

## More or Less

### Part 4 – Longing for Yesterday

#### Intro

Over the course of this month, we will have been addressing the [what seems like] mirage of contentment. We will look at past, present, and future hopes and how this idea of contentment guides our emotions and lives when reality crashes the party of expectation.

***Contentment – Deciding to be satisfied with where you are and what you have.***

All of us experience disappointment. Things don't turn out or happen like we had planned them in our minds. Disappointment is simply a reality of life. How we deal with and process these disappointments is what changes our perspective and defines the overall quality of our lives.

***How do you find contentment when where you are is not where you want to be?***

Sometimes it's not about longing for the future but reaching back into the past. Maybe, for you, contentment seems an impossibility because you don't have what you used to. While others are always hoping and striving for a more fulfilled and satisfied future, you spend your days wishing things could go back to the way they were.

It's a trap that we all fall into at some point in life – *if I just hadn't made that decision, if I had just said this instead of that, if I could just have my health back, if I could go back and do things differently...then maybe life would be better.*

Again, it's a place we've all found ourselves in.

#### Rescue from Slavery

The Israelite people [the people of God] found themselves in a similar situation. Long before, at the genesis of their formation, God had promised to make their fledgling group a nation – more than just a nation, but a nation of size and blessing.

Part of their journey would include several hundred years in captivity under Egyptian rule. But that through this season of their journey, God would use this time to prepare them and the scene around them for the fulfillment of His promises.

However, all they could focus on was the past.

#### Red Sea

Through a series of 10 plagues that God placed on the people of Egypt, God freed the Israelite people from slavery. As the Israelites left the city, the people and pharaoh of Egypt showered them with money, food, and clothing – everything and more they would need for the journey...which, by the way, was the land that God had promised hundreds of years before.

God led the people down by the Red Sea, away from danger and war. But when they came to the Sea, they realized there was no foreseeable way across. Not far behind was Pharaoh and his army. Once the Israelites had left, he realized that his workforce was gone, and he wanted them back. So, the Israelite people are stuck between an immovable object and a raging army – however, one step closer to God's promise.

Notice their reaction:

***They said to Moses, “Is it because there are no graves in Egypt that you have taken us away to die in the wilderness? What have you done to us in bringing us out of Egypt? Is not this what we said to you in Egypt: ‘Leave us alone that we may serve the Egyptians’? For it would have been better for us to serve the Egyptians than to die in the wilderness.”***

***Exodus 14:11-12***

They had quickly forgotten what God had just done in providing their rescue and showering them with enough to provide for their needs on the journey.

At the very last moment, God miraculously parted the Red Sea and allowed them to walk safely across the ground of the sea. As the Egyptian army made their way across the same dry ground, about to capture the Israelites, God closed the waters on top of them and saved His people once again.

### **Abundance of Water**

The people continued their walk across the desert, in search for the Promised Land. Three days into the wilderness, just three short days after seeing the miraculous happen...just a matter of weeks from being freed from generational slavery, the people begin complaining because of a lack of water.

***And the people grumbled against Moses, saying, “What shall we drink?”***

***Exodus 15:24***

A pattern is beginning to develop. What they had in the past [to them], even though it came with chains and bondage, was more comfortable than faithfully trusting God to provide.

***And he cried to the Lord, and the Lord showed him a log, and he threw it into the water, and the water became sweet. There the Lord made for them a statute and a rule, and there he tested them, saying, “If you will diligently listen to the voice of the Lord your God, and do that which is right in his eyes, and give ear to his commandments and keep all his statutes, I will put none of the diseases on you that I put on the Egyptians, for I am the Lord, your healer.” Then they came to Elim, where there were twelve springs of water and seventy palm trees, and they encamped there by the water.***

***Exodus 15:25-27***

What God had provided, every step of the way, was always enough. Twelve springs of water, one for each tribe of the people. Seventy is tied perfection, completion, and God’s administration [rule and reign] over the world.

***With its twelve springs and seventy palm trees it signified to Israel once again that, since the Lord is leading them, they should not conclude too quickly that they know the meaning of their circumstances, especially when they cannot yet see how the Lord will work on their behalf (e.g., parting the Red Sea).***

***ESV Study Bible***

### **Food from Heaven**

After leaving Elim, and heading back out into the wilderness, the people grow discontent with their lot yet again.

***And the whole congregation of the people of Israel grumbled against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness, and the people of Israel said to them, "Would that we had died by the hand of the Lord in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the meat pots and ate bread to the full, for you have brought us out into this wilderness to kill this whole assembly with hunger."***

***Exodus 16:2-3***

God had faithfully brought them out of Egypt, provided for their journey, parted the Red Sea, killed the army who had enslaved them, and had just let them to an oasis...all within the last few weeks. And all they can think about is what they used to have, where they used to live.

When we long for things to be *like they used to*, we miss what God is doing in the now. We lose the ability to see the small [and big] things that God is doing right now in our lives. And, more importantly, we become blind to what He is wanting to do in our hearts.

***Then the Lord said to Moses, "Behold, I am about to rain bread from heaven for you, and the people shall go out and gather a day's portion every day, that I may test them, whether they will walk in my law or not."***

***Exodus 16:4***

God, in His grace, yet again provided for the need of His people. Exactly enough, as each had need. But it never satisfied the people's desire for more. In Exodus 17, we see them complaining again for lack of water.

### **The Problem with Discontentment**

When we are discontent, we grow so focused on our personal desires that we are:

- 1) never satisfied with enough**
- 2) blind to what God is doing in the present**
- 3) unaware other people's needs around us**

Their [people of Israel] calling was never to be *blessed* only, but to be a *blessing* to the nations around them. In order to be a blessing to others, it means that we often have to sacrifice our comforts, release our desires, and trust in God's provision – so we can live within God's purpose and calling for our lives.