

Bread of Heaven

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[0 : 00] May God bless these readings from his holy word as we see again the great truth of Jesus as the bread of heaven.

Four points to consider this morning from the two passages that we read. We see the grace of God revealed in his giving the people that bread that they certainly didn't deserve, but out of God's love, out of God's grace, God gave them all that they needed.

And then, as we'll see, secondly, the Lord's commands regarding the collecting of that bread, of that manna, and following on from that, how the people responded to the Lord's commands.

Did they do exactly as God commanded them to do? And then, finally, as we've been reading in John chapter 6, to look at the bigger picture, what the story of the manna in Exodus tells us about the Lord Jesus Christ.

When I was a schoolboy in Edinburgh in secondary school, my great sport and passion in life was rugby.

[1 : 06] I played the game, I watched the game, and every year I'd go to Murrayfield to watch Scotland play in the various games against the other home nations. And every year, every second year, sorry, Wales would come.

Wales would come, and they'd come with their tens of thousands of supporters. My first time I watched them was 1975, and if you know what that date is significant, that year, look it up.

Anyway, just before the game, the mass choir of the Welsh fans, they would break out, and it still happens to this day, of course, when crowds will come back. That mass choir broke out in song, and they sang that great hymn, and apologies, Megan, for my mispronunciation, at Cwmrondda.

And the chorus, with a deafening crescendo, I still remember it, and it's still there. Guide me, O thou great Jehovah, pilgrim through this barren land. I am weak, but thou art mighty.

Hold me with thy powerful hand. Bread of heaven, bread of heaven, feed me till I want no more.

And I think it's sad to say that the sentiments, the words of that hymn, I suppose, are lost in so many of the voices that sing it.

[2 : 25] It was the famous Welsh comedian Max Boyce that once said of that incident, immediately there were 10,000 Christians, singing the words of the guiding hand of God, singing the words of God providing for his people the bread of heaven, and yet not believing in the bread of heaven.

But for you who know the Lord Jesus, you who know that Jesus is the bread of life, the bread of heaven, you know that he sustains you, he nourishes you, he gives you life, life by his word, life by his power, as you know that, feeding on Christ each day.

Well, you know that he gives you all that you need. You know that he meets you in your physical needs, yes, and meets you in your spiritual needs. He does, let me say, hold you by that powerful hand and leads you to glory.

And it's that spiritual reality that Christians know in a daily walk with the Lord, a daily trusting in him, so that you trust him each day for your daily bread, not just in a physical sense, of course, but for all of life's sustenance, for the good of your life, the good of your soul, so that truly you do want no more, lacking nothing in the blessings that God gives you.

And it's that truth, that aspect of trusting in God for all your needs, you see that played out, as it were, in the life of the Israelites, as they left Egypt, as they're going towards the Promised Land.

[4 : 06] In that 40-year journey, they were to trust God. Trust God for each and every day. Trust him in every turn of events that would happen in the wilderness.

And trust him that God would provide for them each day. And of course, the immediate context of that is seeing the feeding of the people there in the wilderness by the matter.

But this whole aspect of faith, trust in God and obeying God, well, this is what we're seeing here in the passage. And when we look again at the Lord's daily provision of the manna for the people, of course, we have to look forward to what that points to.

It points to the greater provision of the Lord Jesus Christ. See, what the Israelites experienced there in the wilderness when they were being fed by the manna, the bread from heaven, that points to the greater nourishment, the greater strengthening of the Lord Jesus Christ, the true bread from heaven, as Jesus told the crowd there in John chapter 6.

We'll come back to that later. What about these events that we read of in Exodus? What do we see more clearly about God's provision for his people?

[5 : 29] Well, as we said, our first point then is really the grace of God, as we see there, certainly from verse 11 to 15. In fact, if you go back a bit in the chapter, go back to, I think it's at verse 4, God already promised the Israelites that he was going to, as he says, rain down bread from heaven.

The people had been grumbling, they'd been murmuring against Moses, the people were complaining that they didn't have food for the journey, and then they were looking back at a false ideal of what their life was like in Egypt.

But God in his grace, God in his grace has loved his people. He promised them food for the journey. He wasn't going to go back in his promise, because God doesn't go back in any of his promises. He is grace, he's love, he's truth. He's the Lord who provides, even though we deserve nothing of what God gives to us. And you see that grace of God in his love to his people, as we read there in verse 11, when God said that he'd heard the grumbling of the people of Israel say to them.

Now, what's God going to say, or through Moses, say to the people? Is God going to say, I've heard the grumbling of the people, and I'm not going to give them food. I've heard the grumbling of the people, I'm not going to forgive them for their lack of trust in me.

[6 : 55] Is that what God's going to say to them? No. God's going to show his grace to his undeserving people. Say to the people at twilight, you shall eat meat, and in the morning you shall be filled with bread.

Then you shall know that I am the Lord your God. And what God promised, he fulfilled. You see that in the provision that God made, and the quails at night, and the manna in the morning.

