

August 4, 2024

Exodus 16:15-31

A lot can change in a month. In a month, our town is going to increase by thousands of people as the students move in. In a month, football is going to be all anyone can talk about. In a month, summer will be over and the kids will be in school. A lot can change in a month- which was also true in 1446 BC- almost 3500 years ago. At the beginning of the month, God's chosen nation Israel were slaves in Egypt, a plague had come and wiped out the first born sons of the Egyptians while they were spared, and they finally were freed, until Pharaoh changed his mind and led his army after them and they, millions of people and their wives, children, elderly, animals, possessions, are about to be mowed down or drowned in the Red Sea, and God miraculously splits the Red Sea so they can go through, and the Pharaoh and his army is drowned when they try to pursue. And the Israelites sang for joy and danced and celebrated God's power and love, and within a month their praise had turned into grumbling and complaining. "Moses, you and God must have taken us out here to die in the desert- there's no food! We wish we were back in Egypt- we had pots of meat, and now we're going to die out here!" A lot can change in a month. But God doesn't change, and he is going to sustain his people in the desert on their journey to the Promised Land- a sweet, thin, wafer-like substance that appears on the ground in the morning- daily bread in the desert. Today, we are going to learn about God's daily bread given to his people in the desert, and we are going to look at how God gives us our daily bread on our journey to the ultimate Promised Land.

One thing to notice: The Israelites are not taking the common route to Israel- the journey from Egypt to modern day Israel isn't that long and can be done in a few months. Moses, the leader of the people and God's messenger, is being guided by God exactly what to say and exactly where to go, and they go way off course in the Desert of Sinai. It's completely desolate- no water, no vegetation, and therefore nothing to hunt or gather or feed the livestock. Why does God do this? Why not just take them the quickest route to the Promised Land? Because they aren't ready for it. They need to learn how to trust him, and so he puts them in a position where they have no choice but to trust him for everything. The first day he sends this miracle bread, the Israelites have no idea what to call it, they say "What is it?" and that's what they end up calling it, "Man hu," or "Manna"- "What is it?" And although God gives this manna freely and graciously from Heaven, he doesn't just drop it into their hands. He gives the joy and dignity of hard work- this manna had to be collected early in the morning or else it would disappear, and it had to be boiled or baked, and God also attaches rules to his manna. He not only provides manna, but he also provides opportunities for his people to exercise trust. They are to take just as much as they need for that day and no more- which would have been a hard thing because what if God doesn't give his daily bread tomorrow. God was clear, take what you need for the day, no more, and when they did that, everyone was satisfied, things were good. But you know how people are, they get skittish, and they think, "well just in case." And they pay dearly for it- the manna immediately rots and gets maggots when they keep it overnight- that is, until the night before the Sabbath.

This is where they really need to exercise their trust and obey- because now God says that they have to collect twice as much, no more, no less, and stay put on the Sabbath day. That is the day of rest. No work on the Sabbath- do you trust God to obey him when he says, “Don’t work, I’ll take care of you? But of course some people think, “well you never know,” which is actually a blasphemous statement- if God says he’s going to do something, he’s going to do it- and they go out and find nothing and embarrass themselves. But when they do what is right and obey, everything works well, and God does what he promises, and while it’s not filet mignon or Topper’s sticks, they survive. God sustains his people.

Here’s what I’d like us to take away from this: 1. Embrace God’s testing. 2. Don’t hoard your manna 3. Be satisfied with the Bread of Life.

1. Embrace God’s testing. I first want to make this abundantly clear. All of this happened- this isn’t a legend or a parable that’s meant to teach us a higher truth- this is the historical account of what happened to God’s people. At the same time, God’s saving of Israel from slavery and taking care of them serves as a beautiful, useful picture for our journey from spiritual slavery, through the desert of life, into the Promised Land of Heaven. Like I said, God purposely makes Israel wander around in the wilderness and doesn’t take them into the Promised Land right away. Why? Because although they had been freed from political slavery in Egypt, they were still very much enslaved to their fear, their selfishness, their greed, and they needed to learn to trust God and be freed from that inner slavery. In other words, it took a moment to take the Israelites out of slavery, it would take 40 years in the desert to take the slavery out of the Israelites, and it had to be done through testing, trials, hardships in the desert. In the same way, God saved us from spiritual slavery to Satan, sin and death in a moment- when he claimed us for himself in Baptism, when we came to believe in JESUS as our Savior, we were taken from slavery forever. At the same, part of us is still deeply enslaved to sin, selfishness, greed, fear, lust, envy, hatred, every bad. So God, over time, takes the slavery out of us in this life through trials, tribulations, and moments where you begin to realize how desperately dependent you are on him, and he says, “Trust me.” There are times when he takes people, resources, jobs, pleasures, things you always thought you couldn’t survive without, times where he puts you in a place where you don’t to be, puts you in situations where you’re not in control and he says, “trust me.” Don’t look at your hardships as punishments or mistakes of God- neither of those things happen. God is giving you an opportunity to grow in trust. Embrace his test.

