1 says, “Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see.” The young nation of Israel did not yet know God well enough to apply the words of their Red Sea song to their new situation. They were not mature in their faith as their father Abraham proved to be—they had a lot to learn. Just as God taught Abraham and Moses before them in their journeys, so now He was teaching this young people of God on their journey in the wilderness. He does not give up on them due to their faithlessness, but rather He provides a miracle, gives a command, and administers a test to His young nation to move them toward maturity. God leads His people to a place of healing, into the wilderness, for it is a good place to grow in faith.

## Wilderness is Purposeful

Israel is in the wilderness or desert of Shur. Shur means wall. This area is a narrow valley surrounded by limestone hills. The description of this place reminds me of those cowboy movies where the Indians are on the hills and the people have to pass through the valley to get to the land of their dreams. There may not be Indians here in the wilderness of Shur, but this wilderness is not safe. It is wild, untamed, and compelling. The wildness makes it a fearsome place—a place where life and death are uncertain. It is a beautiful place as well, in its vast size, its majestic mountains, with the wide open skies, and trickling springs and brooks of water offering rest and refreshment from the dry desert terrain. Moreover, it is quiet. Quiet and beautiful and dangerous—that is the wilderness. Wilderness in Scripture is a very significant place. In the wilderness God’s people wonder why God brought them here. They struggle with their fears, their needs, their dependence on God. M. Craig Barnes, in his book *Sacred Thirst: Meeting God in the Desert of Our Longings*, writes, “Wilderness describes the difficult, speechless pilgrimage toward God. All of the patriarchs...had to go to the desert to find God. When God leads you into the desert, it is an invitation to find Him there...one of the most important things to remember about the desert is that God never wants anyone to stay there. There is no easy way out, but one of the worst mistakes we can make is to get used to living in the dry places. The only point of going through the desert is to get to the Promised Land, where we are at home with God.”<sup>1</sup> Wilderness teaches us we need to be at home with God. How else can we learn He provides if we don’t experience our need in a very tangible way? How else can we know we need healing if we are never sick in body and soul? How else can we know that God fights for us if we are never held captive by Egypt or some besetting enemy—enemies such as our addictions, our obsession with material comforts, or our desire to try to find love in all the wrong places? Wilderness is God’s invitation to draw closer to Him as we are forced to shed our comforts.

All of God’s people will find themselves in the desert at some point. Even Jesus was led into the wilderness by the Spirit of God to be tested in his faith, just as God led Israel into this wilderness so that they might grow in faith.

Why would it be any different for us, yet how many of us have been surprised that after coming to faith we were challenged by harder things than we had ever experienced before?

I had an unchurched friend recently say to me, “I am a cynic; I can’t help it, it is just how I am. But you probably believe that everything will be alright, and don’t think that bad things are going to happen like I do.” I told her that I didn’t believe things were always going to be alright, and that being a Christian did not mean nothing bad was going to happen to you. “That’s not faith,” I said. Faith is believing God is with me in the bad things and the good things and will bring about something good through them. He sometimes even leads us into the hard places.

## Wilderness is God’s Idea

God’s direct leading brings Israel to the Desert (Wilderness) of Shur. When they arrive at the spring of water they must think, “Hooray! Deliverance! We are so thirsty, and this will taste so great!” But alas, the first sip proves the water is tainted. It is bitter to the taste due to the minerals (nitre) in it. Verse 23 says the spring is named Marah, which means bitter spring in Hebrew. The people of Israel are so disappointed. They expected deliverance from their thirst, and their dashed expectations lead them to grumble against their leader. But really they are grumbling against God. Their attitude matches the name of the spring. They are marah—bitter. Grumbling or murmuring is something that God’s people begin here in their wilderness wandering and continue to do for 40 years! Sadly, they continue this pattern and don’t mature as they should. Grumbling is a word that permeates much of Israel’s wandering years, and it is a word detestable to God. It is a word for faithlessness. No matter how reasonable it is that they would grumble here in their thirst, God still does not find it an acceptable response.

So let me ask you a pointed question this morning. Are you grumbling about something in your life? Is there a bitterness in your heart against someone or something?

I would like to encourage all of us to confess our bitterness to the Lord. Bitterness is a killer. It saps our joy, contentment, and peace and it poisons the water of faith in us and around us. God does not take it lightly. For 40 years Israel wandered in the wilderness because she “grumbled and murmured.” A whole generation passed on in the wilderness due to her unrepentant heart.

