

Exodus 16
Psalm 23
John 6

“Bread from Heaven”

April 9, 2017

I want you to notice something.

God doesn't explain everything in advance.

When Israel left Egypt,

I suspect that at least *some* of the people asked Moses,

“What are we going to eat? Where are we going to find water?”

The wilderness is a big, empty place.

In other words, God does with Israel what he did to their father, Abraham.

Go to the land that I will show you.

Just do it.

No, I'm not going to tell you where – or when.

Just go.

Trust me.

Seriously?

Who among you would have left Egypt to follow a God like that?

Let's go march out into a dry, parched wilderness – in April – as summer is beginning,
and let's take our wives, our children, our flocks.

All of you would be asking:

“What are we going to eat? Where are we going to find water?”

You don't need to know.

You need to trust me.

What is God doing here?

God is teaching his people.

He is teaching *you*

to learn how to listen to his voice –

to trust in the LORD with all your heart

and lean not on your own understanding.

Because if you rely on yourself and your own understanding,

you will *not* follow that lunatic, Moses, out into the desert!

Our Psalm of response, Psalm 23, was written by a man who had learned this!

Yea, though I walk in the valley of the shadow of death,

I will fear no evil, for *you* are with me.

Sing Psalm 23
Read John 6:22-71

I want you to notice something.

Jesus is an awful lot like the God of Exodus.

Does Jesus explain everything neatly and clearly?

Well, sort of... in one sense...

“This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent.”

That’s as clear as the LORD’s command for Israel to leave Egypt
and go out into the wilderness!

And when the Jews start grumbling, Jesus responds with the same provision as in Exodus:
Bread from heaven.

And Jesus responds by speaking of how God is drawing people to himself –

“No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him.”

Because Jesus himself is the living bread that came down from heaven
and gives life to the world.

‘Unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man, and drink his blood,
you have no life in you.’

What?!

That causes some of his disciples to grumble – and some turn away,

Jesus turns to the Twelve and asks, “Do you want to go away as well?”

Do you want to go back to Egypt?

But Peter answered,

“Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life,
and we have believed,
and have come to know that you are the Holy One of God.”

In other words, “We have no idea what you just meant

by saying that your flesh is real food, and your blood is real drink –
honestly, it sounds kind of bizarre and creepy –

but we are *not* going back to Egypt,
because we *know* that you are the Holy One of God,
and listening to you, and being near you, is our only hope.”

Jesus does not expect you to understand everything up front.

Indeed, the only way that you will come to understand
is if you hear him – believe him – and follow him!

And the problem is that in every generation
we have preferred to understand *before* we believe and obey,
and therefore we never really get around to believing and obeying.

1. Grumbling in the Wilderness (16:1-8)

Whose voice do you listen to?

Whose words do you obey?

God is calling you to hear him.

As we listen to the grumbling in the wilderness,
there are three voices that are prominent:
the voice of the people,
the voice of the LORD,
and the voice of Moses and Aaron.

And notice the pattern:

in v2, the people *grumbled* against Moses and Aaron,
in v7, Moses and Aaron point out that God has heard their grumbling against the LORD,
because their grumbling is not against us, but against the LORD.

a. “The People of Israel Said” – Grumbling against Moses and Aaron (v1-3)

They set out from Elim, and all the congregation of the people of Israel came to the wilderness of Sin, which is between Elim and Sinai, on the fifteenth day of the second month after they had departed from the land of Egypt. ² And the whole congregation of the people of Israel grumbled against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness, ³ and the people of Israel said to them, “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 have brought us out into this wilderness to kill this whole assembly with hunger.”

There is a distinction in scripture between *grumbling* and *complaining*.

Complaining is when you bring your objection to the proper person in the proper way.

With a complaint, you are bringing a challenge against an action
to the right people with the goal of producing the *right* action.

With grumbling you are not interested in right action –
you are just whining, murmuring, gossiping.

And you see this in our text in verse 3.

The content of the grumbling is *not* a proper complaint.