2. Don’t hoard your Manna. What actually *is* daily bread? Luther explains it well, as we read before in the service- it’s everything we need to survive. It’s not just food and drink, but home, money, clothes, spouse, family, car, means of income, government, good weather, good friends, everything you need to survive and thrive. Every one of those things is a gift of God, even if you earned it- because the personal gifts, skills, and abilities you have, and the opportunities you have to use and develop those gifts, and the drive you have to develop those gifts, are all gifts from God. All of it is daily bread, all of it is freely and generously given by a gracious God.

Therefore, don't hoard it, and don't take more than what God asks you to take. This clearly applies to monetary greed. I probably don't have to convince you that frivolously wasting your money as soon as you get in on booze or gambling is sinful, but just as sinful is hoarding your money- not because money is sinful, but because you are trusting in your money for security and safety, not God. When we gossip about our coworkers or cheat to get ahead at work or make an extra buck, we are hoarding God's daily bread and trusting it more than him. When we dishonor our elected government, or worship our elected government as if they are going to save this country and therefore us, that's hoarding our daily bread and trusting in it more than the one who gives it. God is the giver of your daily bread. Trust him enough to enjoy what he has given you, and rest- what do I mean by that?

3. The Bread of Life. Notice that hoarding manna isn't the only issue, but looking for manna where it isn't to be found- both are wrong. What's fascinating, is that according to Jesus, that's something all people do. The Pharisees in John 6 demand that Jesus prove that he is who he says he is by giving them some sort of bread or earthly resource, because apparently that's what Moses did. Jesus replies and says, "You're looking for manna in the wrong place. You think your biggest problem is the Romans, the famine, your tax collector, but you are hungry beyond what you realize, and I have come to fulfill your deepest desire. I'm the true manna from Heaven that the Father sends and if you have me in your life, if you know the love I have for you, if you believe in the death that I die for you and the glory and beauty and honor that I've earned for you, you'll never be hungry, even if you barely make ends meet. You'll never be thirsty, even when the well is dry. Even if your stomach is growling and everyone looks down at you, you'll be fuller and more satisfied than a king." That's what Jesus offers you. If you know him, and you know the sacrifice he made just to have you, you realize how important, how valuable, how worthy you are, and when you truly understand that and the glory he has in store for you in the Promised Land, you can enjoy whatever God has given you through your labor and enjoy your daily bread for what it is, a gift that is here today, gone tomorrow, to be shared, not hoarded, and a shadow of the Bread of Life that satisfies you forever. In other words, if you don't have the true Manna, the Bread of Life, no amount of daily bread will ever satisfy you, but if you have the Bread of Life, the true Manna, no amount of scarcity can shake you.

I have one specific application. Part of embracing God's Daily bread is taking time away from your work and your business and spending actual time in God's Word and prioritizing worship and Bible study with your brothers and sisters- being fed by God and resting in his Word is something God commands, not because he needs it, but because we do. When people don't come to church for a really long time, there's always an excuse. "I'm too busy. I have work, or I'm tired from work, I have so much going on." Okay, but here's the reality- when you're too busy to rest in God's Word in God's House with God's people, it probably means you're looking for Manna where there isn't any- just like the Israelites on the Sabbath. You may identify as a Christian, but really your heart is desperately hungry and is trying to find satisfaction in money, or in your kid's sports achievements, or in leisure, or just in busyness itself, and those things will

never satisfy you. Only the Bread of Life can, and he's found in his house with people. Now, the fact that you're all here means that you probably get that, but you probably also know someone who doesn't yet, and it probably means a lot more coming from you than me. Show them how they're looking for manna in the wrong place, and tell them about the Bread of Life that can satisfy them. Amen.