

The Provision, Purpose, and Prophetic Picture of Manna Exodus 16

You may recall from when we preached through the Gospel of Mark that there was an occasion when Jesus wanted to get His disciples away from the crowds and so they went to a desolate place to be alone and to rest. But the crowds saw where they went and they followed Jesus into this wilderness and so He spent the day teaching them. As the sun moved on toward the horizon, the disciples began to be concerned for the crowds and they encouraged Jesus to send them away so they could go to the surrounding countryside and villages to get food and shelter. The disciples were walking by sight and not by faith. They were thinking of practical ways, human ways, to solve the problem. But Jesus had other ideas. He wanted to strengthen the faith of His disciples. So He had them gather up what food they could find, which turned out to be five loaves of bread and two fish. As you know, Jesus gave thanks for the food and distributed the paltry dinner to His disciples and as they passed out the food, they miraculously had enough to feed the entire crowd--5,000 men, Mark reports--and had far more left over than when they started. This was a miraculous provision of food wrought by the Savior's power and grace, and it hearkens back to the miracle we'll see this morning in Exodus 16.

We left the people of Israel at the springs of Elim at the end of chapter 15. They have escaped Egypt, they have been powerfully and miraculously delivered from the Egyptian army by walking through the Red Sea on dry ground, they have become thirsty on their way to Elim and grumbled against the Lord, who patiently and graciously sweetened the bitter water of Marah and then allowed them to encamp and rest at Elim.

Now at the beginning of chapter 16, Israel has set off into the Wilderness of Sin, following the presence of God manifest in the pillar of cloud. And they are beginning to run out of the food they had packed for their trip. They are becoming hangry. They remind me of some of my grandkids who seem to think the worst thing in the world is to feel a pang of hunger. And the hungrier they get, the more irritable they get. Just as they did when they

worried about running out of water in chapter 15, the people of Israel grumble against God. Like the disciples in Mark, they are walking by sight and not by faith. Sure, God miraculously delivered them from Pharaoh and from dying of thirst, but what have you done for me lately, God? We're hungry! We're hangry!

And once again, we are going to see God demonstrate His almighty power over the natural world. Once again we're going to see God graciously provide for the basic needs of the people of Israel by providing manna for them to eat. This morning, we are going to look at three aspects of the miracle of manna:

1. The Gracious Provision of Manna
2. The Grand Purpose of Manna
3. The Glorious Prophetic Picture of Manna

So, let's first look at God's generous provision of manna.

The Gracious Provision of Manna

As I said, the people of Israel were hangry. They grumbled against Moses and they grumbled against Aaron and they grumbled against God. But God's response is not what we might have expected. We might expect God's righteous anger to break out against the people in the form of a plague or some natural disaster. But instead, God continues to be patient and gracious with His people. He says to Moses in verse 4, "I will rain down bread from heaven for you." Then in verse 12, God tells 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 Yahweh, your God.'"

We see the fulfillment of this promise in verses 13-15. Quail came and covered the camp in the evening. The next morning there was a layer of dew around the camp and when it evaporated, thin flakes like frost on the ground appeared on the desert floor. And the Israelites said, "What is it?"

That's how manna got its name. Manna sounds like the Hebrew for What is it? Verse 31 says it was white like coriander seed and tasted like wafers with honey. If it tasted anything like Texas Roadhouse biscuits with honey butter, I'm there!

Think about the awesome power of this miracle. We don't know exactly how many people there were. I know the ESV says there were 600,000 men, but that is the translator's best guess about what the Hebrew is saying. It may be right; it may be wrong. But the number of people doesn't matter. Whether there were 20 thousand or 2 million, think about the abundance that would be required to feed that many people. And God did this six days a week for 40 years. Not that it was hard for God to do. But the sheer magnitude of the miracle boggles my mind!

And the miracle wasn't just that the manna was sitting out there in the wilderness waiting to be picked everyday. Look in verses 17 and 18. Some gathered much and some gathered little, but when they measured it, nobody had too much or too little. Everyone had exactly as much as they needed. That's miraculous!

The takeaway for us is that we worship a great and powerful God in Whom we live and move and have our being. When we face a trial, we can trust that God will provide us with exactly what we need, when we need it, and in just the right measure. God's children do not need to fret or worry. Jesus said in Matthew 10, "Are not two sparrows sold for a penny, and not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father. Fear not, therefore, for you are of more value than sparrows." God's children must trust Him to be their provider. And God's children can trust that there is always a purpose for everything that happens to them. This morning, we will see several grand purposes that God had in His provision of manna.

The Grand Purpose of Manna

Scripture tells us that God had several purposes in His generous provision of manna. The first, which is obvious from the context, is that He needed to feed this massive group of people daily. Without God's care and provision, they would starve to death or die of thirst in the wilderness. So, that's one obvious purpose--He needed to feed them.

