

Nourished and Satisfied

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Please consider donating to this work in the San Francisco Bay Area online at Christchurcheastbay.org. Today's scripture reading is from the book of Exodus, chapter 16, verses 2-5 and 27-35, as printed in your liturgy.

A reading from the book of Exodus. In the desert, the whole community grumbled against Moses and Aaron. The Israelites said to them, If only we had died by the Lord's hand in Egypt. There we sat around pots of meat and ate all the food we wanted.

But you have brought us out into this desert to starve this entire assembly to death. Then the Lord said to Moses, I will rain down bread from heaven for you. The people are to go out each day and gather enough for that day.

In this way, I will test them and see whether they will follow my instructions. On the sixth day, they are to prepare what they bring in, and that is to be twice as much as they gather on the other days.

[1:12] Nevertheless, some of the people went out on the seventh day to gather it, but they found none. Then the Lord said to Moses, How long will you refuse to keep my commands and my instructions? Bear in mind that the Lord has given you the Sabbath.

That is why on the sixth day, he gives you bread for two days. Everyone is to stay where they are on the seventh day. No one is to go out. So the people rested on the seventh day. The people of Israel called the bread manna.

It was white like coriander seed and tasted like wafers made with honey. Moses said, This is what the Lord has commanded. Take an omer of manna and keep it for the generations to come, so they can see the bread I gave you to eat in the wilderness when I brought you out of Egypt.

So Moses said to Aaron, Take a jar and put an omer of manna in it. Then place it before the Lord to be kept for the generations to come. As the Lord commanded Moses, Aaron put the manna with the tablets of the covenant law so that it might be preserved.

The Israelites ate manna forty years until they came to a land that was settled. They ate manna until they reached the border of Canaan. The grass withers and the flowers fall.

[2:19] The word of our God stands forever. Good morning to you all. We are in this new sermon series on the Ten Commandments. We've been spending the last several weeks just looking at the prologue of the Ten Commandments, which we find in Exodus chapter 20, verse 1.

And the prologue of the Ten Commandments goes like this. It says, I am the Lord your God who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery.

And I think a lot of people in the Bay Area, you know, the word salvation can kind of feel vague and abstract. But when we get to this prologue of the Ten Commandments, we find a pretty adequate definition of what salvation is when we hear these words, I brought you out of slavery.

I've set you free. I've liberated you. Salvation is liberation. And that's what this book of Exodus is all about. Salvation is liberation from our bondage.

And if you remember over these past few weeks, we talked in Exodus 12 about the blood of the Passover lamb and that we were people who had been bought with a price, the price of blood.

[3:40] We talked about in Exodus 14, the parting of the Red Sea, that when there was no way, God made a way, that God made a way out of slavery. He made a way through death and into a new kind of life.

And so when the New Testament looks back on these events, these foundational liberating events of the Old Testament, it sees these as signposts.

At Exodus 12, the Passover lamb is a signpost pointing us to Jesus, who had shed his blood to deliver us from our sins. It's pointing us, Exodus 14, the parting of the Red Sea, is pointing us to the resurrection of Jesus, where God made a way where there was no way.

He made a way out of slavery and out of death into new life. And so that brings us now to Exodus 16. Here we are.

We've been liberated from Egypt. We're on the other side of the Red Sea. We've walked through slavery. We've come through death. We're out here with new life on the other side. Now what?

[4:45] What now? What is this journey with God, this liberator God, what's it going to be like? And here's the thing that a lot of people either don't know or easily forget.

It's that God's salvation, God's liberation, is not about being set free to go and do whatever we want to do. And that, I think, is where the postmodern worldview has seeped into the church quite a bit because postmodern philosophy says that freedom is the absence of constraints.

Freedom is the ability to do what I want to do without anybody telling me what to do. But what you're going to hear over and over in the sermon series on the Ten Commandments is that that is a different kind of slavery.

That definition of freedom is actually a slavery to self. It's a slavery to your culture. It's a slavery to the subjectivity of your present historic moment.

