

Text: Exod. 16:14-36

Title: Lessons from the bread from heaven

Time: 1/10/21 am

Place: NBBC

Introduction: In our chapter this morning, the children of Israel are complaining about their hunger and longing for the fleshpots of Egypt (Exod. 16:3). One of the confusing things about their complaint is that we know from other verses in this history that they must have done so while in possession of significant livestock assets.

We remember Exodus 12:38, which tells us how they left Egypt richly blessed of God in this regard: "And a mixed multitude went up also with them; and flocks, and herds, even very much cattle." In the next chapter, the Israelites will again complain about water shortages, but this time they say their livestock need a drink too (17:3). So how can they be complaining of hunger with so much meat in their folds and pens?

It seems to me that one possible answer is that the livestock they brought with them were being reserved for the sacrifices needed to worship Yahweh once they got to Sinai. Remember that this was their original request to Pharaoh - "Let us go three days into the wilderness with our livestock and sacrifice in worship to the Lord" (Exod. 3:18, 5:3, 8:27).

Israel will spend about a year at Sinai (Num. 10:11), and shortly thereafter complain again about no flesh to eat (Num. 11:4-35). This time they complain that all they had at that point was manna. Unlike our passage, God then sends a plague along with the quail. It would seem in our passage here, the hunger need is more real than in the Numbers passage, although here Israel still seems to have their live-

stock, whereas their assets are more depleted a year later. But whatever the answer to this question may be, we must conclude that the manna God gives in this passage, which will be food for them until they enter the promised land (v. 35), was chosen by Him for reasons beyond their hunger need. The Lord might have chosen other ways to feed them, but He uses manna.

The songs of Israel would celebrate the Lord's goodness to Israel with this insight about manna. They call it "corn from heaven" (Ps. 78:24), "angels' food" (Ps. 78:25), and "bread of heaven" (Ps. 105:40) (KJV). This morning I want to treat the manna of this passage the way the Psalmists do, as a special blessing from God designed to teach us much more than the importance of a full belly. I want us to see three lessons about this bread from heaven, which is emblematic of the way the Lord provides for our every need, both physical and spiritual.

I. Our food is a gift from God (vv. 14-21, 31).

Illustration: In the Hobi home, I get to do some of the cooking, which I have come to enjoy. I have found that it is especially satisfying to see a meal you have prepared heartily enjoyed by good eaters. If I have a creation on the stove, and my wife comes home, she sometimes asks the question the Israelites ask about what the Lord prepared for them in verse 15. The phrase *it is manna* there literally means, "What is it?" Now when my wife asks me that question about my cooking, she can say it in one of two ways. One way is a blessing to me, the cook, and the other is an offense. We are not told how the Israelites asked this question about what the Lord prepared, but I think we can surmise that their complaining spirit did not come up with a tone that pleased the Lord.

Food is an important part of our life. Paul said that whether we eat or drink, or whatever we do, we must “do all to the glory of God” (1 Cor. 10:31). Doing that begins with realizing that our food is a gracious gift from the Lord – what we might call bread from heaven. James says this is true about all our blessings, our food included: “Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above and falleth down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning” (Jam. 1:17). Notice with me some things this passage teaches us about our food, a gracious gift from the Lord.

1. Our food is a gift for which we should be thankful (vv. 14-15). Do you give thanks for your food? In John 6 Jesus talks about bread and manna after miraculously feeding a multitude from five barley loaves and two small fish. Verse 11 says, “And Jesus took the loaves; *and when he had given thanks*, he distributed to the disciples.” Do we give thanks before distribution? Do we remember that our food is a gift for which the Giver deserves our thanks?

2. Our food is a gift for which we must labor (vv. 16-17, 21). The Lord clearly structures this provision so that the children of Israel had to do some work for it. That work would need to be done early in the day, because the manna appeared with the dew and melted into liquid when the sun rose too high (v. 21). One commentator was reminded of Solomon’s counsel to his son in Prov. 6:4-11, “Give not sleep to thine eyes, nor slumber to thine eyelids. Deliver thyself as a roe from the hand of the hunter, and as a bird from the hand of the fowler. Go to the ant, thou sluggard; consider her ways, and be wise: Which having no guide, overseer, or ruler, provideth her meat in the summer, and gathereth her food in the harvest. How long wilt thou sleep, O sluggard? when wilt thou arise out of thy sleep?

Yet a little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to sleep: so shall thy poverty come as one that travelleth, and thy want as an armed man." I was reminded of 2 Thess. 3:10, "For even when we were with you, this we commanded you, that if any would not work, neither should he eat."

3. Our food is a gift with which we must be content (v. 18). The quail and manna come to satisfy the legitimate need of hunger in this passage. In Numbers 11, the quail come to satisfy the illegitimate discontent of wanting something other than manna. Here food comes with God's blessing, there with God's plague and judgment. Paul put our need for contentment as believers this way: "For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out. And having food and raiment let us be therewith content. But they that will be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition. For the love of money is the root of all evil: which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows" (1 Tim. 6:7-10).

4. Our food is a gift of our daily bread (vv. 19-20). Jesus taught us to pray for our daily bread. He told us in the context of how He feeds the birds to take no thought for tomorrow (Matt. 6:34). Some of us have had some special instruction in that regard during this past year of shutdowns. When it comes to our need to eat, we need to trust the Lord faithfully one day at a time.