One could argue that the grumble of chapter 15 is more like a complaint:

“What shall we drink?” (15:24)

After all, they are going to the *right person* (Moses)
with the right question (what shall we drink?)!

I suspect that the reason for the use of the word “grumble” in 15:24
is because Exodus is showing us the beginning of a pattern.

If Israel had learned from the waters of Marah that the LORD was gracious, then they would have come in chapter 16 with a proper complaint; but they do not learn from Marah.

So they grumble.

b. “Then the LORD Said” – Grumbling against the LORD (v4-7)

⁴ Then the LORD said to Moses, “Behold, I am 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, whether they will walk in my law or not.

And so the LORD decides to test them.

The word in verse 4 is “torah” – God is going to bring them to Sinai to give them his law – his ten commandments –

will they walk in his law or not?

God had called them at the end of chapter 15 to obey his voice and do what is right.

How will they do?

⁵ On the sixth day, when they prepare what they bring in, it will be twice as much as they gather daily.” ⁶ So Moses and Aaron said to all the people of Israel, “At evening you shall know that it was the LORD who brought you out of the land of Egypt, ⁷ and in the morning you shall see the glory of the LORD, because he has heard your grumbling against the LORD. For what are we, that you grumble against us?”

The evening-morning pattern of the manna reminds us of the evening-morning pattern of creation as does the resting on the seventh day.

c. “And Moses Said” – Understanding the Heart of Grumbling (v8)

⁸ And Moses said, “When the LORD gives you in the evening meat to eat and in the morning bread to the full, because the LORD has heard your grumbling that you grumble against him—what are we? Your grumbling is not against us but against the LORD.”

But the basic point in these verses is that the LORD has heard your grumbling.

I want you to think about the way that the LORD responds to this grumbling.

Is there *anything* in this passage that would make you think

that God *likes* what the Israelites are doing?

They are grumbling *against the LORD* –

and yet the LORD gives them what they want!

On the one hand, God is showing us his kindness.

The Israelites are already whining and murmuring against him.

But rather than grow angry with them,
he is patient.
He gives them what they need – he provides for them,
in spite of their failure to listen to his voice.

Why does God do this?

Because he knows us.
He knows that our hearts are hard – like Pharaoh.
If he deals with us as we deserve,
then we will all wind up like Pharaoh!

For those of you who are dealing with difficult relational issues,
think about this!

How should you respond to the grumbler?
Your first response should be *grace*.

Respond to them like your heavenly Father responded to Israel!
He hears their murmuring and grumbling.
He understands where it is coming from –
and so he responds graciously,
giving them what they need (what they are asking for!),
and then graciously teaching them to ask better next time.

There will come a time when God will judge them for their grumbling.
But God is merciful.
He knows that he is dealing with a people who until a month ago
were slaves to Pharaoh.
They will not learn his Law overnight.
Even so, you were slaves to sin and death.
And God has dealt with you graciously.
Therefore you should deal graciously with others.

After all, *no one* deserves mercy.
By definition, mercy is undeserved.

As Tim Keller said well in his book, *Ministries of Mercy*,
we *always* show mercy to others.

You never withhold mercy!
It's just that sometimes, the only way to show mercy
is to refuse to give what the person asks for!

Here in the wilderness, Israel will ask for bread.

Maybe they are whining about it – going about it the wrong way –
but they *need bread* –
and so God gives them bread.
Later, when God tells them to go into the Promised Land,
they will refuse and decide to go back to Egypt.
That would *not* be good for them –
it would not be *merciful* to let them go back to slavery –
and so God does *not* give them what they ask for.
Instead, he judges them – and makes them wander in the wilderness for 40 years.

Even so, in our dealing with others,
we do not withhold mercy from them.
But that does not mean that we give them whatever they want!
If they want to go back to Egypt, we say “no, we cannot help you do that!”
If the addict wants money to help fund his addiction,
it would not be merciful to give him money!