And what this is telling us is that real freedom, real liberation, is about no longer serving harsh taskmasters and oppressive tyrants in Egypt, but rather to have a new and better king.

[5:59] Real liberation is not about being set free so that you can live according to your own agenda and set your own rules and do whatever you want.

No, it's about learning how to be a free human being under your sovereign Lord as your king. That's what Exodus is about. And so the question is, what can we expect from this God who's newly liberated us?

What does it mean to belong to him? What does it mean to now be on a journey of liberation with him? And that's what we're going to talk about today. We're going to talk about the God who trains us, the God who provides for us, and the God who refreshes us.

Okay, the God who trains us, the God who provides for us, and the God who refreshes us. I want to start by talking about the way in which God trains us. This God who liberates us from slavery is the same God who leads his people into what verse 2 calls, quote unquote, the desert.

Why would God do that? Why would a good and powerful God lead us into the desert of all places? Why would he take his people straight from their liberation into a howling wasteland?

[7:22] Why does he not take them straight into the promised land that's flowing with milk and honey? I mean, he's surely powerful enough to do that. Why doesn't he just take his people on the quickest, easiest, most efficient, comfortable route to the promised land?

To use New Testament terms, why doesn't God just take us straight from justification to glorification? Why does God think it's a good idea to take us through this wilderness we call sanctification?

I mean, I thought he liberated us so we could be happy. I thought he liberated us and set us free so that we could have all we need and all we want. I thought life with God was going to be this graph that goes up and to the right, onward and upward, forever and ever, better and better and better. But strangely and inexplicably, here is this God who brings us in our liberation out into desolation wilderness. Here we are as the people of God in the Mojave Desert.

This God-forsaken Nowheresville. Why are we here? Last week we saw in Exodus 14 that the Lord intentionally put his people in an uncomfortable position in the desert.

[8:41] They were hemmed in there. They had a mountain on their left, a mountain on their right, Red Sea in front of them, Egyptian army behind them. And they were sitting ducks. Why did God put them in that position? And we were told because he wanted everyone to know that he was the Lord.

He wanted everyone to see that he had the power and the glory that belongs only to him. And there's a very similar pattern, a very similar dynamic here. What is the Lord doing?

Well, if you read the story, Exodus 15, God takes his people through the wilderness where they have no water, not one day, not two days, but for three days. And then here he takes them in Exodus 16.

They've got no food. Exodus 17, they have no water. Again, what is he doing? He's training his people. He's training his people.

He's first of all showing them their need and their vulnerability and the weakness of their hearts. And then secondly, he's showing them that he can be trusted to meet their most basic and deepest needs.

[9:45] Look at verse two. It says that in the desert, the whole community grumbled against Moses and Aaron. The Israelites said to them, if only we died by the Lord's hand in Egypt. There we sat around pots of meat and ate all the food we wanted.

But you have brought us out into this desert to starve this entire assembly to death. Any of you ever get hangry? Your parents, your kids ever get hangry?

Here's our redeemed brothers and sisters, the church of the Old Testament. These are the mothers and the fathers of the faith. But they're spiritual newborns.

They're spiritual infants. And here they are. They're one month, you know, out of slavery. They're 30 days into this new life, this new journey of liberation.

And how's it going for them? Well, these people who've been redeemed by the blood of the Passover lamb, they're terrified by the harsh cruelties of the desert. They're feeling serious pain.

[10:46] They're feeling serious hunger pains in their stomachs. And if you've been a Christian for like five minutes, surely you've felt this. Right?

You know what it means to find yourself in an awful place. God has brought you for some reason to this hard and difficult place. This dangerous and uncomfortable and troubling place.

And your experience of life is causing you to wonder whether you are indeed one of the Lord's people. It's causing you to wonder whether or not you got your guidance wrong.

It's causing you to wonder how the evil one has come in to spoil the Lord's perfect plans for you.

And our hardships breed all kind of questions.

Why me? Why is this taking so long? Why is this so brutal? How could I have slipped so far from the will of God?

