

The Lord who Provides

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[0 : 0 0] May God have his blessing to that reading from his holy word as we read there as we'll see this morning, God willing, and next Lord's Day morning as well, this great theme of the Lord who provides.

And yet within that theme we've seen already, we've seen the renewed grumbling of the people, the people grumbled at the waters of Mara, the people grumbling again when they travel further into the wilderness.

And God gives the people a renewed time of testing, testing their faith, testing them to see if indeed they will trust in the Lord who provides. And as God tests the people, not chastening them, God giving his loving chastising to teach them and show them that truly they are to keep and to maintain their trust in the Lord who provides.

If you remember, those of you who were in worship last Lord's Day morning, you had the privilege of worshipping the God who heals the Lord who heals.

That's how we were in the book of Genesis, in Exodus, Exodus 15, as we saw the Lord healing the people, not so much healing them physically, but healing them spiritually, showing them where the true heart of the matter lay in their lives.

[1 : 3 1] God had provided water for them at that place, that place, the place of the springs of Mara, the springs that at one time were bitter. But God making known to the people that their fundamental need wasn't first and foremost physical.

Yes, they needed water, but that wasn't their greatest need. Their greatest need was to be healed in their heart, so that they continue to trust in God, to trust in the one who heals.

And of course that is equally applicable to each one of us, that we come to the Lord God, come to him to find that true healing of heart, to know that what truly matters in your life and my life is that healing of our hearts, to be cleansed of our sin of lack of trust in God, and to know that he is the one who provides at all times that theme, as I say, we're going to look more closely at this week and, God willing, next week.

Because God has made himself known in various aspects of his character. And an associated aspect of God's character of the Lord who heals is the Lord who provides.

And of course, as we've already hinted at this morning, God already showed that aspect of his character in providing for the people, sweet water, safe water to drink from that once bitter oasis.

[3 : 0 2] God had tested the faith of the people there at Marah. He'd found their faith wanting. But God, in his grace, God forgave the people of their sins.

And he gave them water, the water they needed. And he gave them their time of rest there at the lush waters of Elam. And the people had time to recover their strength, to reflect on their following God.

But the Israelites couldn't remain at Elam. Just as none of us can remain in any kind of comfort zone when our faith isn't being tested. Because we're on a journey.

You're on a journey. We are on that journey towards the place, the eternal home of the Lord's people. As the Israelites were on that journey to the land of promise.

And so they had to continue. They had to move forwards. And fortified with the evidence again, God showing them again that he was with his people.

[4 : 09] That he was with them always. And God had shown them that he's the Lord who never forsakes his people. And so you would think that surely by this time, in that month, a little bit over a month, that they'd been on that journey, they'd know in their hearts that God's with them.

He's provided for them in every step of their journey. He's separated a great sea of water to enable them to cross over to the other side. He's stopped the Egyptian army from taking them back to Egypt.

He's given them water. He's given them rest. Surely the people would carry on with that vision of the Lord's presence with them. Surely they would have learned the lesson by now that God provides.

And in all circumstances, God's with his people. For this, as we've seen, even in the passage we read this morning, these same people whom God had shown his mercy towards, these same people very quickly forgot the faithfulness of God.

And in forgetting the faithfulness of God, they forgot to be faithful. And that tragedy of disobedience upon disobedience, that has been played out again and again by the Israelites.

[5 : 36] That tragedy of thanklessness, ungratefulness, selfishness, faithlessness, impatience in God's ways with his people.

They'd been given so many privileges by God, and yet they'd abused these privileges in denying God, the God who provides. And it's a tragedy we're going to see played out again this morning as we see again the people grumbling against God, people impatient with God, people unfaithful towards the faithful God.

Unless you, as we look at this conduct, the conduct of the people of Israel, then of course, we're going to apply it to ourselves and be warned against your conduct.

And you can be, and I can be, so easy to grumble, to complain even against God and when we're tempted and even not tempted when it happens, when we live not by faith, but by our own human-centered thinking.

Especially these times when you think that God isn't meeting your immediate needs. when instead we should be living by faith and praising the God who provides and provides graciously.

[6 : 57] Even when we do come before him with grumbling in our hearts. Because as the people of Israel showed before God, they had that renewed grumbling. Characterized even that, as we see that first month of their journey in the desert.