2. Glory in the Wilderness (16:9-12)

a. “Moses Said to Aaron” – Come Near before the LORD (v9)

⁹ Then Moses said to Aaron, “Say to the whole congregation of the people of Israel, ‘Come near before the LORD, for he has heard your grumbling.’”

So what do we do?

This is why I have highlighted verses 9-12 as a single point in your outline.
“Come near before the LORD, for he has heard your grumbling.”

God’s purpose in feeding his people – providing for his people –
is to bring them near to himself.

God is holy.

We often define holiness in terms of “separation” –
that God’s holiness *separates* him from sinners –
and that is true.
He is high and holy and dwells in unapproachable light!
Holy, holy, holy is the LORD God Almighty –
heaven and earth are filled with his glory!

But God’s holiness also draws us to himself.

“Be holy for I am holy” –

If you are the people of a holy God,
then you are holy!

You are set apart – consecrated to him.

(And again – not so that you can be unapproachable –
but, like God himself, so that you might draw others to him!)

“Come near before the LORD, for he has heard your grumbling.”

b. The Glory of the LORD Appeared in the Cloud (v10)

¹⁰ And as soon as Aaron spoke to the whole congregation of the people of Israel, they looked toward the wilderness, and behold, the glory of the LORD appeared in the cloud.

The whole congregation looks out toward the wilderness (toward Mt. Sinai)
and the glory of the LORD appeared in the cloud.

What does a bunch of grumblers deserve?
Do they deserve a sign from heaven?
Do they deserve to see the glory of the LORD?

No.
But God is merciful.
He does not treat us as our sins deserve.
He is kind.
And he reveals his glory in the wilderness.

This is not the first time that God’s glory was made known in the wilderness – nor the last.

As John says in John 1:14-17,
“And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us,
and we have seen his glory, the glory as of the only Son from the Father,
full of grace and truth....
And from his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace.
For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.”

John came baptizing in the wilderness in order to prepare the way for the glory of God
to be revealed in the face of Jesus Christ.

(And when the Pharisees start grumbling against Jesus,
you start getting the feeling of déjà vu all over again.)

c. “The LORD Said to Moses” – Then You Shall Know (v11-12)

¹¹ And the LORD said to Moses, ¹² “I have heard the grumbling of the people of Israel. Say to them, ‘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.’”

But God says, “I have heard the grumbling of the people of Israel.”
This is not just a statement of fact.
God hears everything – so the fact that he hears is not news!

Rather, when God says “I have heard”
he means that he is about to *do something* about the situation.
Like we heard in chapter 2, “The people of Israel groaned because of their slavery
and cried out for help.
Their cry for rescue from slavery came up to God.
And God heard their groaning,
and God remembered his covenant
with Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob.” (2:23-24)
When God sees – when God hears –
you know that God will act!

This requires humility on our part.

Because often *we* cry out – *we* plead with God to *act now!*
To do something!
And often God is silent.
Does he see?
Does he hear?
Will he act?
Sometimes God’s answer is “Not in your lifetime!”
For the old man who died the day before Moses arrived in Egypt,
God’s answer was – “not yet.”

We need humility to recognize that *we* are not the center of the universe.
God’s purposes in history do *not* revolve around *me*.

He simply calls me to *know* that he is God – and that he is *my God*.

Because when you hear the words, “Then you shall know that I am the LORD”
you may start getting nervous –
after all, this is what God said to Egypt!
But there is all the difference in the world between saying “I am the LORD”
and saying “I am the LORD *your God*.”

Satan will say that “Yahweh is God.”
But he will *never* say “Yahweh is *my God*”!

We do not merely confess that the LORD is God.
We confess “The LORD is *our God*.”

Because the LORD does not draw people near *so that* he can destroy them.
He brings them near to see his glory – so that they might share in his holiness.

And that is why the Word became flesh and dwelt among us.

And that is also why Jesus says that *he* is the living bread that comes down from heaven.

