

**CONCLUSION** – What is the water like in this church? Is it sweet or is it bitter. A church that applies the Cross is sweet –

- **a church with a heart for people;**
- **it has a church which has an attitude of love;**
- **it is a church with a spirit of generosity**
- **it is a church with an absence of legalism**

Have you thought about the opposites – instead of

- **a heart for people there is a self-centredness**
- **an attitude of love there is unforgiveness**
- **a spirit of generosity there is a meanness**
- **an absence of legalism there is a judgementalism**

WHICH CHURCH WOULD YOU GO TO?

## **READING - EXODUS 15:25**

### **INTRODUCTION –**

- Well known story from the OT – Israel have crossed over the Red Sea & are on their way to the Promised Land.
- They are travelling in a desert & have gone three days without finding water.
- From the excitement of the Red Sea, they are now suffering. It is not too difficult to imagine what they must be feeling & thinking at this point.
- They come to a place called MARAH & find water – but the taste of the water is bitter. The people grumble against Moses.
- As we read – “Then Moses cried out to the Lord, & the Lord showed him a piece of wood. He threw it into the water, & the water became sweet”

In my study at home I have a book called “The Cross Through the Scriptures.” The writer uses this incident from Exodus 15 to speak about the Cross of Jesus Christ & how the Cross can turn our experience from one of guilt, shame, thirst because of sin into an experience of peace with God, knowing God through Jesus. **THE CROSS CAN BRING A TREMENDOUS CHANGE INTO OUR INDIVIDUAL LIVES BUT WHAT DIFFERENCE CAN IT BRING INTO A LOCAL CHURCH?**

This morning I want to use this incident from Exodus & ask the question – **HOW SWEET IS THIS CHURCH?** For people who find this church – will their experience be sweet or bitter?

The piece of wood that God showed Moses made all the difference to the bitter waters at Marah. I want us to think about the Cross of Jesus Christ & the difference it can bring to the local church. The Cross isn’t only to be preached by the Church but it is to be applied in the Church – it is to be applied to individual congregations & how we relate to the world & each other.

**STORY – “What’s So Amazing About Grace?”** Philip Yancy tells a story about a friend of his who came across a lady who was in real need. The lady was a prostitute – she was homeless, sick, had no money. The lady also had a two year old daughter to look after. There were some other issues which we will not go into. Philip Yancy’s friend was in a very difficult situation. He asked the lady if she had ever thought about going to a church for help. Philip Yancy’s friend writes **“I will never forget the look of pure shock that crossed her face.”** “Church” said the prostitute, **“Why would I ever go there? I was already feeling bad about myself. They would just make me feel worse.”**

**HOW SWEET IS THIS CHURCH? HAS THE CROSS OF JESUS CHRIST TOUCHED THIS CHURCH?**

The Cross at the Centre of a Local Church –

### **1. HEART FOR PEOPLE – “For God so loved the world that he gave...”John 3:16**

Jesus was known as a friend of sinners – he had a reputation of mixing with sinners. What was his secret? He saw the prostitute, the demonised, the Samaritan, the Roman as people who His Heavenly Father was grieving over, who the Father was looking out for, who the Father was wanting to welcome back home, who the Father was waiting to have a party with – the shoes are

ready, the clothes are ready, the rings are ready. The Cross at the centre of the local church gives us a heart for people – our Heavenly Father has a heart for these people. One of my favourite writers has said this – “You have not seen a person who God doesn’t love & Jesus didn’t die for.”

THE CROSS IS AN INCLUSIVE MESSAGE – Jesus didn’t come for my social group, my economic group but he came for the world. Jesus followed what he saw his Father doing. Are we following the example of Jesus? From Jesus comes our mission – it is the whosoever.

A CHURCH WHERE THE CROSS IS AT THE CENTRE IS AN ACCEPTING CHURCH, A WELCOMING CHURCH – Do you need to re-visit the CROSS as a Church?

