

Provision in the Wilderness

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[0:00] Howdy, one harbor. How you doing? Good, good. Good to have you here with us. So yeah, we're continuing on in Exodus. We got two more weeks. So I'm doing the second to last week, and then next week is the last one, and then we will be done and starting an Advent series taking us through to the end of December. So last week, if you were here, we looked at the Song of Moses, and it was that moment in Israel history where God, on the other side of bringing them through the Red Sea, and then Pharaoh's army follows them, and God brings the Red Sea back over Pharaoh's army while Israel's safe on the other side, and God drowns Pharaoh's army right in front of their eyes.

And so there would be captors, there would be enslavers, their former masters are now decimated. They are no more. And so what happens is, is they break out. Sounds like Moses went into freestyle rapping. There was some dancing that went on subsequently as well. It seemed like it kind of sanctified soul train. For those of you who remember that, that was, it seemed like kind of something like that. But anyways, it was this big victory. The point is, it was a big victory. Man, there was no way to respond but to celebrate all that God has done, to rejoice in him in dancing and singing. And they were on their way to the promised land, right? They were on their way. They were like, yes, we can taste that milk and that honey already. And then they say, cool, what's next? And then they turn around and they see this. It says in Exodus 16, one, they set out from Elam and all the congregation of people of the people of Israel came into the wilderness of sin. All of a sudden, their major victory and excitement turns into a major bummer, right? This wasn't like three days getting to run wild with Bear Grylls, right? It wasn't like they were going to be going through and having a ton of fun, being adventurous and surviving in the desert, eating scorpion heads and other bugs to stay alive.

No, this was them marching a whole nation of people like guys and gals and little kids and livestock, like bringing them through some of the most inhospitable terrain known to man, right? What was God thinking? Well, actually, he was teaching Israel something. But not only then, he also did it for our benefit today. 1 Corinthians 10, 11, it says this, now these things happened to them, talking about Israel and their wandering in the desert, as an example, but they were written down for our instruction. He's talking to the present-day church, to the New Testament church centuries later. These things are written down for our instruction on whom the end of the ages has come. So when we read about God leading Israel through the desert, it's not just something that happened to them. Man, this does something. It explains what the life of following Jesus looks like. And even if you're here, you don't consider yourself a follower of Jesus, you're not a Christian, that's okay. Man, this can still be really helpful. We're going to get into today. See, we can get into this false idea of what being saved by God does, right? We can think of it as this magic way to move toward this perfect life that we want for ourselves. The champagne and caviar life, right? Lifestyles of the rich and famous, that would be the perfect life. But in reality, what we find is that God doesn't change our surroundings. He doesn't change them into a perfect paradise. Man, if we're honest, life often still feels a lot more like a wilderness than a garden. So what does the wilderness represent, right? Well, the wilderness represents this shortfall of the heaven that we desire, right? We have this sense intrinsically in our souls of this is what ought to be, but this is my reality. And this is the wilderness. This is the area of frustration, of despondency, despair, of difficulty. And a lot can happen in that because we want heaven on earth. And not only do we want it, we feel entitled to it if we're honest. So much of our life is lived in this pursuit of manifesting heaven right now, right here, and avoiding any semblance of suffering. The message of our present culture tells us you deserve the perfect life, and you should do whatever you can to get it, and it's possible for you to get it. And how do you do that? How do you do that in the wilderness? Well, you know what? You can attain

that perfect life. Just live your own truth. Live your own truth. Find that secret formula to unlocking success and health and wealth. Live for yourself. Do whatever it takes, no matter who you hurt or what happens. Your heaven, this is the promise, your heaven is just one life hack away from happening. You just got to find out what that is. So what happens is all these false gospels are held out to us today, right? There's the gospel of individualism. Live for yourself.

Be fiercely independent, right? Do what makes you happy. You know what? You just do you. Or there's the gospel of consumerism. Happiness is just one more purchase away. It's just adding the right thing to your life that you're missing, and then everything's going to be resolved. We have this, we get this constant craving for more and satisfying that. We consume goods, and we consume relationships in the pursuit of our happiness and pleasure. Or there's the gospel of materialism. It says like, you know, spiritual things, who cares about them? Don't worry about spiritual things. Don't pursue them. The most important thing is your physical comfort. Now, if you're here and you're listening to this, you're not a Christian. I'm in no way just picking on you because we're all in this, Christian, non-Christian alike, right? I grew up in church. My dad was a pastor, and still I ended up believing in and adopting these false gospels. Got some Christianity, but man, I'm going to weave in a little bit of individualism. I'm going to weave in a little bit of consumerism. I'm going to weave in a little bit of materialism, and everything's going to be okay. And not only did I used to live this way, guys, if I'm honest, man, these things creep back into my heart on a regular basis.