[11:44] Where did I go wrong? You ever wonder what you're doing out here in the wilderness with all this pain? The quick and easy spiritual answer is that all of our troubles are down to the evil one, Satan, who is ever watchful to find some vulnerability in our defenses.

Another answer is that knowingly or unknowingly, we've strayed out of the will of God or somehow gotten our guidance wrong. And in some circumstances, these can be sufficient explanations, but oftentimes they don't tell the whole story.

Because the reality is the Israelites are here in this wilderness because the Lord who loves them has led them there. A pillar of cloud by day, a pillar of fire by night, he's led them right here where he wants them.

And so far in this journey, every move in whatever direction, every stop and every start, every turn of the pathway was by the will of God.

Whether or not they were at a desert oasis and they were feeling good or they're out here and they're in dire straits feeling thirsty and hungry, it's because the Lord has led them here.

[13:00] And why would he do that? Because God trains us by leading us into situations which call for our trust. He puts us in situations that call for the endurance and obedience that prove that our trust is real.

So that as we exercise that trust in him, in the face of new challenges, our trust begins to develop.

Our trust begins to mature until we come to see that everything that happens to us is under his divine supervision and everything that happens to us is full of God's purposes for our good.

Our Lord trains his people by putting us in places where we have this perpetual choice between either complaining against God or living out our trust and obedience to him.

And let's go back now to verse 3 because they say, If only we died by the Lord's hand in Egypt. There we sat around pots of meat and ate all the food we wanted, but you brought us out into this desert to starve this entire assembly to death.

They say, We are so desperate for food to eat that we wish the Lord had struck us down on the night of Passover. We wish he'd have just drowned us in the Red Sea.

[14:23] Why would he send the plagues? Why would he display his power? Why would he go through all this trouble only to bring us out here so that we would die in the desert anyway? This is absurd.

I wish he'd have left us alone in our slavery. I wish he'd have never bothered to liberate us in the first place. And why do they say these things in their hearts?

Because they say, Well, we miss the all-you-can-eat buffets of Egypt. I mean, the fish was good. The cucumbers, the melons, the bread. It was so good. And notice that they're kind of speaking in the language of addiction, the language that addicts use when they kind of have a selective memory of the past, this mistaken nostalgia for what was actually killing them.

They're living in denial. They're only remembering the tiny pleasures, and they're blocking out the massive pain and misery of being slaves. And this sort of delusional, pathological preoccupation that God's people can sometimes have of how great life was when we were oppressed without God.

[15 : 42] You know about Stockholm Syndrome, where you kind of come to love and admire your abusers and your slave masters? That's Stockholm Syndrome of the soul. That's what's going on right here.

And if you turn in Deuteronomy chapter eight, which is kind of necessary to understand this story, Deuteronomy chapter eight, verse two says this. It says, remember how the Lord your God led you all the way in the wilderness these 40 years in order to what?

In order to humble you and to test you so that you might know what was in your heart. Why does God want us to see what's in our hearts?

What does he want us to see that's there in our hearts? We're saying to ourselves, it would have been better to have died as slaves with full stomachs than to be here as God's free people with discomfort.

Forget about God. Forget about his liberation. Forget about his freedom. We want to feel good.

See, though we are legally out of slavery, in our hearts, spiritually, internally, we can still be slaves.

[16 : 57] Slaves to our stomachs. Slaves to our situation. Slaves to our senses. Slaves to all the thought systems and the patterns of imagination in Egypt about the good life.

And as was said last week, though God has gotten his people out of Egypt, he still needs to get Egypt out of his people. What would the right thing have been to do in this moment of pain and panic when the people were hungry?

It would have been to drop down on their knees and cry out to this God who'd already saved them and say, God, you've given us so many reasons to trust in your goodness and your grace.

You've shown us time and again how powerful you are, that you're our protector, that you're our provider, and we need your help. Have mercy on us. But they don't do that.

They don't cry out to God. They cry out against God. And there's a grumbling, complaining spirit in their hearts against the Lord that he needs to simply train out of them.

