

Trust God, He Provides

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[0 : 00] Well, do keep your Bibles open to Exodus chapter 15, because that's where we'll be looking at today. Actually, chapter 16, but it's probably on the same page.

Now, when I came to Australia about 30 years ago, I learned a new word, whinge, and started to perfect the art of whinging.

Of course, us Aussies share this skill with our British cousins, whom we call whinging poms. Now, if you still don't know what I'm talking about, then to whinge on the next slide is to complain or grumble.

So here's a question for you to think about, and I'm going to ask you to send some of your answers over Alvanto. This is a first up for five o'clock, see whether it works.

Yes, I've got my phone here, so I should be able to get the answer over the phone. And the question is, what do you think Aussies love to whinge about? What do you think Aussies love to whinge about?

[1 : 04] So there's a bit of a lag between me and you, so I'll give you 20 seconds to send in your answers. Okay, got some answers coming, quite a lot actually.

Work, the government, the government again, ScoMo, bad coffee. Okay, oh wow, there's too many for me to go through them all. Let me give you some of mine that I've made it to my list.

You probably think it's a bit benign given what I've read on Alvanto, but I think Aussies love whinging about the weather, and maybe that's just Melburnians.

Public transport, traffic, parking at Westfield, maybe not anymore with COVID-19. Here's one I think that has shot up the list.

Internet connection and download speeds. So government, yep, I've got one. Politicians. So we whinged when they acted too slowly on COVID-19.

[2 : 09] And then now we whinge because they're too heavy-handed when they did. And I think the last one probably tops it all. It's whinging about the boss, which I think made the first entry on Alvanto.

Well, humans love to whinge, don't they? So much so some have made it into a pastime, haven't they? Well, surprise, surprise, as we continue our series here in Exodus, we find that it's an age-old habit.

Because right at the start of Israel's journey to Canaan, we find three whinging episodes or incidents. Exodus' equivalent of the Aussie whinger is the Israelite grumbler.

But let me start with a broad overview of this section. Last year at the start of Exodus, we saw God rescue Israel from slavery. They saw His mighty hand freeing them from Egypt, the ten plagues, the parting of the Red Sea.

All this happened no more than two months before this very point in the chapter. And yet immediately we find three whinging episodes. So on the slide, first in chapter 15, verses 22 to 27, they grumbled about not having water.

[3 : 27] Then in Exodus 16, they whinged about food. And then finally in chapter 17, not having water again. Each follows a similar pattern and make the same point.

Because of time, we're just going to focus on the second incident today, the longer one in chapter 16. Andrew, as he preaches next week, may cover the third one as well.

So let's turn then to chapter 16 and verse 1. Here is when God has just brought them to an oasis at Elim, which we heard read before, where there were 12 springs and 70 palm trees.

Now though, in verse 1, on the slide, the whole Israelite community set out from Elim and came to the desert of Sin, which is between Elim and Sinai. On the 15th day of the second month, after they had come out of Egypt, in the desert, the whole community grumbled against Moses and Aaron.

Then 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.

[4 : 39] 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. So Moses and Aaron said to all the Israelites, In the evening you will know that it was the Lord who brought you out of Egypt.

And in the morning you will see the glory of the Lord, because He has heard your grumbling against Him. Who are we that you should grumble against us? Moses also said, You will know that it was the Lord when He gives you meat to eat in the evening, and all the bread you won in the morning, because He has heard your grumbling against Him.

Who are we? You are not grumbling against us, but against the Lord. While Aaron was speaking to the whole Israelite community, they looked toward the desert, and there was the glory of the Lord appearing in the cloud.

The Lord said to Moses, I have heard the grumbling of the Israelites. Tell them, At twilight you will eat meat, and in the morning you will be filled with bread. Then you will know that I am the Lord your God.

[5 : 51] Now you probably weren't counting, but go back over again and see how many times the words grumble or grumbling were used. Include the one time in chapter 15, verse 24-2.

Again, I'm going to give you 15 seconds. There will be a countdown clock. And then when you get the answer, it will pop up. So the answer is, wait for it.

Yep. Eight. Eight octopus legs. Hope you got that one. That's quite a few times, isn't it? So much so that I think when we read it, the word sort of sticks out at us, doesn't it?

Sticks in our head. And it's not very rational, is it? They'd rather die in the desert because there was, die in Egypt because at least there was food there. Never mind all that torture and slavery.

No. At least they could eat. But Moses reminds them in verse 6 that the God who brought them out is still with them. This reference to day and night, I think, is a reference to the pillar of fire at night and the cloud by day.

[7 : 03] What's more, in verse 8, he warns them, be careful because their grumbling was not against Aaron and Moses, but the Lord himself who rescued them.

Of course, God was doing all this for a purpose, and it was to test his people. That's the main point tonight. God tests his people to build trust in him.

Let me repeat that. God tests his people to build trust in him. And under this main point, I want to say three things. First, this test is to teach them to heed his word.

So, on the slide next, a test in heeding his word. Back in verse 4, the Lord tells Moses, I will test them, God says, and see whether they will follow my instructions.

Similarly, in episode 1, back in chapter 15 and verse 25, on the next slide, the Lord had said this, there the Lord issued a ruling and instruction for them and put them to the test.

[8 : 08] He said, if you listen carefully to the Lord your God and do what is right in his eyes, if you pay attention to his commands and keep all his decrees, I will not bring on you any of the diseases I brought the Egyptians.

And so, in both cases, the test is clearly this. Will they follow his instruction? Will they heed his word? And essentially, that's our focus too as Christians.

God leads us by his word, which is revealed in the Bible. And for us, the question is, will we follow and obey? Often, just like here, God's word comes with promises.

That is, we're asked to obey first, and then the benefit will come after. And so, as we now see, God does that, but he's also gracious.

Because the second thing to note is that these instructions are accompanied with ample proof of God's provision. That's the next point. You see, in each of these three incidents, they grumbled, but God provided without punishing them.

[9 : 19] Here in verse 4 again, God said, I will rain down bread from heaven. And now, if we continue with verse 13, there is more. Now, that evening, quail came and covered the camp.

And in the morning, there was a layer of dew around the camp. When the dew was gone, this thin flakes like frost on the ground appeared on the desert floor. When the Israelites saw it, they said to each other, what is it?

For they did not know what it was. Moses said to them, it is the bread the Lord has given you to eat. They had meat and bread. And so abundant was it that it covered the camp.

There was no rationing, no fighting for scraps. A bit like when you toss that chip to a flock of pigeons in the city square and they scramble for it. Nothing of that sort. And what's more, God spaced it out, didn't He?

There was quail for dinner and bread for breakfast. No need to hunt or grow it. It was delivery. Uber eats. It's clear, isn't it?

[10:24] God will provide. They need to simply follow His instructions. And again, as Christians, it's the same with us. God has already provided for all we need in Christ.

Jesus Himself said in John 6, verse 51, which I've got on the next slide, I am the living bread that came down from heaven. He is the spiritual manna, He says.

He's referring to this very passage. Every spiritual blessing in heaven, Paul says, is ours in Christ. But we're to respond in obedience.

It's a small ask compared to what God has already done, but we are asked to put our faith in God. So here's the third thing. On the next slide, God's aim with these instructions is to build faith in Him. And we see here, as we look into the passage further, just how simple and yet wise these instructions are. So look again in verse 16. Moses continues, Everyone is to gather as much as they need.

[11:34] Take an omer for each person you have in your tent. The Israelites did as they were told. Some gathered much, some little. And yet, the amazing result is that everyone ended up with just what they needed.

Reading on, And when they measured it by the omer, the one who gathered much did not have too much, and the one who gathered little did not have too little. Everyone had gathered just as much as they needed.

So the first instruction that they are given is to just take what they need. Don't take more, don't take less. Take what they need. But then the next instruction comes in verse 19.

No one is to keep any of it until morning. That is, even if you've gathered what you need, and then at the end of it you decided you didn't need that much anyway, you didn't end up using everything, then don't save the rest for the morning.

Why? Because God will provide again tomorrow. There will be fresh manna. No need to stockpile, like toilet paper or pasta.

[12:45] Now, what happens? Verse 20, Some of them paid no attention to Moses. They kept part of it until morning. But it was full of maggots and began to smell.

So Moses was angry with them. It was a simple test of their faith in God. Trust Him to provide for tomorrow just as He's done today. But some didn't believe.

And of course, the manna goes bad. But then, notice this third instruction. It is that on the sixth day they were to gather twice as much.

Verse 21, Each morning everyone gathered as much as they needed, and when the sun grew hot it melted away. On the sixth day they gathered twice as much, two omers for each person.

And the leaders of the community came and reported this to Moses. He said to them, This is what the Lord commanded. Tomorrow is to be a day of Sabbath rest, a holy Sabbath to the Lord.

[13:43] So bake what you want to bake and boil what you want to boil. Save whatever is left and keep it until morning. So they saved it until morning as Moses commanded. And it did not stink or get maggots in it.

Eat it today, Moses said, because today is a Sabbath to the Lord. You will not find any of it on the ground today. Six days you are to gather it, but on the seventh day, the Sabbath, there will not be any.

Again, this is yet another lesson that God will provide. Yes, they had to physically gather food each day, but ultimately what they had to learn is that it's God and not their physical act of gathering that sustains them.

Because once a week, they don't have to gather and yet, there will still be food to eat, which will not rot. Again, it's a test of faith.

Having seen the manna rot for the previous five days, if kept overnight, will they still trust God and obey, collect double, and then provide for themselves for the day of rest.

[14:53] The Sabbath, the law of the Sabbath hasn't been given just yet, but this is not just about taking one day off a week, is it? But rather, the lesson is to know how to rest in dependence on God.

That one day a week, which God is about to institute for them, is to teach them this dependence on God. That resting is to learn dependence.

Well again, sadly, some failed to obey. Verse 27. 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. They had a weekly social isolation, if you like to think of it that way.

[15:52] So the people rested on the seventh day. Now they may not understand why or how, but God simply asked them to obey anyway.

And again, that's similar to us as Christians. Having had ample proof of His provision in Jesus, you know, our sins are forgiven, we have the gift of eternal life, God's aim now is to build faith in us. Each time, we're given small steps of faith to take. Will we trust Him? Will we obey Him and place our lives wholly in His hands?

And not to seek to use even the things that He's given us, like the manna, as means of security by hoarding it. Now we may wonder sometimes, why does God put us through all this?

Surely He can fulfill all those promises now. Give us all those blessings now. Why make us go through all this testing of our faith? I don't know whether you realize that Israel, after they've crossed the Red Sea, the shortest route to Canaan would have been for them to head northeast.

[17:04] So on the next slide, the map there, that's the red arrow after crossing the Red Sea. But instead, we find that God took them southeast, away from the promised land to places like Mara, Elim, and Rephidim, which is on the map.

And God chose to do it like this because He needed to build their faith in Him. It was a process that took time. And so therefore, He didn't take them straight into the promised land of Canaan.

And so like the Israelites, we may wish for all the blessings now as well. In one sense, we already have them. As Paul has said, we've got all our spiritual blessings in Christ. But in another sense, God is withholding some of these promises from full fulfillment now in order to build our faith.

And that's because the most precious blessing that God can give to us is our faith. That is the very thing that defines our relationship with God.

The most intimate relationship you can have with God is one built on trust, total faith in Him.

Trusting Him as your Lord and your Savior and allowing Him to be God.

[18:27] Jesus modeled that relationship with the Father when He walked on this earth. And so if you read 1 Peter 1 and verse 6, this is what it says, that even though we may suffer for a while, as in our promises are not fulfilled immediately, and we face hardship, we rejoice so that the proven genuineness of your faith of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire, may result in praise, glory, and honor.

Likewise, in the reading from James by Natalia tonight, it says, consider it pure joy whenever you face trials of many kinds because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything. So friends, the question I have for you tonight is, do you desire this blessing of faith in your life, a growing faith in God?

Do you long and crave for it with all your heart? If you do, then we need to allow God to grow that faith by testing it.

For this is the most precious thing we can have, one where our whole life is dependent on Him, where we trust Him totally for all that we need in life.