[6:30] Why, I slipped right back into that. And I'm sure I'm not the only one in the room. See, these false gospels, what they do is they deceive us, and they plant these false ideas into believing that this is how we can attain heaven on earth, but then counter to that. Counter to that is this message held out by the gospel of Jesus. And that's not just the gospel of the New Testament. It's actually a gospel we see in the Old Testament. It's a gospel we're going to see even in Exodus chapter 16 and 17 that we're going to look at today. I'm going to pick out a few passages because it's just too much to read through. And it's not just for the Christian. Man, if you're here again, you're not a Christian. It's for you too. And what we see in these Exodus accounts right here is why God leads us through the wilderness instead of just giving us the perfect life. Some things can only be learned through the trials faced in the wilderness.

God is concerned with perfecting our faith over perfecting our life. Exodus 16, 1-4 says this, They set out from Elam, and all the congregation of the people of Israel came to the wilderness of Sin, which is between Elam and Sinai, on the 15th day of the second month, after they had departed from the land of Egypt. And the whole congregation of the people of Israel grumbled, say grumbled, against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness. And the people of Israel said to them, that was like you guys added a little bit of like grumbling into that grumble. That's good.

They said to Moses and Aaron, 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.

And then Moses said to the Lord, 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. Say that I may test them.

Whether they will walk in my law or not. So I tend to think when I read these accounts of God leading Israel through the desert, seeing their grumbling, I tend to think that I wouldn't have been one of the ones involved in the grumbling, you know. Having considered what God just did to Egypt and bringing them all the way through, opening the Red Sea and then destroying their enemies miraculously.

[8:53] And then I remember how ready I am after three days to get back to a shower and my bed after camping out at Cape Lookout. And then I realized, hmm, you know what?

I just wouldn't have been grumbling. I would have probably been a leader of the group that started the grumbling, right? See, it's interesting what we find out about. It's interesting what we find out about ourselves and what we actually believe when we're under pressure, right?

See, it's one thing to profess faith in God. It's quite another to have a faith to trust and obey Him from your heart, no matter what that means. No matter where He leads you.

And that's what the trial does. It squeezes us like a sponge. It squeezes our hearts like a sponge to show us what's really inside. We get to see what comes out.

And so what do we see come out of the Israelites? Let's jump into chapter 16, verse 2. The whole congregation of the people of Israel grumbled against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness, and the

people of Israel said to them, Would that we have 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.

[10:04] For you have brought us out into this wilderness to kill this whole assembly with hunger. And then the next chapter, Israel's in a new desert place, and they're thirsty, and it says this, in verse 3, The people thirsted there for water, and the people, again, grumbled against Moses and said, Why did you bring us up out of Egypt to kill us and our children and our livestock with thirst?

You know, unfortunately, we read these accounts, and it doesn't say, All the people were hungry and thirsty. So you know what they did? They turned to God, and they looked to heaven, and they cried out for help. Oh, Lord, help us.

Now, what did they do? They grumbled. I'm going to be honest. I like to complain. I don't know about you. Man, I'm a natural complainer.

I'm really good at it, right? If there was a spiritual gift called complaining, I would be, like, super sanctified. But, you know, that thing, it's a sin issue in my life.

God's been working it out in my life. You know, what's funny is, I used to think that it really wasn't a big deal, that grumbling and complaining wasn't a big deal, and actually, I thought it was my right to be able to voice my dissatisfaction. And it's almost always at people or circumstances, right?

[11:21] It's my boss or my employees or my kids. It's never Haley, because she's perfect. But that's what we often do, guys, right?

And the Israelites did that, too. It's funny how much we're like them. And honestly, we can go back to the third chapter of Genesis, and we see somebody complaining about someone in their life, right?

God comes and said, Adam, what did you do? He's like, this woman you gave me, right? It starts right from then. We just keep rinsing and repeating the same cycle of sin and how we respond when things aren't perfect in our lives.

