

Title: **“THE WATERS OF MARAH”**

Text: Exodus 15:22-27

Subject: *Bitter Waters Sweetened by the Cross*

Date: Tuesday Evening — June 3, 2008

Tape : Exodus #71

Readings: *Larry Brown and Rex Bartley*

Introduction:

We read in the Book of Proverbs, “*The full soul loatheth an honeycomb; but to the hungry soul every bitter thing is sweet*” (27:7). Have you come here tonight full, or have you come hungry? If you are full, I have nothing for you; but if you are hungry, I have a bitter thing upon which I trust the Spirit of God will feed you. If he will do so, you shall find this bitter thing sweet and satisfying, and you shall go home full. Come with me, children of God, to “**THE WATERS OF MARAH.**” Sitting down by the stream of bitter waters, ask God the Holy Spirit to be our Teacher and ask him to write upon our hearts the lessons that bitter place are intended to teach us. Let’s read Exodus 15:22-27 together. This will be our text tonight.

(Exodus 15:22-27) “So Moses brought Israel from the Red sea, and they went out into the wilderness of Shur; and they went three days in the wilderness, and found no water. (23) And when they came to Marah, they could not drink of the waters of Marah, for they *were* bitter: therefore the name of it was called Marah. (24) And the people murmured against Moses, saying, What shall we drink? (25) And he cried unto the LORD; and the LORD showed him a tree, *which* when he had cast into the waters, the waters were made sweet: there he made for them a statute and an ordinance, and there he proved them, (26) And said, If thou wilt diligently hearken to the voice of the LORD thy God, and wilt do that which is right in his sight, and wilt give ear to his commandments, and keep all his statutes, I will put none of these diseases upon thee, which I have brought upon the Egyptians: for I *am* the LORD that healeth thee. (27) And they came to Elim, where *were* twelve wells of water, and threescore and ten palm trees: and they encamped there by the waters.”

After God had so graciously delivered the children of Israel across the Red Sea, miraculously opening a path for them in the sea and then drowning Pharaoh and the armies of Egypt in the depths of the sea, he brought Israel

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into the wilderness of Shur, where for three days they wandered without water. The scorching sun beat down upon them. The desert sands scalded their feet. Their cattle were perishing. Their children’s tongues were swollen. Their lips were parched. They had roamed for three days in the barren wilderness without water.

Then, at last, they came to the plentiful fountains of Marah. When they saw the waters of Marah, how their hearts must have rejoiced in hope and expectation. As they approached Marah, they could almost taste the water. They could almost feel the cool, refreshing water in their mouths. But when they got there, the waters were so bitter that they could not drink them! Can you imagine the frustration and disappointment these men and women must have felt?

Immediately, they turned upon Moses, and began to murmur and complain. Actually, they turned upon the Lord God who had brought them to this place! Though the Lord had led them by the fiery and cloudy pillar, though he was with them, though he had miraculously and graciously delivered them from the bondage of Egypt and promised to do them good, they could not see him! All they could see, all they could think about were the bitter waters before them and the thirst within them. **Because they saw nothing good in God’s providence, they despised God’s providence.**

Do you know anyone like that? I blush to tell you I do. When these chosen, redeemed people should have remembered God’s goodness, they thought only of their troubles. When they should have looked to their merciful Deliverer, they looked only upon Marah’s bitter waters. When they should have prayed, they murmured. When they should have believed, they grumbled. — *“But God, being full of compassion, forgave their iniquity, and destroyed them not...For he remembered that they were but flesh”* (Psalm 78:38-39).

They had just before sung the song of salvation, on the borders of the Red Sea. They had that great sight fresh in their minds. They had been redeemed and all their enemies were swallowed up in the sea. They were now on the march toward the Promised Land. Three days they have traveled into the wilderness, and found no water. When they came to Marah, though water was there in abundance, it was bitter and they could not drink it. They murmured against Moses; and Moses cried unto the Lord. When he did, the Lord showed him a tree, which when cast into the waters made them sweet.