[17 : 56] And I wonder about us. What about you? How many of us started strong in our journey with God? But like these spiritual newborns, these spiritual infants, we begin facing the first challenges of our liberation.

We begin to face those first challenges of being free yet hungry and thirsty. And we realize that here we are out here in this wilderness with a severe shortage of supplies and we start freaking out and we start complaining against God.

You see, if that's in your heart, God leads us out into these wilderness places so that he can train us to see that that's what's there. And so that he can train the slavery out of the hearts of his people.

So this is the God who trains us. But I want us to also look at verse four because this is the God also who not only trains us, who brings us into the desert, but he's also the God who provides for us.

Look at verse four. It says, Then the Lord said to Moses, I will rain down bread from heaven for you. Now if I were God, this passage would say, I will rain down fire from heaven on you ungrateful people who complain against me constantly even though I liberated you from your slavery.

[19 : 24] That's what you deserve. Fire from heaven. Now maybe if I'm having a good day, I would say, actually, I'm going to rain down on you on some random occasions a scant supply of low quality, crusty, moldy bread.

But thank God I'm not God. Right? And thank God you're not God because I don't know what you would say. But this manna does not come down on random occasions. It comes every day.

And this manna does not come in scant amounts. It comes in abundant, generous supply, two quarts per person per day, which is plenty. It's enough to satisfy.

And this is not low quality bread, but in verse 31, it says that this manna tasted like wafers made with honey. This is Trader Joe's quality bread.

Some of you are like British and from the Anglosphere. This is like McVitie's biscuits. Okay? The people would read this, these wafers made with honey, and they'd say, this is the most delicious food you could possibly imagine.

[20 : 34] And the sweetness and the substance of this manna, it's given not just daily, but it's given in a double supply, one time a week. And it's this gift that just keeps coming day by day, week by week, not just for one year, but for 40 years.

And what does that tell us about God? What does it mean that a jar of manna was miraculously preserved in the holy of holies of God's tabernacle, right beside the Ten Commandments as a sign for generations to come of who God is?

What does it say about the person of God and the work of God? What says that we need to be continually reminding ourselves and reminding each other of how good and how gracious and how generous this provider actually is.

He continually supplies an abundant, delicious, nutritious, daily food source for thousands upon thousands of people. Friends, do you know how good he is?

Do you know how gracious he is? Do you know how generous this God is? And here's the thing, if he's able to meet his people's short-term and long-term needs with material bread, what does that mean?

[21 : 55] It means that he's also able to meet all of our non-material needs. You see, if he rains down material bread from heaven that is not necessarily what the people expect but it's exactly what they really need, then how much more can he meet our spiritual needs, our existential needs, our eternal needs?

How much more can he give us of the abundant spiritual riches of heaven? I want us to remember that Jesus' ministry began when he was hungry and tempted in the desert.

That's the official starting point of his ministry. He was baptized and he goes into the wilderness and he's hungry and he's tempted in the Gospel of Matthew chapter 4 and Jesus in that place, he quotes that passage from Deuteronomy 8 that I read earlier.

I'll read a little bit more of it here. It says, remember how the Lord your God led you all the way in the wilderness these 40 years to humble you and to test you in order to know what was in your heart, whether or not you would keep his commands.

He humbled you, causing you to hunger and then feeding you with manna, which neither you nor your ancestors had known, in order to teach you this, and this is what Jesus quotes, in order to teach you that man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord.

[23 : 30] Jesus is saying there, Moses is saying there that our needs are way deeper than our material need for bread. In fact, in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus asks the question, he says, is not life more than food?

And then immediately he says, seek first the kingdom of God. Life is about so much more than food. And what he's saying is that we don't live on material bread alone, that's the lesson of the manna, but that spiritually we live on every word that comes from the mouth of our king, every word about his kingdom.

And you remember in the Gospel of John, John chapter 6, Jesus goes out, he's with at least 5,000 men plus women and children, they're hungry, they're in this forsaken place, and what does he do? He multiplies bread. And then he says, he says, it was not Moses who gave you bread from heaven, but my father who gives you the true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is the bread that comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.