Because it's a whole month since the people have left Egypt. They've spent a fair bit of time resting at that place of Elam, that water, that oasis.

They've had to replenish their animals with water. They can't obviously move forward unless the animals have been provided for, unless the people have been provided for.

They've moved on. There's obviously no bread for them. The people have used up the bread that they baked in Egypt. And then, as they move on, again, they think, they perceive that there's a lack of provision for them.

And they turn on their leaders. They turn on Moses. They turn on Aaron. But of course, ultimately, it's against God that their complaint's been made. And in many ways, it's the most serious complaint up to date to that point.

[8 : 10] basically saying, and you can see that from verse 3, they're saying, why were we ever saved by God in the first place? Would that we had died by the hand of the Lord in the land of Egypt when we sat by the meat pots and ate bread to the full, for you brought us out into the wilderness to kill this whole assembly with hunger.

Just take in what the Israelites are saying at that point. They're actually saying that they wish that the plagues that had so been inflicted in Egypt and even the 10th plague, they're actually saying we wish that we'd been afflicted by these plagues so they wouldn't be taken to the wilderness to die of hunger.

They're basically saying, you know, what's the point of being saved? What's the point of us being where we are at this moment, starving to death in this wilderness? They're saying we would have been better off in Egypt there.

We had all the food that we wanted. But, you know, analyze that. This is exaggeration. In fact, not more than exaggeration, this is lies. This is untruth.

This is a lack of faith or even using the name of God in a wrong way. Put it all together and we're seeing rebellion against God. God had never forgotten his people.

[9 : 32] God saved them and continued to save them. He'd rescued them from slavery in Egypt. Yet the people offered no thanks in return. They offered no continuing maintaining faith in the Lord who provides.

And they were ungrateful. They even say blasphemous, using the name of the Lord in vain, wishing in fact that God had never saved them in the first place.

They had no respect for God in his way with them. They were utterly disrespectful against God for his having saved them and continuing to save them.

I mean, they said, you know, we sat around pots. I mean, no, they didn't. They never sat with that abundance of food. They were deluding themselves. They were idealizing a former existence that actually never happened.

But let's be warned. Let's be warned. Be very careful you don't fall into that same trap that the Israelites fell into, especially when your faith's been tested.

[10 : 45] Maybe at times when your Christian life is very difficult. Maybe at times when God appears, appears to be distant, and when his providence is frowning upon you.

And instead of maintaining a trust in God, you seek a false comfort. You go back, as it were, to a place of delusion, self-delusion, a sort of idealizing the past.

You know, casting your mind back to a time before you were converted. And you're looking through rose-tinted specks, as it were. And you're seeing an illusion of life that you thought was so easy and trouble-free.

That's an illusion. In fact, that's a delusion. That's an idealizing a past that never existed. No, even in these times of difficulty and hardship, yes, when God is testing your faith, even when these days are difficult, continue to trust in God.

I think one of the great passages of trust in God, even when the believer is going through particular times of testing and difficulty, is found in the Old Testament, the book of Habakkuk.

[11 : 59] Listen again to the words that Habakkuk said in his time of difficulty. Though the fig tree should not blossom, nor fruit be on the vines, the produce of the olive fail, and the fields yield no food, the flock be cut off from the fold, and there be no herd in the stalls, yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will take joy in the God of my salvation.

Great words. Talk to them when you go home and just read that passage in Habakkuk of faith, even in these times of great need, the Lord's people are, yes, at times struggling in faith, continue to trust in God, even as it were when the fields yield no fruit.

Continue to rejoice in the Lord. But as we see in the passage here, the Israelites certainly weren't rejoicing in the Lord. They were grumbling. Again and again they were grumbling against God and grumbling against the leaders whom God had given them.

They weren't looking back at God's having delivered them again and again. They weren't coming before God in faith, trusting that the same God who delivered them from slavery in Egypt, the same God who had given them water to drink, the same God who would give them food to replace their hunger.

They didn't look to God as the one who provides. They weren't crying out to God for mercy. But they were using their own judgment.

[13 : 41] They were blaming their leaders. And in fact they were blaming God. But God is merciful. God in his love, God in his grace, God forgives.