“THE WATERS OF MARAH”**PERSONAL APPLICATION**

Let every ransomed soul personally apply these things to himself. The Lord my God has brought me out of spiritual Egypt. He has led me through a new and living way, through the red sea of Christ’s blood. He has put a new song in my heart, the Song of Moses and the Lamb. He has made himself my Strength, my Salvation, and my redemption.

Yet, as he brought Israel through the wilderness of Shur, so he is bringing you and me through the wilderness. And in this wilderness, we ought to expect such experiences as one is likely to find in a wilderness. This is not the Land of Promise. This is the wilderness!

- Though we often do, we ought never call into question the wisdom and goodness of our God for leading us through the wilderness.
- Though we blush to acknowledge that we do, we should never question our God’s faithfulness, because he has placed a worm in the luscious apple we have been keeping back for ourselves.
- We should never doubt our Father’s mercy, love and grace because he sends us some bitter thing by which he has purposed to sweeten our souls and to sweeten himself to our souls!

O Lord God, as often as you bring us to the waters of Marah, show us the tree you showed Moses that day, Jesus Christ our crucified Savior, cast him into our souls’ experience, and make every bitter thing sweet!

GOD’S DIRECTION

Remember, it was God who brought Israel to Marah. He brought them here to teach them and to make himself known to them. And he did it to teach us and make himself known to us. — *“All these things happened unto them for ensamples: and they are written for our admonition”* (I Cor. 10:11). We read, in verses 25 and 26, that Moses *“cried unto the Lord; and the Lord showed him a tree, which when he had cast into the waters, the waters were made sweet: there he made for them a statute and an ordinance, and there he proved them, And said, if thou wilt diligently hearken to the voice of the Lord thy God, and wilt do that which is right in his sight, and wilt give ear to his commandments, and keep all his statutes, I will put none of these diseases upon thee, which I have brought upon the Egyptians: for I am the LORD that healeth thee.”*

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Proposition: In his wise and adorable providence, The Lord Jesus, the God of Israel, brought the children of Israel to the bitter waters of Marah, so that he might make himself known to them as JEHOVAH-RAPHA — *“The Lord that Healeth Thee.”*

I will talk to you about that in a few minutes; but first there are several things I want to call to your attention about this experience at the waters of Marah. I must make several observations about this experience in Israel’s history. .

1. **God does not deal with all people alike.** — This is certainly evident from the picture before us. To the Egyptians, God’s presence brought nothing but darkness and destruction. To the children of Israel, the presence of the Lord was their light and their salvation. Jehovah brought plagues to Egypt. He brought healing to Israel. God overthrew the armies of Egypt in the Red Sea. But he brought Israel through the sea upon dry ground.

Why did God treat the two nations with such distinct difference? The Jews certainly were not better people than the Egyptians. On the whole, the Israelites were just as wicked and corrupt as the Egyptians. So the difference was not in themselves. The difference between Israel and Egypt was the difference of God’s distinguishing grace. The Lord God made himself the God of Israel, by his own sovereign choice and covenant mercy. Thanks be unto God, he made a difference between Israel and Egypt because he chose to make a difference. And he has done the same for us (1 Corinthians 4:7). Let us ever adore the grace of God, the sovereign grace of God that brings salvation to his elect people. Thanks be unto God, he has not dealt with us after our sins, nor rewarded us according to our iniquities! We gladly acknowledge, — *“By the grace of God I am what I am!”*

2. **God does not deal with his own elect as we might expect.** — God seldom does things the way we expect him to. He does not deal with us according to our wishes, but according to his own infinite wisdom. He does not act according to our pleasure, but according to his own purpose. His ways are not our ways. And his thoughts are not our thoughts. Who would ever have imagined that God, who had given Egypt for the ransom of these Israelites, would then lead them into the wilderness of Shur? Who would have thought that God, who divided the Red Sea, would send his chosen ones three days into the desert without water?

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They looked for a Promised Land of milk and honey. But they found Marah! We might have expected that Almighty God would cause water to gush out of the ground as soon as his people began to thirst, as he later caused it to gush out of the Rock; but it did not. God was determined, in great love and mercy, to prove his children. And to prove them, they must be tried. He was determined to make himself known as Jehovah-Rapha, “*The Lord that Healeth Thee.*” But in order for him to be known as the Lord that heals, his beloved people had to be brought down to the place that they needed to be healed.

Do you see the parallel? We are not in a dress parade. We are pilgrims in this world, marching through this bleak and barren wilderness, to our land of promised rest. And ours is a stern march, over rough ground, which flesh and blood would never choose. All along the way, God is proving us, teaching us and preparing us for our promised rest.

The Egyptians had plenty of water. They had so much water that they were drowned in it. But God’s chosen ones did not even have enough water to quench their thirst. **If they would drink, they had to seek water from the hand of their God.** That is just the way it is in this world. The wicked seem to possess an abundance of the goods and comforts of this world, while God’s elect must seek their daily bread by faith and prayer. Do not envy the prosperity of the wicked! The waters of a full cup are wrung out unto them, because God intends by these things to drown them in his wrath (Psalm 73:1-20; 92:7).

The Lord was teaching Israel to trust him. He was teaching them to long for and earnestly seek after the Land Of Promise. And that is what he is doing for us. With every trial, he is saying, “This is not your place of resting. Seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. Set your affection on things above not on things on the earth. For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God” (Colossians 3:1-3). The only way to the city Beautiful is through the Slough of Despond and up the Hill Difficulty. This is the way to Canaan. This is the way you must go. We must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God. This is God’s way, not ours. And God’s way is best. The sooner we learn it the better.

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3. **There is a need for every trial and a necessity for every heartache that our heavenly Father sends.** — God has a reason for doing things the way he does them. And his reason is always gracious, loving, wise and good. He will never cause his child a needless tear. By this grievous trial, the Lord caused Israel to see something of the corruption, unbelief and vile ingratitude that was in their hearts.

- If there had been no wilderness within, they would not have had to go through the wilderness of Shur.
- If there had not been a drought in their souls, they would not have had to endure the drought of the desert.
- If there had been no bitterness in their hearts, they would not have had to experience the bitter waters of Marah.

God intends by our trials to show us our corruption, teach us to trust him, and correct his erring children. Child of God, there is a need for the things you suffer (Hebrews 12:5-12). I repeat — Our Father’s hand will never cause His child a needless tear.

Not only did God intend to show his people what was in them, he brought them to Marah because he was determined to show them what is in him. God brought Israel down to Marah so that he might reveal himself to them under this name: Jehovah-Rapha, *“The Lord that Healeth Thee.”* This is God’s purpose in all the experiences of his people upon the earth. It is that we may know more and more of him. The Lord leads his people into the wilderness of affliction, pain and sorrow, causes us to thirst and cry after him, so that he might make us to know his wisdom, power, goodness and love to us in Christ Jesus. **Spurgeon said,** “Our lives are the canvas upon which the Lord paints his own character.” Whatever your trial is, when it is over, if you belong to God, you will say with David, — *“It is good for me that I have been afflicted”* (Psalm 119:71). There is a need for your trials, else you would not have them. There is a necessity for every affliction, else you would not be required to endure it.

Divisions: Now let’s look at this name by which God revealed himself to Moses and the children of Israel at Marah: *“I am (JEHOVAH-RAPHA) the Lord that healeth thee.”* Let me show you three things:

1. The Lord Jesus, Jehovah-Rapha is the Healer of All Our Troubles.
2. The Lord Jesus, Jehovah-Rapha is the Healer of All Our Sicknesses.
3. The Lord Jesus, Jehovah-Rapha is the Healer of Our Souls.

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HEALER OF TROUBLE

First, the Lord Jesus, Jehovah-Rapha is the healer of all our troubles. — Who among you has not learned, by bitter experience that, though our days on earth be few, they are full of trouble? Some of you are going through a trial of great trouble right now. Perhaps God has brought you into trouble so that he might teach you to know him as Jehovah-Rapha, “*The Lord that Healeth Thee.*”

Let me tell you what I have experienced. “*This poor man cried, and the Lord heard him, and saved him out of all his troubles*” (Ps. 34:6; 3:1-8; 2 Samuel 22:1-7, 17-20, 31).

(Psalms 3) “A Psalm of David, when he fled from Absalom his son. LORD, how are they increased that trouble me! many *are* they that rise up against me. (2) Many *there be* which say of my soul, *There is* no help for him in God. Selah. (3) But thou, O LORD, *art* a shield for me; my glory, and the lifter up of mine head. (4) I cried unto the LORD with my voice, and he heard me out of his holy hill. Selah. (5) I laid me down and slept; I awaked; for the LORD sustained me. (6) I will not be afraid of ten thousands of people, that have set *themselves* against me round about. (7) Arise, O LORD; save me, O my God: for thou hast smitten all mine enemies *upon* the cheek bone; thou hast broken the teeth of the ungodly. (8) Salvation *belongeth* unto the LORD: thy blessing *is* upon thy people. Selah.”

(2 Samuel 22:1-7) “And David spake unto the LORD the words of this song in the day *that* the LORD had delivered him out of the hand of all his enemies, and out of the hand of Saul: (2) And he said, The LORD *is* my rock, and my fortress, and my deliverer; (3) The God of my rock; in him will I trust: *he is* my shield, and the horn of my salvation, my high tower, and my refuge, my Saviour; thou savest me from violence. (4) I will call on the LORD, *who is* worthy to be praised: so shall I be saved from mine enemies. (5) When the waves of death compassed me, the floods of ungodly men made me afraid; (6) The sorrows of hell compassed me about; the snares of death prevented me; (7) In my distress I called upon the LORD, and cried to my God: and he did hear my voice out of his temple, and my cry *did enter* into his ears.”

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(2 Samuel 22:17-20) “He sent from above, he took me; he drew me out of many waters; (18) He delivered me from my strong enemy, *and* from them that hated me: for they were too strong for me. (19) They prevented me in the day of my calamity: but the LORD was my stay. (20) He brought me forth also into a large place: he delivered me, because he delighted in me.”

(2 Samuel 22:31) “*As for* God, his way *is* perfect; the word of the LORD *is* tried: he *is* a buckler to all them that trust in him.”

When the children of Israel came to Marah, they found themselves in great trouble. The waters were bitter. They were dying of thirst. And they had nothing to drink. They seemed to be mocked. **There was plenty of water, but not an ounce to drink. Then God intervened!** He delivered them from their trouble by healing Marah’s bitter waters. The Lord makes our waters of bitter trouble sweet in many ways.

Sometimes the Lord simply changes our circumstances. — How often have you been so sorely oppressed that you thought you could not endure another day of abuse? But, just when it looked as though you would be overcome, the Lord removed the oppressor, or took you out of his reach. Many times I have been in a strait, not knowing what to do, or how to order my steps. I have come to the point where some decision must be made, but I knew not what to do. Then the Lord stepped in and completely altered the whole affair. He opened the way before me. He took me by the hand and said, “This is the way, walk in it.”

At other times the Lord turns our sorrow to joy and makes our bitter waters sweet interjecting something unexpected, which changes everything. — He showed Moses a tree and commanded him to cast it into the waters. And “*when he cast (it) into the waters, the waters were made sweet.*” The waters which Israel could not endure before became sweet to them because of the tree.

That tree, of course, refers to the person and work of our Lord Jesus Christ (Psalm 1:3; Song of Solomon 2:3; Revelation 22:2). No doubt this tree had always been at Marah. But God had to show it to Moses. And our Lord Jesus Christ is always present with us in our troubles. He is the One who brings them. And they come to us because of his gracious work as our

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Mediator. But until he reveals himself, interjects himself, we cannot see him. But once we see Christ’s hand, the hand of our Redeemer in our bitter waters, those very waters become sweet (1 Thessalonians 5:16-18).

(1 Thessalonians 5:16-18) “Rejoice evermore. (17) Pray without ceasing. (18) In every thing give thanks: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you.”

(Genesis 50:20) “But as for you, ye thought evil against me; *but* God meant it unto good, to bring to pass, as *it is* this day, to save much people alive.”

Frequently, the Lord makes our waters of bitter trouble sweet by simply giving us satisfaction with his will. — Nothing removes trouble from our hearts like submission to the will of God in the trouble he brings. Acquiescence in the will of God brings peace to the troubled heart quicker and more effectually than anything else (John 12:28).

How often we cry out with Jacob, “*All these things are against me.*” But, then, the Lord takes us down to the land of plenty and shows us our beloved Joseph upon his throne; and we are ashamed that we ever questioned his goodness. Then, with weeping eyes, amazed that we could ever doubt him, we sing,

Oh, how merciful, how merciful,
Blessed Lord, how merciful Thou art to me!

All that we have experienced should teach us that our God is able to make the most bitter things sweet. Past grace is his pledge of future grace. The name of God our Savior is Jehovah-Rapha — “*The Lord that Healeth Thee.*” In the midst of all our troubles, let us ever worship him and trust him (John 14:1-3).

(John 14:1-3) “Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me. (2) In my Father’s house are many mansions: if *it were* not *so*, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. (3) And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, *there* ye may be also.”

HEALER OF SICKNESS

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Second, Jehovah-Rapha is the healer of all our sicknesses. Certainly, sickness and disease are included in this promise of healing. They are specifically named! We are not among the foolish and ignorant charismatics, who pretend to have the apostolic gifts of healing. No man today possesses those gifts of the apostolic age. But let no one misunderstand this promise of God, or diminish its fullness. The name of God our Savior is Jehovah-Rapha. He is *“the Lord that Healeth Thee!”*

Our text tells us several things about sickness and divine healing. I will be brief here, but I want to be perfectly clear and clearly understood.

This text certainly assures us that all sickness and disease is the result of sin. Read verse 26 again. It is plainly stated that if we had no sin, we would have no disease. If we were perfectly righteous, obedient and sinless, we would never get sick. Though our bodies are redeemed by Christ, they are not yet changed. The change for our bodies will come later. **The resurrection will do for our bodies what regeneration has done for our souls. But until these bodies are raised incorruptible, so long as we live in this world, we will have to suffer sickness and disease in one form or another.** This body is yet under the sentence of death because of sin. It is left under the sentence of death by divine purpose, to remind us of the effects and consequences of sin.

If Christ had not redeemed us from sin, we would have to suffer eternal death in hell. And he has wisely left bodily sickness in us, sickness that will eventually bring bodily death, to constantly remind us what he has done for us in redemption, to make us both grateful and humble. All men get sick and die, young and old, because all are sinners. But those who are redeemed by the blood of Christ and saved by his grace have nothing to fear of either sickness or death.

Yet, the Lord our God, Jehovah-Rapha, does heal his people from bodily sickness and disease. Our Lord Jesus is so much concerned about his tried and afflicted saints that he makes our bed in times of sickness (Psalm 41:3). He *“took our infirmities, and bare our sicknesses”* (Matthew 8:17). And he plainly tells us how to seek his healing power (James 5:14-15).

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Often the Lord heals us of sickness and disease by graciously preventing them (Psalm 91:4-16). We do not often think of it, but God’s prevention of disease ought to be as much a matter of praise as his curing us of it. But, with us, that which should inspire constant gratitude creates indifference.

Still, we see the healing hand of the Lord more conspicuously when we have been sick and graciously restored to health. Let us never attribute praise to the medicine we have taken, the doctors who have treated us, or to some ingenuity of our own. It is God alone who wounds and God alone who heals. Let God alone be praised.

But our text shows us plainly that our God uses ordained means for the healing of his sick people. — The Lord God could have simply spoken the word and made the waters of Marah sweet. But he chose to use a specific means. Had Moses not cast in the tree the waters would not have been healed. **The use of means does not hinder faith. It proves faith.** Believing God, Moses took a worthless tree and cast it into the waters. And the waters were healed! **This is the first reference of healing mentioned in the Bible. And it was accomplished by the use of means.** The healing was done by God. That tree had no healing virtue. But God used the tree to accomplish the healing.