The deeper meaning of the manna is that it points to our spiritual need for God's word, which God has so abundantly provided for us, not only in the scriptures, but in his word made flesh, his son, Jesus.

[24 : 52] And Jesus goes on in the Gospel of John chapter 6, he says, we heard it earlier, I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats of this bread will live forever.

Whoever eats the bread of my flesh, he says, has eternal life and I will raise them up on the last day. So how do we get this manna?

How do we get this living bread from heaven that God has provided for us in Jesus Christ? It's interesting to consider if God's so powerful, why didn't he just put the manna straight into their stomachs?

Right? They're like, they're walking around, they're like, we're in the wilderness, we're hungry, and then boom, oh, I feel better. He's already doing a miracle, why didn't he just go ahead and put it straight in?

Well, the answer is that they were passive, right, at Passover and all they had to do was just put the blood of the lamb over the doorpost and they just had to sit there and basically watch God do everything.

[26:03] Same thing at the Red Sea, they were just completely passive. God did everything, all they had to do was just walk, like from one end to the other. And even here, God is actively providing the manna while everybody just sits around passively watching him do it.

But once the manna has been provided, God's people are called to be active, right? They've got to actively go out and they've got to put their faith in God by going out to receive his provision. And I think that's important because if you're exploring Christianity, it's so important to take the time to understand who Jesus is, to understand what he did, to understand why he's the living bread that God gave to come down from heaven.

But there comes a point where you've got to actively put your faith in God by going out to receive what he's provided.

You've got to put your trust that if you take Jesus in, he will be the bread of heaven that can fill you, that he can satisfy you, he can give you life.

[27:12] That's how you become a Christian. But if you've become a Christian, you've got to realize that just because the Lord is providing your daily bread, you can still die in the desert if you don't go out and get it.

And this is what it says in verse 4, Then the Lord said to Moses, I'll rain down bread from heaven for you. The people are to go out each day and to gather enough for that day, and in this way I will test them to see whether or not they will follow my instructions.

Literally, I'm going to see whether or not they will walk by my Torah, they'll walk by my law. This will show the degree to which they put their faith in me and their trust in me.

Will the provider's people trust the provider's word about the provider's gift so much that they put their trust into action and go and get it? When you become a Christian, one of the things you need to learn right away is that your schedule is no longer your schedule, but that God has a different plan for your daily schedule, and what the plan is, is that you need to get up and go do something every morning.

Just like these people went and got the manna. You've got to actively trust him by getting up and going out and gathering the sweetness and the substance that he provides.

[28:30] You're to express your faith by expending effort to go out and get for yourself this delicious, nutritious bread from heaven.

Jesus teaches us in the Sermon on the Mount. This is the way you should pray. Father, give me today my daily bread.

But then we don't just sit there passively, we put our trust in God's provision, and we go and we get it. If you read this whole story, some people lacked confidence in God that he would provide the next day, and so they tried to keep some of the manna more than they needed.

They tried to keep it overnight, and it just completely spoiled. And the reason is that God's trying to train us to live by faith and trusting him every day afresh.

It doesn't matter what you did yesterday, what about today? You've got to eat bread today. God is training us and challenging us to rearrange our daily lives and our daily schedules around his gracious provision so we don't die out here in the wilderness.

[29:47] And this is my concern. I'm concerned that some of us who profess faith in Christ may be experiencing unnecessary self-inflicted pain and misery and stress.

that some of us are experiencing self-inflicted exhaustion and malnutrition and emaciation because we're not going out by faith and gathering our daily spiritual bread and that heavenly substance that God wants to feed us in his word.

And if that's you, we love you so much. We're doing a class today called How to Read the New Testament. And we encourage you, if you can't come today, come next week. Can't come next week? Come the following week. We want to teach you how to go get your bread so you can feed yourself and not die in the wilderness.

Okay. He's the Lord who trains us. He's the God who provides for us. And I want to say a last word here on the God who refreshes us. He's the God who refreshes us.