3. Bread in the Wilderness (16:13-36)

a. Give Us This Day Our Daily Bread (v13-21)

¹³ *In the evening quail came up and covered the camp, and in the morning dew lay around the camp.* ¹⁴ *And when the dew had gone up, there was on the face of the wilderness a fine, flake-like thing, fine as frost on the ground.* ¹⁵ *When the people of Israel saw it, they said to one another, “What is it?”^[a] 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.”* ¹⁶ *This is what the LORD has commanded: ‘Gather of it, each one of you, as much as he can eat. You shall each take an omer,^[b] according to the number of the persons that each of you has in his tent.’”* ¹⁷ *And the people of Israel did so. They gathered, some more, some less.* ¹⁸ *But when they measured it with an omer, whoever gathered much had nothing left over, and whoever gathered little had no lack. Each of them gathered as much as he could eat.* ¹⁹ *And Moses said to them, “Let no one leave any of it over till the morning.”* ²⁰ *But they did not listen to Moses. Some left part of it till the morning, and it bred worms and stank. And Moses was angry with them.* ²¹ *Morning by morning they gathered it, each as much as he could eat; but when the sun grew hot, it melted.*

When Jesus teaches us to pray, “Give us this day our daily bread,”
everyone would have remembered the daily bread in the wilderness.

The manna in the wilderness came every morning – for six days out of the week.

But God wanted to teach his people to *trust* him.

Will you trust me to provide for you *every day*?

Therefore, don’t stockpile your daily bread.

Go out every morning and gather it.

In this way, the six days of daily bread

is connected to the days of creation –

“six days shall you labor and do all your work.”

You need to get up early every morning and gather manna.

If you are lazy and sleep in, you won’t have anything to eat today!

b. God’s Provision for the Holy Sabbath (v22-30)

²² *On the sixth day they gathered twice as much bread, two omers each. And when all the leaders of the congregation came and told Moses,* ²³ *he said to them, “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.’”* ²⁴ *So they laid it aside till the morning, as Moses commanded them, and it did not stink, and there were no worms in it.* ²⁵ *Moses said, “Eat it today, for today is a Sabbath to the LORD; today you will not find it in the field.* ²⁶ *Six days you shall gather it, but on the seventh day, which is a Sabbath, there will be none.”*

But then on the sixth day, you shall gather twice as much bread.

Because the seventh day is a “day of solemn rest, a holy Sabbath to the LORD.”
We should note that before God calls Israel to rest,
 God himself rests.
God provides food for six days –
 but on the Sabbath, God himself rests from his work of providing food.
This goes all the way back to the Creation –
 when God rested on the seventh day from all his work in creation.
So keeping Sabbath is something that God does –
 therefore his people are called to imitate him.

But the basic disbelief of the people continues:

27 On the seventh day some of the people went out to gather, but they found none. 28 And the LORD said to Moses, “How long will you refuse to keep my commandments and my laws? 29 See! The LORD has given you the Sabbath; therefore on the sixth day he gives you bread for two days. Remain each of you in his place; let no one go out of his place on the seventh day.” 30 So the people rested on the seventh day.

Modern educational theory tends to emphasize
 the importance of explaining everything in advance.
Make sure that they understand everything before they start.

But that assumes that the intellect is the most important faculty we have.
 God does not assume that the intellect is the most important faculty we have!
 As James K. A. Smith says, “You are what you love.”
 We are driven by our loves – our desires – our habits.
 Usually what we need is *not* more information.
 What we need is to have our loves, our desires, our habits re-formed.

Notice what God is doing for Israel:
 even as he gave them the Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread
 as a means of remembering their deliverance from Egypt,
 so now he gives them a weekly pattern –
 six days shall you labor, but the seventh you shall rest.

He explains the Sabbath commandment later at Sinai –
 “for in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth,
 but on the seventh God rested,
 wherefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and hallowed it.”
And later in Deuteronomy 5 God will highlight the importance of giving rest to others,
 “for you were a slave in Egypt” – therefore you shall give rest to your servants,
 and not require them to work for you on the Sabbath day!
But before God explained the Sabbath to his people,

he first required them to practice it.

I will say this to you:

you can study the Sabbath commandment all you like –
but until you put it into practice, you will not understand it!
Israel had been slaves in Egypt.
They had worked seven days a week.
They had been oppressed with heavy labor.

The Sabbath commandment was given to them *as a gift*.

Yes, it is a commandment!

And when some of the people go out to gather manna on the 7th day,
the LORD said to Moses,

“How long will you refuse to keep my commandments...?”!

But the point of the Sabbath commandment is to give rest to the weary.

Notice verse 29:

“The LORD has *given* you the Sabbath.”

The Sabbath is a gift.

Jesus will highlight this:

“The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath.”

The Pharisees totally misunderstood the Sabbath –

so we should not get bogged down in debates over details.

The point is simple:

In our culture – in a day when everyone is relentlessly pursued by busyness –
when your boss wants you to be always available for work –
when your favorite sports team wants you to be always paying attention to them –
when our 24/7 news and entertainment culture
wants you to “always be plugged in” –

God says “turn it off.”

Stop being possessed by it.

It is a gift!

God has given you a gift.

Take one day out of seven as a Sabbath to the LORD your God.

Why does it matter which day it is?

Because that day is not just a “personal day” –

it is a day that is at least *connected* to the idea of worship

(even though in the Old Testament, the Sabbath was not really a “worship day”).

The reason why I say that it is *connected* to the idea of worship
is because “remember the Sabbath day” in the OT
is connected to what Jesus says, when he says
“do this in remembrance of me” – at the Lord’s Table.

That’s what Jesus is doing in John 6
as he speaks of himself as the true bread which came down out of heaven.

c. Bread and Worship (v31-36)

³¹ Now the house of Israel called its name manna. It was like coriander seed, white, and the taste of it was like wafers made with honey. ³² Moses said, “This is what the LORD has commanded: ‘Let an omer of it be kept throughout your generations, so that they may see the bread with which I fed you in the wilderness, when I brought you out of the land of Egypt.’” ³³ And Moses said to Aaron, “Take a jar, and put an omer of manna in it, and place it before the LORD to be kept throughout your generations.” ³⁴ As the LORD commanded Moses, so Aaron placed it before the testimony to be kept. ³⁵ The people of Israel ate the manna forty years, till they came to a habitable land. They ate the manna till they came to the border of the land of Canaan. ³⁶ (An omer is the tenth part of an ephah.)

Even in Exodus 16, there is the beginning of a hint in this direction.
Aaron is told to take a jar, and put an omer of manna in it,
and place it before the LORD to be kept throughout your generations.

Later in Exodus, we will hear how the bread from heaven
will be placed in the Holy of Holies –
in the ark of the covenant –
because there must be a *holy bread* –
if we are to draw near to a holy God.

This is why Jesus will refer to himself as the *true bread* – the *living bread* –
which came down from heaven.

Very few things were placed in the Holy of Holies:
the ark of the covenant contained three things:
the Ten Commandments,
Aaron’s rod,
and the jar of manna.

From the days of the Exodus, *bread* is associated with God’s presence and provision.
Bread is associated with God’s *word* and promise.

God was teaching his people in the wilderness
that man does not live by bread alone,
but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.

Jesus said that when he was tempted –
but he was quoting from Moses in Deuteronomy 8:3,
who said that God “humbled you and let you hunger and fed you with manna,
which you did not know, nor did your fathers know,
that he might make you know that man does not live by bread alone,
but man lives by every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD.”

Will you listen to the voice of the LORD?
Will you do what God says? – even when you don’t understand why?

Lord, to whom shall we go?
You have the words of eternal life,
and we have believed, and have come to know, that you are the Holy One of God.
Have mercy upon us, our heavenly Father,
and grant that we may hear your word and believe your promises,
and that we might obey your voice and do what you say –
so that we might live before you all our days.