People didn't really have to wait long to see the grace of God in their presence. That very evening, these small birds, these quails, and they must have come in the tens, if not hundreds of thousands, miraculously provided by God to give the people food that evening.

Then the very next morning, that flaky substance, the manna, what is it? The manna, the bread from heaven. And in God's perfect timing, God's perfect way, God revealed his grace to his people. But they would lack nothing. In fact, people would never lack anything of God's grace. God was always with them. God would never leave them.

[8 : 15] Even when the people in their hearts left God so many times. But God is the Lord who's with his people. God's the Lord who forgives us our sins and blesses you abundantly.

And you know, when we think of the blessing of God on those who love him, when God continues to provide for even such as ourselves who are so undeserving, He provides wonderfully, abundantly, amazingly.

And he does it out of the storehouse of his grace. And it should never ever cease to amaze you at the amazing love of God when he gives and gives and gives again.

Yes, to you, to me who sin against him. But he washes you clean of your sins. And he restores you to himself. Even when you've wandered away from him. Even when you've denied him before others.

You see that again and again in the Old Testament. You see it in the New Testament. You see it through the history of mankind. God showing his love is forgiving love to undeserving sinners such as ourselves.

[9 : 27] Think of the example. Think of the gracious forgiveness of God when Jesus spoke to Peter. Disciple Peter. Remember Peter had denied Jesus three times.

But it wasn't simply forgiveness of Peter. But it was provision for him as well. Peter was given the work of feeding the flock. Feeding the Lord's people.

In other words, preaching to them, teaching them, giving them that nourishment, that food, that blessing of God's word. And Peter was going to be strengthened to be courageous for the Lord.

Peter was going to be given the power of the Holy Spirit. He was going to proclaim the word of truth. And for that he was going to be imprisoned. He was going to be persecuted for his faith.

The same Peter who at one time had denied his saviour three times. But Peter was going to be provided with that abundant grace in the Lord and what Peter had lacked.

[10:31] And yet we have to say, and I'm sad to say, when the Lord blesses his people with abundant grace, when God forgives you and forgives you again, when God provides you with so much, isn't that the case so often that we actually fail to recognise God's hand of mercy?

And we can so easily just take for granted what God gives you in his love. In fact, I think we see that in verse 15. I think we can interpret these words as the people really taking for granted what God gave them.

When the people of Israel saw it, saw the manna, they said to one another, what is it? For they did not know what it was. And Moses said to them, it is the bread that the Lord has given you to eat.

I mean, really at first, these are the children of Israel. They didn't recognise that this was the Lord's provision. I mean, Moses had to tell them, this is what God has given to you.

And then he says to them, take it. Take what you need. Gather it in small bowls. Gather it for everyone in the tents that the people were living in.

[11:39] And in fact, when Moses tells them these things, this is actually the Lord's commands. God giving the command through Moses to what the people are to do regarding the manna.

Look at the commands of God. And I think there's a number of things to take and to apply for ourselves. First of all, it was all the people.

All the people were to participate and gather the manna. Gather of it, each one of you, as much as he can eat. And isn't this a biblical principle here?

It's for all of the Lord's people to be involved in the Lord's work. Whether you're old, whether you're middle-aged, whether you're young, whether you're a young Christian or an older Christian, God has given each one of his people work to do for him.

It might well be by your word, by your witness, by your prayers. But God's given each one of you work, work to do. So don't hide your light.

[12:42] Shine for Jesus, all of you. So that's the first principle we see here, that the work that God gives to his church is for all to participate in.

But secondly, we see here another principle that God gives ample provision for us all. Gather of it, each one of you, as much as he can eat. You shall each take an omer according to the number of the persons that each of you has in his tent.

Not one of the, I mean, there must have been several million Israelites. Not one of that vast number was going to go hungry. Not one of these people was going to have insufficient food for the journey. God was going to supply all his people with exactly what they needed. And it's that biblical principle that we find again throughout Scripture that God gives to you according to your need, that God gives you out of his abundance all that you need.

In fact, remember what the apostle Paul said to the church in Ephesus. God's able to do far more abundantly than we can ask or think. So, God gives to each one of you exactly all that you need even in service for him.

[14:04] But then, there's a third principle here in the gathering of the manna. And that's contentment. Contentment with what God gives you. Verse 19, And Moses said to them, let no one leave any of it over till the morning.

God was giving them exactly what they needed for each day. Not too much. Not too little. As we said, they weren't going to go hungry. And they certainly weren't going to indulge in excess food. The people were going to be given what they needed and to be content with what God measured out to them each day. Again, this is a principle, a biblical principle, a God-given principle to apply in each and every one of our lives.

Remember what Jesus taught to various groups of people who asked him questions really about this matter. To tax collectors, Jesus, well, he told them, don't collect any more money than they were authorized to do so.

To soldiers, he told them, be content with your wages. And it's that practical holiness. That holiness, that living day to day in thankfulness to God with what gives to you exactly as God knows that you require.

[15 : 24] Well, that trust in God that speaks of contentment with what God has provided for you. Be content with what God has given you in his wisdom.