Look at verse 5. It says that on the sixth day they are to go and prepare what they bring in and that is to be twice as much as they gather on the other days.

[31:00] And then down in verse 29 it says, bear in mind that the Lord has given you the Sabbath and that is why on the sixth day he gives you bread for two days. Everyone is to stay where they are on the seventh day. No one is to go out so the people rested on the Sabbath day.

What does it say to us about this God that one of the main things he wants for his people who've been wearied and exhausted by 80 plus years of slavery.

Never had a day off, seven days a week. They're just in the daily grind generation to generation to generation. What does it say that this God is providing for their rest?

He's providing for his people's physical refreshment and their spiritual renewal. It tells us that though Pharaoh was an oppressive tyrant, this God, this Lord is a liberating father who wants his children to experience refreshment by stopping every seven days to just worship him and enjoy him, to rest in his grace.

But as you can see, this is sometimes hard for God's people to trust because it says in verse 27, nevertheless, some of the people went out on the seventh day to gather the manna, but they found none.

[32:23] God's asking his freed people to do for their refreshment something that feels counterintuitive to them. He's not only wanting them to gather the manna every morning and not take more than they need because it's going to spoil overnight, but he's also every six day wanting to ask them to discipline themselves to trust in him that what he provides will be enough.

And that they can have a Sabbath and that it's not going to spoil overnight as it might on all the others. And this is just a really strange thing.

It's unfamiliar to them. Why would God ask them to do something that's counterintuitive to them?

Because God is training them to do things that are not normal to their cultural sensibilities.

He's testing to see if his people will obey not only those commands that make perfect sense to them, but also especially the ones that do not.

If I give you a double amount once a week, will you just take me at my word that it will be enough for you? And just rest and worship me.

[33:44] And see, clearly the Sabbath didn't make sense to people. Verse 27, Nevertheless, some of the people went out on the seventh day. They gathered the manna, but they found none. And then the Lord said to Moses, how long will you people refuse to keep my commands and my instructions?

Some people just couldn't resist trying to get ahead. They couldn't resist trying to advantage themselves. But of course they go and they find no manna. And in trying to find the manna, they also don't stop to rest and worship.

So they get no refreshment. God is not going to bless his people when they try to do things their way rather than God's way.

And the reason I'm pointing this out is because we're going to jump into the Ten Commandments next week. And the question is, if there's an attitude or there's an action that seems intuitively right to us, it seems culturally reasonable, it seems like this is a no brainer, this is pleasurable, this is not so bad to us, but God happens to disagree with us about that thing that seems so normal and natural, what do we do?

And the Ten Commandments is going to address all kind of like practical things like money and sex. And what we're going to see is that pagan societies, they've basically always been stingy with their money and promiscuous with their bodies.

[35:14] Every pagan society says, this is the way to be free. This is the way to be refreshed. This is the way to be human. And so, pagan societies, you see that, you know, they would basically give nobody their money and practically everybody their body.

But then God's people come along and we can see historically and biblically like they give practically nobody their body and almost everybody their money. It's the exact opposite of what our culture says and what our intuition says. And what happens as a result? Well, the same thing that happened when they kept the Sabbath holy. When they did it God's way, they got refreshed. And when they did it their way, they got exhausted. When they did it God's way, they were blessed. And when they did it their way, they were cursed. When they stopped to worship their liberating God, when they stopped to worship the God who was providing for them, they were refreshed. [36 : 20] They were blessed. And the question for us as we continue on this journey is, will God's people pattern our lives on God's counterintuitive, countercultural ways? It says, so the people rested on the seventh day. And as they rested, they remembered, oh yeah, this is the God who graciously led us out of slavery. Oh yeah. This is the God who generously rained down bread from heaven. Oh yeah. This is the God who knows what it means to be human. This is the God that can show us how to be free. Oh yeah. This is the God that can give us life. He can give us refreshment. He can give us a blessing that we cannot get for ourselves. That's what happened when they stopped and they worshiped and they rested and they fixed their heart on God. In the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.