

Text: [Exodus 16:1-7, 13-23, 31](#)
Date: May 12, 2019
Title: “Manna from Heaven: God’s Generosity”
Theme: God’s generosity provides what we need when we are anxious and afraid.

Intro

Two weeks into our series on Exodus and so far, we’ve talked about two foundational episodes in the story of the people of Israel

Moses at the burning bush

And Israel at the Red Sea

Today, I want to look at another story that’s probably familiar to many of you – the manna God provided for Israel in the wilderness

Question

What’s the most important thing you learned from your Mom?

1

“What is it?”

I can think of a few times when you don’t want to hear that question

One is when you’ve just given someone a gift

Anything that takes much explanation is probably going back to the store (I’m hoping none of the moms here are going to experience that today)

The second one is when you put dinner on the table

Definitely not a good sign

Combine both of those situations and you have the core of this story from Exodus this morning

In chapter 16, verse 15, the people of Israel looked at this gift from God and said, “What is it?”

The scripture says that they started calling it “manna” because in ancient Hebrew, that sounded a lot like “what is it?”

There are a few explanations for what this stuff might have been
In that part of the world, there is something called a tamarisk bush
For a few weeks out of the year, certain types of insects, as they feed on
this bush, leave behind a kind of sweet and flaky substance that falls
on the ground around the trees
It IS edible, if you can beat the ants to it

Whether that could be a food source for hundreds of thousands of people,
I'm not sure
The quail, for sure – they were around in abundance at certain times of the
year as they were migrating

2

But something need not be literally true to be spiritually true
And there is plenty of truth in this story

First, the writer goes to great lengths to say that this event took place
exactly one month to the day after the Red Sea
If you read along, you find that immediately after the Red Sea, the people
are praising God and giving thanks for their freedom
The very next story after that is about the people wondering where they're
going to find water
And the story after that is what we read today – the people wondering
where they were going to find food

Now it's easy to say, "God help me if I were Moses trying to lead these
people with their complaining"
But water, food – these are kind of important things
Not at all unreasonable to be worried about either one

3

Remember what I said last week, though, about the shelf life of faith?
One month, and the people are in not only physical, but spiritual crisis
Here's how we know that:

"If only we had died by the hand of the Lord in the land of Egypt,
when we sat by the fleshpots and ate our fill of bread; for you have

brought us out into this wilderness to kill this whole assembly with hunger.” (Ex. 16:3)

Two things I see here:

First of all, it's Moses' fault

YOU have brought us out into this wilderness

So one sign of a spiritual crisis is that we put blame where it doesn't belong

Remember, it was actually GOD who called them out of Egypt

The second sign of spiritual crisis is looking back at the past with rose-colored glasses

Wasn't it so much better when...

Remember when we used to sit by the stew pots and eat all we wanted?

There's another place where they talk about missing the fish, the cucumbers, the melons, leeks, and garlic (Num. 11:5)

So one of the spiritual truths I discern here is that we often prefer

SLAVERY with SECURITY

To FREEDOM with FAMINE

And I get that – no one wants to be hungry

But I also want to say to the people who keep talking about how good they had in it Egypt: YOU WERE SLAVES

So when you say you had plenty to eat, is that really true?

Was it really as good as you say it was?

Faith has a short shelf life

And humans have a selective memory

BACK always looks BETTER to us

Because we forget all the hard things we left behind

And when we're feeling like we're hanging out there

Like Israel, who were wondering where they were next going to find food and water, it gets unsettling

SECURITY seems promising, even if it means SLAVERY

And FREEDOM scares us, because there's this constant FEAR that we won't have enough

4

But that's the price of doing a new thing – there's uncertainty, there's fear
And it is uncomfortable
Sometimes you're short on the things you need

Think about it – if some of Israel's leaders had made this trip, even once
before,
Then they would have KNOWN where to go to find water, to find food
The whole situation would have been different

This series isn't about the SECOND time you do something though
It's about wandering in unfamiliar places
Setting out to do something brand new – in our own lives
And in the life of the church

Think about how much preparation is involved in the FIRST time you do
anything
You ask everyone you know for wisdom, you try to find people who have
been in similar situations
You Google your problem, study it thoroughly
Think about what might go wrong and plan accordingly

But at some point you just have to do it
That's the only way you'll ever really know what it's like
Is to take on that experience for yourself

You'll worry, though
You'll worry about bumping up against the limits of your own resources
Your own smarts, your own gifts, your own grit and endurance

5

And it's in those moments that you'll have to learn to trust in resources
much greater than your own
You'll have to trust in God's generosity

That's really what this story is about – it's about God's generosity towards
the people of Israel – and by extension, us
That's the spiritual truth for us here

Because no matter what you're looking for, no matter what you need, God
has it
Opportunity, possibility, hope, endurance, courage, resources
You name it, and God has it

What's interesting about the way God shares it with us, though, is that it
gets very carefully doled out
Did you notice that?
Each day, you collect this much for every member of your family
Don't collect more than you need, it won't do you any good
Don't keep it overnight, it will go bad

Fridays, you'll get a double portion
Don't go out looking for it on Saturdays

Now why is this?
Well, why do we pray, "Give us this day our daily bread"
It's because God wants us to learn something
It would be SO much easier to have bread for a week

But God introduces this anxiety in order to remind us that ONLY GOD is
capable of relieving this anxiety
If we had bread for a week, God wouldn't hear from us for a week
If we had bread for a month, God wouldn't hear from us for a month
If we had bread for our lifetime, God wouldn't hear from us at all
God is generous, but God also wants us to recognize the giver!

We often choose SLAVERY with SECURITY
Because we fear that FREEDOM will bring FAMINE

So my question to you today is this: "What is it?"
Remember – that's what manna means – "what is it?"
What is it you need today?

Is it provision? Is it wisdom? Is it patience?
What is it you need?
God did not bring you this far to leave you alone
God did not bring you this far to watch you starve out in the wilderness

So what is it?
What is the manna you seek today?
Trust God's generosity.
And what you need will turn up.

Amen.

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