When they're not going our way, we're so quick to blame someone or something for it. What I've come to realize is that my complaining and my blaming is really misplaced, right?

I'm really saying, man, if these people would just shape up, if these people would just fix and just do what I want them to do, if they would just treat me the way I deserve to be treated, you know, then life would go better.

[12:28] But then I read Exodus, verse 6, and the Holy Spirit does like a roundhouse kick to my gut in the best possible way.

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, and in the morning you shall see the glory of the Lord because he has heard your grumbling against the Lord.

Who are we or what are we that you grumble against us? And Moses said, when the Lord gives you in the evening meat to eat and in the morning bread to the fool 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. And then when the next chapter, when they're in a new place and they're complaining about water, they're thirsty, they grumble again. The people quarreled with Moses and said, give us water to drink and Moses said to them, why do you quarrel with me? Why do you test the Lord? Let's let that sink in.

[13:39] Think about that. Think about what's going on in your life right now. Think about the people that you've identified as the problem and you're grumbling against them. When our expectations aren't met, when our perfect life isn't being realized, man, we run to blame people.

I do. But really what we're doing is we're blaming God. That's what this passage is telling us. How does this work out?

I mean, as Christians, we even do this a lot. We blind ourselves to the fact that when we can blame people but don't see it as blaming God because, you know, blaming God's a bad thing and that's sinful so we shouldn't be doing that.

So, you know, I'm okay. I'm just gonna make that person the problem. And unfortunately, what we have to realize and what we see in this passage is that they're blaming is really putting God on trial. God said, you're putting me to the test. Moses is saying, you're putting God to the test which is really a way of saying, you know what you're doing is you're putting God on trial. You're saying, here's what's going on.

[14:48] Here's what's wrong. Now, we're gonna put you on trial and we're gonna question your motives and your morals and your values, right? God, are you really loving? Do you really love us? God, are you really good? Because if you were really good and you were really loving, this wouldn't be happening in my life right now. Man, we tend to forget so quickly what God does for us, right? The Israelites forgot so quickly what God did to get them out of Egypt and to bring them through the Red Sea and to destroy Pharaoh's army. I mean, at most, when you look at this, maybe a month had passed since they rejoiced and danced and sang that victory song on the other side of the Red Sea.

You would think, man, God, what are you gonna do? Like, how is God gonna respond to these ingrates? What is he gonna do? Is he gonna bring some hard discipline? Man, God, maybe at least bring a good spanking or something like that, right?

What does God do with their grumbling? Well, he doesn't do what you and I would do. He doesn't respond to them in anger. Actually, you know what he does? He provides for them.

[15:56] Sometimes God perfects our faith through discipline. Like, we learn about that in the book of Hebrews in the New Testament. He says, man, he's a heavenly father and because he loves us as a father loves his children, he disciplines his children for our own good.

So sometimes God, you know, he perfects our faith through discipline, but all the time, all the time, he perfects our faith by giving us what he knows we need. God perfects our faith by showing us he is our loving provider.

Exodus 16, 11, the Lord said to Moses, 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. And then in the evening, quail came up and covered the camp. That was like a hunter's paradise. Give me a shotgun.

Let's go have some fun. And in the morning, dew lay around the camp. And when the dew had gone up, there was on the face of the wilderness a fine flake-like thing, finest frost on the ground.

[16:57] And when the people of Israel saw it, they said to one another, what is it? Which is literally the word manna, which we get the word manna from. Manna means 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.

And then in the other situation when they were like really thirsty in chapter 7, this is how God provides. The people were crying out, we're thirsty, we're gonna die.

They wanted to stone Moses. Moses cried to the Lord, what shall I do with this people? They're almost ready to stone me. That's when you know things are going bad, right? Yeah? I hope you guys never get there.

Where you're just like, man, we are like so upset we're about ready to stone Jesse. And the Lord said to Moses, pass on before the people, taking with you some of the elders of Israel and take in your hand the staff with which you struck the Nile and go.

Behold, I will stand before you there on the rock at Horeb and you shall strike the rock and the water shall come out of it and the people will drink. And Moses did so in the sight of the elders of Israel. So what we see, we don't see a God who responds harshly to their grumbling.

[18:03] What we see is God's lavish response of crazy love, of crazy, gracious, good love. The Israelites, I mean, think about this, guys. The Israelites moaned about God.

They didn't even, it's like, you know, it's like really rude when you like talk about someone who's in the room like they're not there, you know? Like that's what the Israelites were doing. They were like grumbling, complaining about God like God wasn't there.

They're moaning about God's care and they were comparing God's care to Pharaoh's care and saying Pharaoh cared for them better than God cared for them. Hey, Pharaoh gave us pots of meat that we ate.

We ate to the full. We had fresh bread. It was amazing. And how does God respond? Well, you know what he does? He gives them meat and he gives them bread. He gives them quail and manna.

And here's what's funny. See, Pharaoh fed the Israelites because he was using them as a master uses a slave. The Israelites were his slaves to build his kingdom.

[19:06] They were in forced labor but he also needed them to be strong and so they were given food for that. But God, he fed the Israelites because he loved them.

Not because of what they could do for him. And so he met their needs. You look at the way Pharaoh provided for them. It was a master to slave relationship and the way God provides for his people.

It's a father to child relationship. See how different that is? One is transactional. You do for me, I'll do for you. One is just beautifully just entrenched in love.

With God, we don't come to him with any type of bargaining chip which is maybe why Israel took to complaining instead of bargaining. They realized they had no bargaining chip here. And so we see God's love and grace at play in his provision.

And we remember this even today, man. Every time we come to God we realize we come to him empty handed. We don't come to him with bargaining chips. We don't come to him saying, Lord, I did this therefore you need to do for me. We come to him empty handed and he always gives us exactly what we need.

[20 : 15] Maybe not what we want but exactly what we need. Now, what we see in this story and what we can learn from this story is man, as loving and gracious and amazing God's provision is that's not the only thing it is but it's also faithful.

And that's how God also perfects our faith. He does it by showing us he is our faithful provider. In chapter 16, verse 31, it says, 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. And 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.

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. As the Lord commanded Moses, so Aaron placed it before the testimony to be kept.

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.

[21 : 27] God faithfully provided for them. God faithfully fed them manna and brought manna for them, the bread of heaven, until they were brought, until he brought them and led them to the promised land, Canaan.

So what does that mean for us today? What is that natural truth, the story that we see, what spiritual reality does it represent for us that we can learn from?

Well, it's this. God faithfully provides through this wilderness of life until he brings us all the way home to heaven. That's what he does. And this promise of provision, it doesn't mean we're going to get bigger houses or fancier cars or the longest life or the best life we want right now.

God isn't our fairy godmother. He's not in the, he's not there to make all of our wildest dreams come true. He's not about perfecting our life, he's about perfecting our faith.

And today, he still gives his people this bread from heaven. And this bread from heaven, he gives, no one else can give to us. And this bread from heaven, man, it's better than any bread anyone can give to us.

[22 : 42] This bread is, it's not just bread that fills our bellies or water that quenches our thirst.

Man, it's bread and water that gives life to our hungry and thirsty souls. John 6, 31 to 35, Jesus is in a conversation.

Some people said to him, our fathers ate the manna in the wilderness. As it is written, he gave them bread from heaven to eat. And Jesus responds with this. Truly, truly, I say to you, it was not Moses who gave you bread from heaven, but my father.

My father gives you the true bread from heaven for the bread of God is he who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world. They said to him, sir, give us this bread always.

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.

God provides our greatest need by giving us himself. He provides our greatest need by giving us himself and that was his son, Jesus Christ.

[23 : 47] Listen, if you're here and not a Christian, if you're here and a Christian, please listen to me. The perfect life you're looking for can't be found by what you can do or think or get.

True life is found in a perfect savior who gave himself for us. Jesus is the true bread of heaven.

Jesus is the rock that was struck so that we could drink from him and never be thirsty again and he

gives himself freely and as he gives himself freely, that means he doesn't require anything of us. He doesn't say, you better come with all these good works to earn what I have for you. All he says and invites us to come with is faith but it does take faith and it does take coming to him but that is all we do.

We come, we come empty handed, we come with no bargaining chips and I want to speak to you if you're not a Christian, you can come to him today. Jesus is inviting you to come to him today.

All it takes is faith in who he is. All it takes is faith in him as Lord and Savior as the bread of life not that he's going to give you the perfect life but that he is the God who is perfecting you in the most profound ways in your heart and in your soul and providing for you.