God tells us in verse 4 another purpose He had in the provision of manna. He intends to test them. He set down rules for the gathering and eating of the manna. They were only to gather enough for one day.

I want to do a thought experiment here to see if we can relate to this test. Suppose our nation was in a severe economic crisis, a grave depression. Suppose every one of us lost our jobs and we were unable to feed our families. Now suppose God said, I will provide food for you each day of the week except Sunday. I will miraculously fill the auditorium of the PRC building with enough food for each of you to feed your family for that day. But you are not to take any more than your family can eat in a day. Except on Saturday, take enough for two days, because you will need the auditorium space on Sunday for your worship gathering. Be sure you have nothing left over at night or it will spoil and stink up your house. If you obey these commands, I will continue to provide food for you until you no longer need it.

That would be a test of our faith and our obedience, wouldn't it? I think for many of us, it would be hard when we see God's provision for us today, to trust that it will be there again tomorrow. Just think how hard it would be for us to only take what we need for that day.

That's what God was testing. Could the people of Israel obey His commands and trust in His daily provision? Did they trust that God's grace would be more than a one and done? Did they believe He would sustain them throughout their travels? Some didn't. Some tried to hoard the manna overnight--maybe because they didn't trust that God would provide for their daily needs or maybe because they didn't want to put in the work necessary to gather the manna every morning. But whatever the reason,

some of them hoarded it with the result that it spoiled, was infested with worms, and stunk up their tent.

Another test related to the Sabbath. This is the first mention of the word in the Old Testament. God wanted them to devote each Saturday to Him and therefore, He provided double manna on Friday and they were to gather double the amount on that day. Again, some of them didn't obey and they went out looking for manna on the Sabbath. But God continued to be patient with the people throughout Exodus 16. He didn't send on them the plagues of the Egyptians. He didn't punish them severely for their lack of obedience. But God's patience is meant to lead us to repentance. His patience with Israel won't last forever. There will come days of reckoning in their future and eventually, only two of the men over 20 who escaped from Egypt would make it to the Promised Land.

But there is another purpose that God had for the manna and we see that in Deuteronomy 8, starting in verse 3.

3 And he 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.

God wanted them to be hungry and he wanted them to be humbled, and then he fed them with manna for a purpose. And that purpose was so that they would know that man does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord. He wanted them to hunger so that they would learn to hunger and thirst for righteousness. Jesus said, "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness for they will be satisfied."

God wanted Israel to walk by faith and not by sight. This temporal, physical world in which we live is not the everlasting reality. The welfare of your physical body is not the most important thing. Your spiritual welfare is most important. God cared about their physical welfare; that's why He gave them

the manna to eat. But He cared more about their spiritual health; and what they needed for spiritual health was the Word of God.

And the same thing is true for us today. Think back to the scenario I gave a few minutes ago. Now let's change it up. Suppose you had no food and no means with which to buy it and you came to church on Sunday and the pastors had laid out a huge breakfast buffet with all kinds of egg dishes, bacon, fruit, bacon, breads, bacon, pancakes, bacon--well, you get the picture. And we were serving each of you, and we say, "Take all that you want. There's plenty for everyone!" And everyone goes home stuffed to the gills. And you came back on Monday, and there was a sign on the door: we fed you yesterday and that will have to last until next Sunday!

You would be indignant. We only get to eat once a week? It doesn't really matter how good it is, right? If you only get to eat once a week, you'll starve!

But I fear that is what some of us do with the Word of God! We get our fill on Sunday and we hope that will tide us over until next Sunday. But God says we live by every Word that comes from the mouth of the Lord. The Word of God is no small matter. It's not something to be trifled with. Listen to what Moses says in Deuteronomy 32:46-47.

"Take to heart all the words by which I am warning you today, that you may command them to your children, that they may be careful to do all the words of this law. 47 For it is no empty word for you, but your very life, and by this word you shall live long in the land that you are going over the Jordan to possess."

Oh, my brothers and sisters, the Bible is not a collection of idle words--they are your life. Our physical existence depends on the Word of God. We were created by His Word and He upholds the universe by the Word of His power.

Our spiritual life began by the Word of God, for faith comes from hearing and hearing by the Word of Christ. Peter says we were born again through the living and abiding Word of God.

We were created, both physically and spiritually by the Word of God. We are sustained and preserved by the Word of God. Brothers and sisters, the Word of God is a matter of life and death! We must nourish ourselves continually on His Word in order to live healthy and joyful lives. Don't trifle with God's Word. Feast upon it! Marinate in it. Study, memorize, and meditate on it. It is your life!

So far, we've seen the generous provision of manna and the gracious purpose of manna. Now, let's look at the glorious prophetic picture of manna.

The Prophetic Picture of Manna

Jesus is the focal point of the Bible. He taught that the OT Scriptures spoke of Him. And so this miraculous provision of manna, which was intended to feed the nation of Israel, intended to test their faithfulness to God, and intended to teach them that man does not live by bread alone, was also intended to point forward to the Messiah, the Savior who would come to finally and fully deliver them from their slavery to sin.

As we have already seen, God told Israel through Moses that one purpose of the manna was to teach them that their lives are not only dependent on what they eat, but even more so on every Word that comes from the mouth of the Lord. And what is that Word of God; or more accurately Who is that Word of God? John identified Jesus Christ as the Word of God.

1 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. 2 He was in the beginning with God. 3 All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made. 4 In him was life, and the life was the light of men.

14 And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.

Ultimately, it is our relationship with Jesus Christ which is the source of life for us. He is the vine and we are the branches. We must be connected to Him and in Him. Through Jesus, we can be partakers of the divine nature. When we behold the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ, we are transformed by the Holy Spirit from one degree of glory to the next. We must abide in Him. We must reckon our lives to be totally absorbed into His. We are crucified with Christ--His death is our death. It is no longer us who live, but Christ who lives within us. And the life we now live, we live by faith in the Son of God who loved us and gave Himself for us. We have died, but our lives are hidden with Christ in God. But we also have been raised with Christ. And when Christ, who is our life, appears a second time, then we will also appear with Him in glory.

After Jesus miraculously multiplied five loaves of bread and two fish to feed 5,000 people, He strove to show the disciples His connection to the provision of manna to Israel. He told them not to work for bread that perishes, but for the food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man would give to them. The Jews responded by asking for a sign like the provision of manna in the wilderness (as if they hadn't just seen an equally miraculous sign!). And Jesus responded, **“Truly, truly, I say to you, it was not Moses who gave you bread from heaven, but my Father gives you the true bread from heaven. The bread of God is He who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.”**

There it is. The provision of manna was to point forward to the true bread of heaven, Jesus Christ, the Son of God. And anyone who believes that He came and died and rose again and offers a free gift of salvation to those who believe, to those who will repent of their sin will receive His gift of eternal, abundant, joyous life that only comes to those who live in communion with Him.

Then, hammer home His point,

35 Jesus said to them, “I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst. 36 But I said to you that you have seen me and yet do not believe.

Then John says the Jews grumbled against Jesus because He said He came down from heaven.

47 Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever believes has eternal life. 48 I am the bread of life. 49 Your fathers ate the manna in the wilderness, and they died. 50 This is the bread that comes down from heaven, so that one may eat of it and not die. 51 I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever. And the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh.”

52 The Jews then disputed among themselves, saying, “How can this man give us his flesh to eat?” 53 So Jesus said to them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. 54 Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day. 55 For my flesh is true food, and my blood is true drink. 56 Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me, and I in him. 57 As the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father, so whoever feeds on me, he also will live because of me. 58 This is the bread that came down from heaven, not like the bread the fathers ate, and died. Whoever feeds on this bread will live forever.” 59 Jesus said these things in the synagogue, as he taught at Capernaum.

Now John reports that some of His disciples grumbled against Him.

“Do you take offense at this? 62 Then what if you were to see the Son of Man ascending to where he was before? 63 It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh is no help at all. The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life.

66 After this many of his disciples turned back and no longer walked with him. 67 So Jesus said to the twelve, “Do you want to go away as well?” 68 Simon Peter answered him, “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life, 69 and we have believed, and have come to know, that you are the Holy One of God.”

Do you know Jesus as the Holy One of God? Do you know Him as your Savior, the forgiver of your sins? Do you know Jesus as your Lord and Master? You can. Don't let another day go by before you fall on your knees before Him, repent of your sin, and receive peace with God through faith in Jesus Christ. Do it now! Do it before it is too late! (card, pastors, etc.)

If you are a follower of Christ, maybe you're thinking this passage I just read is a hard teaching. What is Jesus talking about? How can we eat His flesh and drink His blood? I think He means what Paul was saying in Galatians 2:20. Consider your life to be absorbed into His. Consider yourself crucified with Christ, living a life of faith in the Son of God. No longer live for yourselves. Consider yourself dead to sin and alive to God. Consider yourself a branch attached to His vine. Feast daily on His Word. Commune with Him in prayer. Be active in your church, in your Peine Family, in your Discipleship Group, in the Ridge and Jr. Ridge. Fellowship with your brothers and sisters in Christ. Stir one another up to good works. Encourage one another. Exhort one another. Hold one another accountable. This is how we stay attached to the vine and this is how we eat the Bread of Life and drink the Water of Life.

Of course communion is a beautiful picture of our partaking of the flesh and the blood of Christ. (and so on...)