But then there's another principle here and that's obedience. Obedience to the Lord's commands. You see that in verse 23. This is what the Lord has commanded. Tomorrow is a day of solemn rest, a holy Sabbath to the Lord.

Bake what you will bake and boil what you will boil and all that is left over lay aside to be kept till the morning. And then verse 26. Six days you shall gather it, but on the seventh day, which is a Sabbath, there'll be none.

God had established a principle from creation, time of creation. That was going to be later put into the Ten Commandments.

And of course it was a principle that the people probably wouldn't have enjoyed in Egypt because they were living under cruel people who didn't observe the one day in seven. But God was giving them this provision, this one day in seven.

[16 : 34] And God was going to send them a double portion of the manna on the day before the one day in seven, the day before the Sabbath. And the people were going to be tested in their obedience.

Would they do as God commanded them to do and take a double portion on the Friday, as it were, before the Saturday, before the Sabbath?

Because there wasn't going to be any manna on that Sabbath. the people, if they went out, as we'll see what they do, they would find none. The people weren't going to lose out by keeping that one day of rest.

And it's that principle that remains today. We call it the Sabbath principle. No unnecessary work to be done in contravention of God's command.

God, in creation, God rested on the seventh day, a day of rest. And you won't lose out. You won't miss out. You won't be deprived of anything in keeping that command.

[17 : 42] But you will lose the benefit of the Lord's day when you treat it as any other day. And we'll see exactly that's what happened with the Israelites. And we see the response, the third thing to look at in the passage.

because God requires obedience from his people. I mean, you see the details that God gave the Israelites. He spelled out exactly what he asked them to do.

The people were only to take a daily supply of the manna. But then some people disregarded that particular command. And they found out that when they tried to get more, the food that they left over till the morning, the next day rather, that food became maggot infested.

They disobeyed the word of the Lord because they didn't trust him for their daily bread. And you know, it's the other command about the Sabbath.

Again, you see the same thing happening. People go out on the seventh day to gather food. They find none because they disobeyed God's command. Because they weren't trusting God for all their needs.

[18 : 52] You see, God doesn't give us his commands. He doesn't give us his word to hurt us. He doesn't give these commands to somehow, you know, make our lives somehow uncomfortable or pain.

But he does give his commands to teach us, to discipline us, to show us his wisdom. And yes, to show us that he does love us.

And God's going to test you by his word, to follow his word, to teach you, even in this particular principle, giving you your daily bread.

Because what gives you is sufficient for all that you need. As Jesus called us to pray, give us this day our daily bread. In other words, trust, trust in God each and every day of your life.

But remember, that's why we came, read in John 6, Jesus. Remember, God has given you what truly satisfies. He's given you that bread, that nourishment that truly, truly, truly satisfies.

[19 : 58] It's the Lord Jesus Christ. And that's what this provision of the manor points forward to when we see the bigger picture that we read there in John 6, 29 to 35.

Remember what we read. John's, Jesus rather, Jesus is talking to a group of people. These people that have become quite interested in his ministry, particularly because they saw the miracle of the feeding of the 5,000.

And the people wanted a sign. They wanted Jesus to show them a sign that he is whom he claimed to be, the Christ, the Messiah. And Jesus tells of the sign.

You see, the people had failed to see the significance of the manor in the desert, the manor that the forefathers had eaten. Because that bread, that bread, that manor wasn't the true bread from heaven.

The true, eternal bread, the true, eternal nourishment is Jesus. See, the manor, the manor from the wilderness pointed to the true bread that God sends and that God would send, not just for daily provision, but for an eternal provision to satisfy all your needs eternally.

[21 : 18] Of course, the provision is Jesus. Remember what Jesus said of himself, the true bread from heaven, that's himself, for the bread of God is he who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.

See, the Israelites were given that daily provision that kept them alive for these 40 years. but God has given you not just a daily provision but an eternal provision, not just for 40 years or forever how many years God gives you in this earth, but God gives you that provision eternally.

And so even now, look to Jesus, the bread of life, who feeds you, who nourishes you. Yes, he nourishes you for your earthly journey.

Of course he does. But even in that earthly journey preparing you for that eternal rest, the Lord Jesus and his provision for you that is eternal.

But if you haven't yet tasted the bread of life, if you haven't yet given your life to Jesus, look to him. Look to him who came down from heaven to earth.

[22 : 29] Look to him who came to give you life by giving his life for you. Look to him so that you might not and know that you won't ever, ever die eternally because Jesus is the bread of heaven, the bread of life who satisfies you completely.

Amen. Let us pray. Lord, we give you praise and thanks for the gift of the Son, the one who is the bread of life, the one who is that true bread from heaven.

Lord, forgive us for the many times when we have not fed in Christ. Forgive us, Lord, when we have taken even for granted that eternal provision. But feed us so that we will want no more, want no more because Jesus is our all in all.

Hear us, Lord, as we continue before you in continued worship, as we again come before you in praise. We pray these things, Lord, in Jesus' name.

Amen.