Even our complaining, our moaning, our grumbling, as he forgave the people there in the desert. And remember that truth.

That God is forgiving your sins, even your sins of grumbling against him. At the same time he provides you with the means to move forward in faith. Because God will continue to show you his mercy, even when you're complaining against him.

That God shows you his grace, even when you don't deserve that grace. But give him the praise and thanks that he gives out of the bounty of his grace and mercy, even when we are grumbling against God.

Because that grace towards sinners, that grace is what we might say is awesome. That love of God for undeserving sinners when we've rebelled against God.

[14 : 50] Because in rebelling against God, we're rebelling against the one who provides and continues to provide. And God gives you what you don't deserve.

God gives you his abiding and eternal love. And the Israelites would see just how much God is, a God of love, a God of mercy, a God of grace.

They'd see just how gracious God is. And God provided for them in the desert. But before we look at that provision, God willing, next week, we'll see that that provision began with a promise.

You see in verse 4, Behold, I'm about to rain bread from heaven for you. For you. Because God is faithful towards his people.

He says, I'm going to rain down bread from heaven for you. In other words, heaven supplies earth's needs. The abundance of heaven's riches are going to be rained down.

[15 : 52] And the people are going to be amply provided, satisfied in God's gracious provision. As we want to emphasize this, that heavenly supply from God is for you.

You know, surely that's a timely reminder to each one of us. You know, when we're tempted to forget God's love towards you, that love God is directed to you.

Because what he has done for you is grace towards you. Just reflect in that, dwell in that and give praise to God for that truth. There is mercy, what God keeps from you, what you deserve.

That mercy's for you. That grace, that grace, what God gives you that you don't deserve, that grace is for you. And never, ever forget that that God gives to you, for you, for your good, for God's glory.

The more that we dwell in that truth of the Lord who provides for you, it would stop your grumbling. And if only we would continue to trust in the Lord who provides and give him praise and thanks when we see that evidence of his mercy and grace.

[17 : 11] But remember too, yes, the Lord provides, but there'll be times when the Lord provides a time of testing to strengthen your faith in him. As we see there in the passage, that renewed time of testing, the Lord said to Moses, this is verse 4 and 5, Behold, I'm about to rain bread from heaven for you, and the people shall go out and gather a day's portion every day that I may test them, that I may test them, whether they will walk in my law or not.

And then God goes on to say on the sixth day when they prepare what they bring in, it will be twice as much as they gather daily. So God's promising to provide food for the people, but he's accompanying that promise with a word of testing.

There's going to be a time of testing. God's testing his people, he's going to give them this opportunity to actually show that they do still obey him, that they are a committed people, people, and that their times of lack of faith were really just not who they truly are.

So God's going to provide food for the people, but the people have to do exactly as God requires of them. They're going to have to do what God says to them every day apart from the seventh day.

On six days, they're going to gather food, and of course, the sixth day, God tells them to gather twice as much, because there's going to be no food for them, provided for them on the seventh day, the Sabbath day, to follow the example of God when God rested the seventh day after he created the heavens and the earth.

[18 : 53] So God's going to provide for the people, he's providing, yes, for their physical needs, but he's also providing for their spiritual well-being. He's going to feed their bodies, he's going to feed their souls, he's going to test them, he's going to test their faith.

And to test them, to believe that truly the Lord is the one who provides. And as we read there, in fact, if we were to read further in verses 11 and 12, they were to gather, as we said, each day.

They'll do that at twilight, they'll be able to eat the food that they gathered, eat the food the next morning. They're going to have neither too much nor too little.

They're going to have sufficient for their needs because God is the Lord who provides. They're going to be tested each day when they gather that food.

It's what Jesus taught in the Sermon on the Mount. When Jesus taught us to pray, give us this day our daily bread. And God tests you even in that prayer.

[20 : 00] Can you truly say, by faith, give us each day our daily bread. God is the Lord who provides each and every one of his people exactly what you need.

And again, this is a test of faith. And again, I ask you, can you say, or can you echo the words of the author of Proverbs 30 when he said, when he prayed to God, give me neither poverty nor riches.