## **2. ATTITUDE OF LOVE – “live a life of love, just as Christ loved us & gave himself up for us.” Eph 5:1**

The example of Jesus on the Cross is an example we are to follow with each other – he loved us. How well are you doing on this? There is a story told about a General in the American Civil War. The troops that were under him were arguing & fighting among themselves. The General simply turned to them & with his finger pointing away from his own troops said – “the enemy is over there.” WE ARE NOT ENEMIES OF EACH OTHER.

Jesus said – “Love each other as I have loved you.” Jn 15:12

PASTOR IT IS HARD – yes, it is hard but I have learned a secret – I GO DIPPING. When I have a difficulty with someone, I practice the Elisha/Namaan incident – I dip, I dip, I dip. I say to myself –

- Marcus, God loves them as much as He loves you
- Marcus, God has problems with you, as much as He has problems with them
- Marcus, God isn’t going to love you more than He loves them
- Marcus, they have problems with you, as much as you have problems with them –

KEEP DIPPING

LOVE EACH OTHER AS CHRIST LOVES YOU – selflessly, sacrificially.

DOES THIS CHURCH NEED TO REVISIT THE CROSS – “This is love: not that we loved God, but He loved us & sent His Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.” 1 John 4:10-11

## **3. SPIRIT OF GENEROSITY – “freely you have received, freely give” Matt 10:8**

Jesus was sending the 12 disciples out & was giving them guidance & in the middle of the instructions he said – “Freely you have received, freely give.” Jesus is saying to the disciples –

- It is not about what you had
- It is not about what you were
- It is not about who you were

IT IS ABOUT WHAT YOU HAVE BEEN GIVEN SINCE YOU MET ME – SAME FOR US TODAY – “FREELY YOU HAVE RECEIVED, FREELY GIVE.”

Thinking about the disciples we can ask – What had they been given? They had received teaching from Jesus; they had come to know relationship with God’s own Son; they had been given purpose in their lives; they knew friendship with Jesus. But when we look at this incident in Matt 10 we must also note something else they were given – authority to drive out & to heal the sick. Think of Peter in Acts 3 – “Silver & gold...but what I have....”

A SPIRIT OF GENEROSITY – it was in the disciples & in the early church (e.g. Jerusalem church in Acts 4; the Macedonian churches in 2 Cor 8 who gave beyond their ability). Jesus was the example in his life & at the Cross – God gave His Son & Jesus gave Himself up to be sacrificed.

Are you givers of encouragement? Are you givers of your time? Are you givers of your resources? Are you givers of praise to God?

IS THERE A SPIRIT OF GENEROSITY IN THIS CHURCH OR DOES A VISIT NEED TO BE MADE TO THE CROSS?

## **4. ABSENCE OF LEGALISM – “It is for freedom that Christ has set us free” Gal 5:1**

What are we talking about here? The unwritten rules that are in churches. The petty things that are made important. The rules that others lay down. We are talking about practices that are man made. We are talking about the standards that man have laid down.

I HAVE LIVED WITH LEGALISM IN MY MINISTRY – there is a way to set the communion table; the restrictions on who can distribute the communion; the restrictions about who can pray in a meeting. I remember being told by someone that they would not allow my wife to pray for them because she doesn’t wear a hat!!

With legalism it is the outward that is important – all the time the vision that God has for a local church is lost. Legalism is a killer – it drains a church of its joy, its life because people become more concerned to please others & come up to some impossible standard.

CAN YOU RELATE TO WHAT I AM SAYING?

THE CROSS SPEAKS OF JOY, FREEDOM, LIBERTY – IT IS ABOUT HAVING A PARTY.

What are we to encourage?

We are to encourage people to live in relationship with Jesus – we should speak about this  
We are to encourage people to learn from their mistakes & failures – we should help people up  
We are to encourage people to become the person God intended them to be – it is a work of grace