There was a man in the paper last week named James W. von Brunn. He was a notorious racist. At age 88 he was so bitter and mean that he went into the Holocaust Museum in Washington, D.C. intending to kill whomever he could. He ended up killing an innocent security guard who was only 39 years old and a kindly family man by most accounts. I do not know what disappointed von Brunn in his life, but something surely did. Whatever happened to him, he developed bitterness in his soul and then he just became consumed with it. He became a hater. This is what unchecked bitterness can do in our lives, too. It begins with

some disappointment, then turns to grumbling, and then becomes entrenched bitterness. It is so ugly. We should reject it the moment it rises up in us.

## The response of faith

So, what is a thirsty person to do? Cry out to God in prayer. Follow Moses' example in Exodus 15, verse 25:

**Then Moses cried out to the LORD, and the LORD showed him 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.**

Moses is our good example in this passage. Moses' response to the disappointing spring of water is to cry out to God. He has come to the bitter pool as well, he is just as thirsty as his people, but Moses chooses the way of faith. He prays. This is the response God is looking for in His people. We are to pray rather than complain. When Moses prays, or cries out to God, he is answered immediately. God shows Moses a piece of wood, or in some translations a small tree, and tells him to throw it into the bitter water. God does not complain about the people, or punish them, but when Moses cries out for help he immediately answers. God gives Israel another sign that He is with them. He gives Moses another miracle to perform to encourage this young nation.

So why this miracle? It is in direct contrast to the plague miracle when Moses touched the River Nile and turned it to blood, making it undrinkable. Now God takes the bitter waters of Shur and makes them sweet or drinkable for His people. In other words, He acts on their behalf. He provides for their needs when they call on Him. He will turn their bitter water to sweet. What a gracious God is Yahweh, Israel's God, who does not give up on His people but leads them with wisdom and patience.

Verse 25 also says that He makes a decree (this is something which they were to engrave on stone) so that His commands will be known and obeyed in their nation. His people need more direction as a community, so God gives them some written instructions to help them live as His children.

So, what is a thirsty person to do? Listen to the voice of God and obey. Exodus 15:26:

**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."**

Here is a fundamental issue for the people of God. God revealed Himself to Israel by walking with them and teaching them through the encounters they had with Him. These God encounters give us beautiful pictures of the way God works in the world with His people, but these real-time events in history have also been recorded. We have just seen that the proper response to our need is to

call on God in prayer, but here God is saying that He has also revealed Himself through the written Word engraved on stone. This is a gift to guide Israel in obedience, and to us as well. We cannot know God well if we ignore His written Word. That is like crying out in prayer and then not listening to God's response. Perhaps that is why so many in our post-Christian era know the fundamentals about God but do not live their lives in accordance with His will. They pray but they do not read His Word to find out what He is answering. This passage on the wall behind me, "You are not your own, you were bought with a price" was written so that God's people in Corinth would live like who they were. It is a call to sexual purity in an impure world. It is a call to live by God's standards as His people and not by any old way we choose. James 1:22 says: "Do not merely listen to the Word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says."

Pay attention, listen carefully to all God has written down, and do what it says, and then we will know Yahweh-Rophe, the LORD who heals in our lives. Since God's Word brings life and wholeness it makes sense that hearing and doing what He says will bring us life. What needs healing the most is the human heart. The LORD who heals, Yahweh-Rophe, reveals this new name for Himself when Israel is confronted with a disappointment and their response is as bitter as the pool to which they have come. It is not only physical healing that we need and we often cry out for; we need much more healing than that.

Israel needed heart surgery. Most of us don't want to succumb to surgery. It is painful, and debilitating for some time, but it is necessary for our healing. We need heart healing too. And the Lord says in Jeremiah 31:33 that a heart transplant is actually his plan: "'This is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel after that time,' declares the LORD. 'I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people.'"

Israel never could stop their complaining, but continued in a cycle of grumbling, judgement, repentance, God's intercession, and deliverance for their entire history. Yahweh-Rophe, the LORD who heals, had to do something radical to heal His people of their sin sickness.

What's a thirsty person to do? Come to Jesus.

## Jesus—The Living Water

When we are thirsty we often try to satisfy ourselves with things that temporarily meet our need for love and connection, or worth and value, but then find we are quickly thirsty again. These temporary fixes can be thought of as "bitter pools" that bring no refreshment. Jesus comes to a well in Samaria to meet up with a very thirsty woman. This woman has tried to fill her thirst for love and security with five consecutive husbands, but when Jesus meets up with her she is thirstier than ever. He meets her by this well so he can talk about her spiritual thirst. In John 4:10 he says, "If you knew the gift of God and who it is that asks you



for a drink, you would have asked him and he would have given you living water.” She dodges this statement for a moment and Jesus continues in verse 13: “Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks the water I give him will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life.” “...give me this water,” she replies. And with joy she runs off to tell all her neighbors about this man who understood her and changed her life. When Jesus returned later to Samaria they were all totally primed to listen to the gospel because of this woman.