- In a similar way, the Lord healed the waters of Jericho when Elisha cast salt into them (2 Kings 2:19-22).
- God told Isaiah to lay a lump of figs upon Hezekiah’s boils to heal him (2 Kings 20:7).
- Paul told Timothy to use a little wine for his stomach disorders (2 Timothy 5:23).
- And James told the sick to use both prayer and the anointing of oil for the healing of the sick (James 5:14-15).

In every healing we experience, we have a pledge of the resurrection of the body. Jehovah-Rapha, who brings us up from the gates of death, will, at the time appointed, bring us up from the very pit of corruption. He who restores health to our bodies will restore life to our bodies in the resurrection.

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And this great God of ours, who heals the bitter waters of earthly trouble and bodily disease, is also the Healer of our souls!

The great Physician now is near —
The sympathizing Jesus;
He speaks the drooping heart to cheer,
O hear the voice of Jesus.

This is what he says, “*I am (JEHOVAH-RAPHA) the Lord that healeth thee.*”

These bitter waters of Marah are an emblem of the bitter curses of the law, for that bitter thing sin, which makes for the bitter work of repentance. The law demands bitter plagues upon every sinner, even a bitter death in hell. It cannot give us peace. But Christ, the Tree of Life, was immersed under the curse of the law, and made a curse for us. He endured in our place the bitter wrath of God and suffered the bitter curses of the law to the full satisfaction of divine justice. And now, the law of God, once so bitter to our souls, is sweet, pleasant, lovely and comforting, because it is fully satisfied by Christ, our Substitute.

How is it that God heals the sin-sick soul? How does he remove the plague of our hearts? Look at Marah again, and you will see the answer.

First, the Lord made the people know how bitter the water was. There was no healing for that water until they had tasted its bitterness. But once they knew how bitter it was by nature, the Lord miraculously made it sweet to them. That is exactly what happens in conversion. The Lord first makes sin bitter to us. He makes us see how corrupt and wretched we are by nature. He squeezes the cry from our hearts, “O wretched man that I am!” Then he heals us by his grace. This is God’s way with men. First he wounds. Then he heals. First he strips. Then he clothes. First he humbles. Then he exalts. First he kills. Then he makes alive.

Second, before the waters were healed, prayer was made to God. The prayer of Moses did not heal the waters. But until he called upon the name of the Lord, the waters were not healed. And you will not be healed of your sin and your heart’s plague until you call upon God for mercy through Christ Jesus.

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The Woman with the issue of Blood.

Still, something else was needed. **The waters were not healed until the tree was cast into them.** You know what that tree represents. It speaks of two things. The tree is a picture of Christ himself (Revelation 22:2) and a picture of the cross upon which our Savior put away our sins and brought in everlasting righteousness for us (1 Peter 1:24).

- We can only be saved, healed of our souls’ plague, when the work of Christ is imputed to us and his grace and righteousness are imparted to us.
- We are saved when Christ himself comes into our hearts by the power of his Spirit, and makes all things new.

Fourth, once the tree was cast into the waters, they were completely healed! The waters of Marah, once so vile and bitter, were made to be the sweetest waters on the earth, once the tree was cast in. And God’s elect, so vile and bitter in themselves, are made perfect and holy, once they have Christ and have his work put in them. When God heals a soul, it is healed forever, and healed completely, so that there is not even a trace of sin or its bitterness.

This is the name of God our Savior, Jehovah-Rapha — “*The Lord that Healeth Thee!*” He heals all our troubles. He heals all our sicknesses. And he heals our souls! Trust him now. He can and will heal you by the power of his grace!

HEALER ALL-SUFFICIENT

I’ve got to show you just one more thing. Look at verse 27.

(Exodus 15:27) “And they came to Elim, where *were* twelve wells of water, and threescore and ten palm trees: and they encamped there by the waters.”

Israel found twelve wells of water and seventy palm trees at Elim – a well for every tribe and a tree for every elder. This tells us that there are “*times of refreshing*” to follow the waters of Marah (Acts 3:19). And it tells us that the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ is grace sufficient for our souls, yea,

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grace sufficient for all the Israel of God! May the Lord God make that grace yours, for Christ’s sake.

Amen.