[19:55] And as we do that, our relationship with Him grows and grows and we know how real He is to us. That's what God wants of us, for us.

But will we allow Him to grow that faith through testing? Now, there are many examples I can give of what life looks like when we put our trust in Him, but let me just flesh it out by way of application

with two or three areas.

So first, I think trusting God has the power to melt your anxieties in life. You see, when you realize that God has cared for you up to now, and therefore you can entrust your future to Him, whatever the uncertainty, whatever the unknown that's causing your anxiety, then that grows your faith, doesn't it?

And that takes away all the fears in your life. God knows what they are, and He's able to provide for them. A second example, when your faith in God grows, I think so will your generosity.

You become a generous person, and gracious person. You realize there's no need to hoard, no need to find security in your worldly wealth. You can give sacrificially, because if God has provided to date, then He will keep providing.

[21 : 13] you don't need whatever you have right now as security. And then third, as your faith in God grows, I think it will transform your view of work.

Yes, just like the Israelites, we'll still need to go out and gather and work. God still wants that of us. But then we realize that ultimately our needs and our fulfillment are not met by how hard we work. but actually by God's provision. We are no longer enslaved to our work. We learn how to deal with the stress of it. We work diligently, and yet it doesn't own us.

We are able to rest, because it's ultimately God and not our work that provides for us. And I have to say that applies for us doing ministry as well, paid or unpaid.

God's church does not depend on us. But on Him, it doesn't fall apart if we are not there to do it. Of course, He graciously gives us work to do.

[22 : 23] And it's often very telling, isn't it? When we find that we can't stop working, somehow or other we are so driven that we can't rest, I think it actually belies a lack of faith in God.

God's faith in God. Now, I'm sure having said all this, that some of you might be feeling that you've fallen well short, that your faith is not where it should be.

Well, let's not be discouraged, because as I said earlier, this takes time, a lifetime actually. That's why God led Israel through the desert, because they need a time for their faith to grow.

So don't be discouraged, God is still working through you. So important was this test of faith, that actually God commanded Moses, as we see in verse 31, to create a memorial of this lesson, by setting aside an omer of manna, that's a daily portion, for future generations to learn this same lesson.

Because the point is that once they entered the land of Canaan, they wouldn't be receiving manna and quail anymore, and yet this lesson was so important that they would set aside this omer of manna, so that they could keep reminding themselves of what God had done for them in the desert, and what they still needed to do, that is, trust in the Lord, even though they were in the land.

[23 : 43] So don't be discouraged if your faith is not where it should be. God is still working through us. And the amazing thing is that even though we may grow tired of our own progress, God isn't.

God's patient with us. And by way of reminder, just look at the very end in verse 35 and 36, or 25. The Israelites ate manna for 40 years until they came to a land that was settled. They ate manna until they reached the border of Canaan.

Verse 34 and 35. Of course, we know as we read later on that it would have been much shorter than 40 years if the Israelites had learned to trust God. But you see, the point is that even when they failed to do so, and God made them wander the wilderness for 40 years until the generation died, what did they continue to do?

What did God continue to do? He still continued to provide for them, didn't He? Manna and quail, manna and quail, every day for 40 years, even as they grumbled, even as they rebelled, even as they stopped trusting God, until the very day, Moses said, they reached the land of Canaan.

[25 : 05] And so it is the same with us, isn't it? Each step of the day, whether we fail or we succeed each day, God gives us a chance each day simply to get up, to follow those simple instructions that God gives us in His Word, so as to keep building our faith.

God didn't give up on Israel, He kept providing for them, but He also kept building up their faith, so that they would know that He is a God that can be trusted to provide.

And that's the same with us. God tests us by asking us to obey His Word. He does it to build up our faith in Him, so that we will know that He can be trusted to provide for all we need.

He's already provided all we need in Christ, but now He wants us to live out this faith each step of the way. Let's pray. Father, help us to heed Your Word, to obey You as an expression of trust in

Your promises and Your goodness.

Help us to believe that what You ask of us is for our own good, that You are testing our faith so that we may learn to depend humbly on You for all our lives, not least, our salvation through Jesus.

[26 : 28] Teach us that You can be trusted to provide all we need in our lives. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.