[25:07] It involves turning from this false gospel that you can attain this perfect life now. It's believing that all that you need truly is this Lord and Savior Jesus Christ who died for your sins.

And if you're a Christian God invites you to come and eat the bread of life and drink from the fountain of life. He fed Israel for 40 years. Right?

The Israelites ate manna daily. They drank from the rock daily. Now imagine they said you know what I just I wish it was easier.

You know? I wish God would have like said all you need to do is wake up open your mouth and I'm going to put manna inside and put water in there and you can chew and swallow and you're good to go. God provided the manna.

He provided the water. But you know what? The Israelites they had to go get it. And I want to speak to my reformed friends in the room. We can often overstep God's sovereign grace in this way.

[26:12] Yes he provides what only he can provide and he provides what we really need but we have to respond to it. Dallas Willard this great old godly dude praise God for them.

I mean this guy I can't recommend his books enough. He reminds us that grace isn't against effort it's just against earning. You can't earn God's love you can't earn being saved but you know what? That doesn't mean you have no effort to put in to your walk with Jesus. We don't come to God and say hey we deserve the manna for what we did that's earning but man we have to go and we have to get get it realizing it's his grace he's provided for us.

And that he's given it in grace. And that's why we call certain habits that we do as Christians spiritual disciplines. There's things that they're meant to do to feed and to nourish our souls.

They're simply the means by which we experience God's lavish grace. And that lavish grace nourishes our souls. So let's briefly talk about what some of these things are.

[27:20] It's what we're doing right now in the Christian community. Gathering on a Sunday or gathering in small groups in the week. We come together. We come together to build each other up in the faith.

We don't neglect that. The book of Hebrews says we shouldn't neglect that. We would be foolish to. Another one is reading the Bible. That's key. And you can go to your Bible right?

We live in a time we live in a place where we can buy a Bible and we get to read it and it's really no big deal. We're not going to be persecuted for it. It's amazing. And it's not enough to just get some scripture read to you on a Sunday.

Listen to what Moses is saying to the people of Israel at the end of their 40 years of wondering. Looking back over those 40 years he says, And 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.

The Bible is God's written word. It's his written words. We feast on them. We feed on them.

[28:29] Another way is prayer and worship. It's talking to God and praising God. You may say, Man, do I really have to do these things? No. You don't have to do these things. These things don't save you.

These things won't even make if you don't do them God won't love you any less. But you know what? I can guarantee you this. If you don't do them you're going to miss knowing the fullness of his love and the fullness of his grace.

Now there's another means of grace that I haven't mentioned yet we're going to do right now and that's communion. And God gave his people his bread in the wilderness and nourished and it strengthened them.

He provided water from a rock that was struck to satisfy their thirst and he invited them to come and to take of them and in communion that's what God is doing. He's inviting us to come and be reminded and partake in faith of Jesus.

Now these things aren't literally physically Jesus but they're a reminder of who he is and what he did for us. He's the bread of life that came down from heaven and his body was broken for our sin. [29 : 34] He invites us to come and drink of Jesus the rock that was struck his blood that was shed for the forgiveness of our sin. and we invite right now all who believe in Jesus to come with faith and to take communion come and eat and drink and be reminded of God's provisional grace in your life.

And as we do so let's prepare our hearts and just thank him that he's a gracious loving faithful provider caring for our needs and nourishing our souls in this wilderness of life. Pray with me. Lord we thank you that these things happen for our example.

that you had them written down for our instruction. Lord and we see that Israel literally walked through a wilderness and Lord we figuratively walk through a wilderness called life.

But Lord you provide for us all the way. You provide for us and nourish our souls. You give us what we need. We get to enjoy you daily and feast on you daily Lord God and I just pray where we have been grumbling in our souls that we I just pray we would repent of that.

We realize that we're not grumbling against people and situations we're actually grumbling against you. Lord help us to see how we can just change our perspective in the trial to see how you're using this to glorify yourself in us and to bring us into more grace to do something in our hearts that's transformative that's perfecting our faith in you.

[31 : 18] Lord God I pray as we come that you truly would meet us at the table that you would truly as we take it in faith really remember and be thankful and be filled with gratitude and let that gratitude nourish our souls as we remember your body that was broken and your blood that was shed for us and always be reminded that Lord you're bringing us all the way home all the way to heaven.

Amen.