5. Our food is a gift that is delicious (v. 31). Cooking is as much art as it is science. The Lord flavored the manna in such a way that it would be delicious to the taste. It is possible for fallen man to think that the day-two worms and maggots taste better than the Lord's original recipe, but that is only because it is possible for fallen man to be dead

wrong. God is not only the originator of great taste; He is also the one whose tastes define great taste. Do we find delicious what He does? Where does our standard of good taste and beauty come from?

And so the manna teaches us that our food is a gracious gift from the Lord. We need to eat and drink for His glory. Note a second lesson from Israel's manna with me.

II. Man shall not live by bread alone (vv. 22-30).

Illustration: After forty days of fasting, the Lord Jesus endured a time of temptation from Satan. The first satanic suggestion encouraged Jesus to turn stones into bread to satisfy His hunger. Jesus gave Satan an answer that He had learned from the lessons of God's gift of manna. It is a lesson found in Deut. 8:3, which Jesus quotes to Satan in response. The verse is truth we must all learn from God's gift of manna: "And he humbled thee, and suffered thee to hunger, and fed thee with manna, which thou knewest not, neither did thy fathers know; that he might make thee know that man doth not live by bread only, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of the Lord doth man live."

Application: The Lord not only gives manna for Israel's belly, but He also gives Israel His word, commandments and laws for Israel's soul. In this case, God's words are instructions and promises that anticipate God's instituting the sabbath rest among His people Israel in Exodus 20. These instructions come with the manna with the hope that the Lord would not have to ask the question of verse 28 as He gives them this wonderful and abundant material provision: "And the Lord said unto Moses, How long refuse ye to keep my commandments and my laws?"

But He does have to ask, and He still asks this question today every time you and I live by the abundance He gives us instead of by the Word of God. Often, we are content to disobey God so long as our bellies are full. When that happens, we are worshipping our material blessings by prioritizing them over obedience to God's commandments and laws. In Matt. 6:24, Jesus was clear that "no man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one and love the other; or else he will hold to the one and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon" (v. 24).

Satan's temptation of Christ seems very innocent on the surface. Jesus is hungry. Bread is not sinful. Why not turn a stone into a loaf of bread? The reason is that to do so would have changed the determinative principle of His life. Would He be guided by the god of his belly, or by the Holy Spirit who had led Him into the wilderness fast (Matt. 4:1)? To be guided by the Holy Spirit is to mind obedience to the word of God. To be guided by the god of our belly is to mind earthly things (Phil. 3:19, "Whose end is destruction, whose God is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame, who mind earthly things").

God does not feed our belly so it can become our god. He does not bless us materially so that we can ignore His commands and laws for our worship and life. Like the Lord Jesus, we, who live in such abundance that we can replace our stones with loaves of bread any time we want to, must make the leadership of the Holy Spirit the determinative principle of our life, for God's gift of manna teaches us that "man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God."

III. The bread from heaven must be passed on (vv. 31-36).

Illustration: My favorite commentary on the Pentateuch (the first 5 books of the OT; the books of Moses) is C. H. Macintosh's five volume set published in the 1860s and 1870s. It was a gift to me from Bonnie Bartelt, who served Dublin Christian Academy for a generation and used to play the piano for us every Sunday. One thing that is very special about this set is that it once belonged to Bonnie's mother, Dorothy Bartelt. So my set has some of Dorothy's markings in it. I am reminded each time I use that commentary that Bonnie inherited her faith in no small measure from her mother Dorothy.

Application: Israel was to do that with a pot of manna. God wanted future generations to learn at least three things from this miraculous pot of the bread of heaven: (1) the supernatural and miraculous are real; (2) freedom from bondage in our Egypt of sin is the Lord's work; (3) and God is faithful to feed us in the wilderness. We have no pot of manna to show them, but our kids need to learn these same lessons from us today.

So, what will our kids see from us to help them know these things? Bonnie's mom, Dorothy, gives us an important clue on page 212 of volume 2. She simply wrote at the top of the page, "manna in the morning." She understood what Jesus says in John 6, that Christ is the true bread from heaven. Each morning, we can collect an omer-full of Him and show it to those who see the details of our life each and every day.

Conclusion: Dorothy then marked two of Macintosh's comments, with which I will close this morning: "It is one thing to know that we have life in Christ, together with full forgiveness and acceptance before God, and it is quite another to be in habitual communion with Him — feeding upon

Him by faith – making Him the exclusive food of our souls” (2.215). Do we have both of these?

Dorothy also marked this: “We must make Christ the paramount object of our soul’s pursuit, else our spiritual life will inevitably decline” (2. 216). Is Christ the paramount object of our soul’s pursuit? Every day, our soul has a paramount object of pursuit. Is ours Christ?

If not, we have sinned a great sin, and only God’s grace and mercy can save and cleanse us from it. Perhaps along with the many gifts we enjoy from the Father of lights this morning, He will also graciously grant us some repentance too, so that we can make Christ the paramount object of our soul’s pursuit. He is worthy.

“A man came – I think it was actually in Philadelphia – on one occasion to the great George Whitefield and asked if he might print his sermons. Whitefield gave this reply; he said, ‘Well, I have no inherent objection, if you like, but you will never be able to put on the printed page the lightning and the thunder.’ That is the distinction – the sermon, and the ‘lightning and the thunder.’ To Whitefield this was of very great importance, and it should be of very great importance to all preachers, as I hope to show. You can put the sermon into print, but not the lightning and the thunder. That comes into the act of preaching and cannot be conveyed by cold print. Indeed it almost baffles the descriptive powers of the best reporters.”

– David Martin Lloyd-Jones,

Preachers and Preaching