In John 7:37 Jesus explains what this life giving water is: “Jesus stood and said in a loud voice, ‘If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within him.’ By this he meant the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were later to receive. Up to that time the Spirit had not been given, since Jesus had not yet been glorified.”

Yahweh-Rophe sent His son to heal a sin-sick world. For those of us who welcome Jesus into our lives to forgive our sins and take up permanent residence, He does more than heal our bitterness and sin; He makes our lives sweet as He lives in us and through us. We have received a heart transplant—God has written His law in our hearts so that we can and want to do His will. As we pay attention to His voice, and ponder His word and apply it, the living water bubbles up in our hearts through acts of love and compassion. It bubbles up in joy and encouragement; it bubbles up and makes us look like our Savior.

I want to close with a story about one little girl who had the ability to meet her “bitter pool” just the way God hoped Israel would face theirs. Instead of grumbling and getting stuck in bitterness in the wilderness she brought the living water inside her to bear in a very hard circumstance, and she influenced many generations following her to do the same.

In 1960, desegregation came to Louisiana. Ruby Bridges was one of only six African-American children chosen to go to the first integrated schools in New Orleans. She was six years old at the time. Her father didn’t want her to go because he thought it would only cause trouble and be hurtful for Ruby, but her mother prevailed because she wanted Ruby to go where she could have a chance at a good education. Ruby was the only child chosen to go to William Frantz elementary school. On her first day of school there was such a ruckus that she had to remain in the principal’s office all day. The white parents pulled their children out of the school in protest and kept them out that whole first year of desegregation. A child psychiatrist named Robert Coles happened to see Ruby, aided by several Federal Marshalls, arriving on that first day. He was amazed that the little girl marched so calmly into school with such a crowd of mean-spirited people taunting her, calling her names, and even threatening to kill her. He was convinced Ruby was going to suffer from all of this so he offered to counsel her as she went through this trial. He

counseled her for a year and got to be a family friend as well. He has written a book that many of you may have read with your children by now. He found out that Ruby was fine, and was in fact a child of great faith in God.

For one entire year Ruby went to school every day and sat alone in her classroom with Mrs. Henry, her teacher. One morning Mrs. Henry looked out her window for Ruby as she always did. She saw Ruby stopping and talking to the crowd of people, but she couldn’t hear what Ruby said. When Ruby came into the classroom, Mrs. Henry said, “I saw your lips moving, but I couldn’t make out what you were saying to those people.” “I wasn’t talking to them.” Ruby told her, “I was praying for them.” Later on, Ruby explained, “Usually I prayed in the car on the way to school, but that day I’d forgotten until I was in the crowd. ‘Please be with me,’ I’d asked God, ‘and be with those people too. Forgive them because they don’t know that they are doing.’”<sup>2</sup>

Jesus said a child will lead us. Ruby saw the situation clearly. Those people needed praying for. They were the ones that were sick with bitterness and hate, and Ruby knew what to do—she would pray for them to get better. When the psychiatrist persisted in asking her parents if she were afflicted with fears, etc., they said no, Ruby was just fine. And of course she was. The God and healer of her soul was with her.

## A Better Future

The final verse of our passage this morning, Exodus 15:27, concludes the story with this:

**Then they came to Elim, where there were twelve springs and seventy palm trees, and they camped there near the water.**

The numbers 12 and 70 carry the meaning of fullness. Israel rests in this mini-promised land for a month after the incident at the bitter pool. They reached it only 7 days afterward. Revelation 22:1-5 promises far greater things ahead than a month-long rest in a wilderness oasis: “Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, as clear as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb down the middle of the great street of the city. On each side of the river stood the tree of life, bearing twelve crops of fruit, yielding its fruit every month. And the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations. No longer will there be any curse. The throne of God and of the Lamb will be in the city, and his servants will serve him. They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads. There will be no more night. They will not need the light of a lamp or the light of the sun, for the Lord God will give them light. And they will reign for ever and ever.”

The life of a Christian is a journey. It begins with a great deliverance, and then we go on a great journey. On life’s journey there will be wilderness times and joyful times. In all our times God is with us. When we are by our “bitter pool” and can’t hear God’s voice very clearly; when we are having a hard time not despairing and we wonder where

did God go, may we remember this text. Yahweh-Rophe  
will turn your bitter waters to sweet.

**In His Time**

**By His Grace**

**Through His Power**

NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Barnes, *Sacred Thirst: Meeting God in the Desert of Our Longings*,  
14.

<sup>2</sup> Taken from [www.RubyBridges.com](http://www.RubyBridges.com).

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