Feed me with the food that is needful for me, lest I be full and deny you and say, who is the Lord, or lest I be poor and steal and profane the name of my God.

Give me neither poverty nor riches. Feed me with the food. Feed me with all that is needful for me, necessary for me. Well, back to the Israelites here. God's testing them.

He's testing their faith. He's testing their contentment in God. Just as God tests your contentment, you're being content in God's daily provision for you.

[21 : 03] God's God was testing the people's obedience to him. God had rested in the seventh day of creation. God's people were to follow his example and not do any unnecessary work on that seventh day.

That's what God still demands of us in respect to his law, that we don't do any unnecessary work on our Christian Sabbath. But for the Israelites on that first Sabbath day, as it were, when there would be no food from heaven, that was going to be a test of their faith.

Now, God willing, next Lord's Day we'll see, in fact, that the people truly did keep to God's Word and not collect the bread, the manna, on the seventh day.

We'll eat that until next week. But for the moment, well, the lessons surely are clear, because God will, and God will test your faith. He will test your faith at particular times in your life to show you, to enable you the more to trust in the Lord who provides.

Well, trust him. Trust the one he does provide. He's not going to forsake any, anyone who's his. He will provide. But in providing and in testing, we're going to be times when he disciplines, disciplines you for your good, especially when you stumble, when I stumble, we show that lack of trust in God.

[22 : 39] Well, we see that in verses 6 to 10. Especially as Moses says to the people, verse 8 for example, your grumbling is not against us, but against the Lord.

And Moses says to Aaron, remember Aaron's his spokesman, say to the whole congregation of the people of Israel, come near before the Lord, for he's heard your grumbling. He's heard your grumbling.

You know, if you didn't read all these verses again, 6 to 10, but the number of times you see the word grumble in these verses, in fact, six times in just a few short verses, this word that means complaining against God, being dissatisfied with God's way with his people.

And Moses and Aaron, they're speaking to the people about their grumbling, because that grumbling's not so much against Moses and Aaron, but it's against God. And the Israelites are being told that they've sinned against God and they're grumbling against God.

You see, the people were in fact complaining against God, against God who brought them out of Egypt, and now they've been told, well, you've sinned against heaven and against earth.

[23 : 57] And God in his righteous discipline, God speaking to his people through his spokesman, and he's doing it for their good by his chastening. He's doing it in loving kindness.

People didn't deserve God's forgiveness. They didn't deserve to see the glory of God in that cloud, the cloud that was leading them through the wilderness. But this is our God.

This is the one true God, the God whom we worship, even worshiping this morning. This is God who shows again and again, shows his mercy towards his wayward people. So let none of us despise God's discipline.

Don't despise these times when he chastens you, because God disciplines you for your good. You know, when you wander down paths that you shouldn't be on, and you backslide in sin, when you lose trust in God, when you're depending on self rather than trusting in God who provides, God will discipline you for your good.

So don't despise that discipline. Don't chase things from a holy, loving God. Because God is. God the Father loves you.

[25 : 14] And as a father chastens a child in love, God the Father will chasten you and chasten me to keep you, to guard you, in that way you walk with the Lord.

So thank God. Give thanks to God when he asks you to trust in him always, when he asks you to trust in him, the Lord who provides. Praise him for all that he gives you to feed your body, your mind, your soul.

You lack nothing of God's provision for you. So trust him today, trust him always. Even when the times are lean. Yes, and even when the times are plenty.

Be as the Apostle Paul and his contentment in Christ. Remember what Paul said in Philippians 4.11, I've learned in whatever situation I am to be content. And then he adds these words, these words of great encouragement I'm going to leave with you this morning.

In verse 19 of Philippians 4, my God will supply every need of yours according to his riches and glory in Christ Jesus.

[26 : 29] My God will supply every need of yours according to his riches and glory in Christ Jesus. Amen. Let us pray.

Lord, you promise to give and you fulfill that promise. You give and you give and you give again out of your love, out of your grace, out of your mercy.

Lord, teach us to follow you, to know you as the Lord who provides. May we go forward in faith, trusting in you at all times, giving thanks for your goodness to us.

Hear us, Lord, as we continue in praise before you now. We pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

[27 : 35] Amen. Amen. voters. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen.