

Sermon preached by Pastor Ben Kuerth on Numbers 11:4-23 on August 30, 2015 at Victory of the Lamb.

**Series: Leading Questions**

**Today's Focus: Is the LORD's arm too short?**

**"Don't Misread the Scouting Report on God!"**

Dear Friends in Jesus Christ who once asked, "Is not life more important than food, and the body more important than clothes?" (Matthew 6:25)

I don't know about you, but this is one of my favorite times of year. It's football season again. The NFL pre-season is wrapping up. The college football regular season is starting up. High school football began a week ago. And I know a number of you have fantasy football drafts coming up real soon. Who do you hope to draft this year for your team? Have you read any fantasy football draft guides this year? Do you have the scouting report on each player?

As a former high school and college football player that was one thing that was always kind of interesting to me. We'd usually get some sort of scouting report on the teams we were playing. Often the scouting report mentioned particular players we were playing against. In other words, what are they good at? What are their strengths? What are their weakness that we might be able to exploit? What are their tendencies? How do we match up against them? The scouting report can be an important part of game preparation.

Well today in a sense we'll be getting a look at a scouting report that's far more important than how many points a particular fantasy football player might earn your team. I'm talking about the scouting report on God. Now you may think this sounds kind of silly because you know already know all about God. You may think that you've seen the scouting report on God, but you know here's the thing—we're going to see today how Moses and virtually all the people of Israel did too and yet they misread the scouting report on God in a pretty major way.

Here's the context. Moses and the Israelites had experienced a dramatic, miraculous rescue. Firsthand. They saw what God could do when their backs were up against the pursuing Egyptian army and in front of them was the Red Sea. Then saw with their own eyes how God opened up a dry lane through the sea and they passed between walls of water. They watched as God then sent the waves crashing down on Pharaoh and his army. After that they saw what God could do once they got to Mt Sinai. That's where God met with Moses amidst fire and a cloud on top of the mountain and Moses came down with the 10 Commandments carved in stone. And because they had experienced these things firsthand the people had even gotten off to a decent start in obeying the laws God had given them at Sinai. They had seen what God could do. They were optimistic about God's special promises. They were glad to be on God's team.

But then they began to question the game-plan. They began to doubt God's ability to provide and complain. Many of them flat out gave up on God. Why? Because they misread the scouting report on

God. They thought that the LORD's arm was too short. How about you? Is the LORD's arm too short? Here's what happened...

<sup>4</sup> *The rabble (probably non-Israelites who had tagged along from Egypt) with them began to crave other food, and again the Israelites started wailing and said, "If only we had meat to eat! <sup>5</sup> We remember the fish we ate in Egypt at no cost—also the cucumbers, melons, leeks, onions and garlic. <sup>6</sup> But now we have lost our appetite; we never see anything but this manna!"*

<sup>7</sup> *The manna was like coriander seed and looked like resin. <sup>8</sup> The people went around gathering it, and then ground it in a hand mill or crushed it in a mortar. They cooked it in a pot or made it into loaves. And it tasted like something made with olive oil. <sup>9</sup> When the dew settled on the camp at night, the manna also came down.*

<sup>10</sup> *Moses heard the people of every family wailing at the entrance to their tents. The LORD became exceedingly angry, and Moses was troubled. <sup>11</sup> He asked the LORD, "Why have you brought this trouble on your servant? What have I done to displease you that you put the burden of all these people on me?"*

<sup>12</sup> *Did I conceive all these people? Did I give them birth? Why do you tell me to carry them in my arms, as a nurse carries an infant, to the land you promised on oath to their ancestors? <sup>13</sup> Where can I get meat for all these people? They keep wailing to me, 'Give us meat to eat!' <sup>14</sup> I cannot carry all these people by myself; the burden is too heavy for me. <sup>15</sup> If this is how you are going to treat me, please go ahead and kill me—if I have found favor in your eyes—and do not let me face my own ruin."*

<sup>16</sup> *The LORD said to Moses: "Bring me seventy of Israel's elders who are known to you as leaders and officials among the people. Have them come to the tent of meeting, that they may stand there with you.*

<sup>17</sup> *I will come down and speak with you there, and I will take some of the power of the Spirit that is on you and put it on them. They will share the burden of the people with you so that you will not have to carry it alone.*

<sup>18</sup> *"Tell the people: 'Consecrate yourselves in preparation for tomorrow, when you will eat meat. The LORD heard you when you wailed, "If only we had meat to eat! We were better off in Egypt!" Now the LORD will give you meat, and you will eat it. <sup>19</sup> You will not eat it for just one day, or two days, or five, ten or twenty days, <sup>20</sup> but for a whole month—until it comes out of your nostrils and you loathe it—because you have rejected the LORD, who is among you, and have wailed before him, saying, "Why did we ever leave Egypt?"'"*

<sup>21</sup> *But Moses said, "Here I am among six hundred thousand men on foot, and you say, 'I will give them meat to eat for a whole month!' <sup>22</sup> Would they have enough if flocks and herds were slaughtered for them? Would they have enough if all the fish in the sea were caught for them?"*

<sup>23</sup> *The LORD answered Moses, "Is the LORD's arm too short? Now you will see whether or not what I say will come true for you."*

So what happened? Well right off the bat we hear people griping. (“Oh my back hurts from carrying all this stuff. My feet hurt from walking all day long. It’s so hot outside. And what’s for dinner? Oh yeah, the same thing we had yesterday. Manna...manna...manna. All I ever see is this boring, plain old manna. Whatever happened to the good old days when we lived in Egypt?) And the thing is that their general griping soon escalated into open rebellion against God. God had graciously given them manna to eat—but they were sick of it. And the thing that becomes clear is that it wasn’t just that they were sick of manna—they were sick of God. You can’t separate the gifts from the Giver. Spurning God’s gifts meant spurning their relationship with him. So God was angry.

But then there’s Moses too and as I hear Moses talk, my first reaction is to smile. It sounds so silly! When you read it out loud it almost sounds ridiculous, doesn’t it? Yet as I reflect on it, myself as a leader, I am deeply convicted by it. Because I’ve been Moses. I am Moses far more often than I’d like to admit. I can’t believe sometimes God still allows me to be a leader in his church or that he puts up with me. It is sheer grace through and through. Because how does Moses misread the scouting report on God? Well Moses wrongly acts like it all depends on him! First we see Moses getting all angry at the people. “What a bunch of ungrateful, cry babies!” Then we hear that Moses getting all angry at God. “Why are you treating me like this, God?”

So what has happened with Moses? Even though Moses had been on top of the mountain with the LORD, now he’s throwing a pity party for himself and he desperately wants to quit. He thinks maybe it would be best if God would just put an end to his life. And why? Because he does the same thing you and I do so often. He misreads the scouting report on God. He completely loses sight of God’s power—God’s ability to provide! He thinks God’s arm is too short—like a left tackle whose arms aren’t long enough to protect the quarterback from getting sacked by a speed rushing end or like a quarterback whose hands are too small to grip a football in bad weather.

Friends, can you relate? Can you relate to the people craving something they didn’t have? I mean you ever search for something online because you’d like to have it and then lo and behold... Google or Amazon or Ebay somehow knows just how to constantly put ads for that product on every other website you visit until you become so discontent with your current kitchen or your phone or your TV or your spouse that you can’t even stand to look at the one you have? Like now you just have to get a new one. You just have to have something you don’t currently have because you think you’ll never be able to happy anymore with what you do have. It happens, doesn’t it? We live in a world driven by the marketing forces that want us to live in a mode of constant upgrading. Websites use catchy images and slogans to drive discontent with false promises of happiness like in the case of the Ashley Madison scandal—where 40 million users had signed up under the slogan Life is Short, Have an Affair. Yikes.

Or can you relate to Moses in his pity party thinking everything depends on him? Parents, we’re good at this. You ever feel burned out, angry at God, or wanting to give up because of your perceived lot in life? There are lots of ways we can misread God’s scouting report and incur God’s anger. Satan’s happy if we fall for any one of them.

But did you hear how the conversation between Moses and God went at the end? This is interesting. Remember, the people demanded meat. "Give us meat, God!" Then God basically said, "Alright, I'll give you more meat than you know what to do with then. Have it your way." But how did Moses react?

<sup>21</sup> *But Moses said, "Here I am among six hundred thousand men on foot, and you say, 'I will give them meat to eat for a whole month!'"* <sup>22</sup> *Would they have enough if flocks and herds were slaughtered for them? Would they have enough if all the fish in the sea were caught for them?"*

So how did Moses react? Basically by saying, "There's no way, God! You can't provide enough meat for all those people. You've underestimated the size of the problem." But was that really it? Is that a legitimate reason for us to complain about our lives? Does God underestimate the size of our problems? Or was Moses perhaps just underestimating the potential size of God's provision? We human beings do this all the time don't we? We freak out at the size of a problem without factoring in the potential size of our God's provision. We think God underestimates the size of our problems when in reality we've underestimated God's power. And why? Because we've misread the scouting report on God's power just like Moses!

So God himself asks Moses a leading question...listen to this. *"Is the LORD's arm too short? Now you will see whether or not what I say will come true for you."* Sometimes instead of asking nicely for God's help, what do we do? We throw up our hands and sulk. We look at the size of an obstacle and instead of turning to God in prayer and asking him for new insights that we might see the opportunity behind the obstacle we get frustrated about our great misfortune. Instead of bringing to God what we have and asking him to bless it, we curse our bad luck that's caused us not to have what we want. Instead of expressing our thanks to God for what we have, we express our bitterness with what we don't. Instead of trusting God to provide abundantly so that we're able to be generous givers, we decide to greedily hang onto to what we have out of fear that we someday we won't have enough. And when we do this we show how little we've really studied the scouting report on God.

There's a parallel here with the lesson we read earlier from John 6, remember? There on the shores of Galilee a multitude of 5,000+ people had gathered around Jesus. And like the children of Israel after a long day they grew hungry. So Jesus' disciples found a little boy who happened to bring his lunchbox along. Andrew says, *"Here is a boy with five small barley loaves and two small fish, but how far will they go among so many?"* (John 6:9) Sounds like Moses, doesn't he? He thinks, "I can't believe I'm even asking this silly question. Obviously they won't go very far!"

But what did Jesus do? You remember? He took that little boy's lunch and the first thing he did was he gave thanks. He gave thanks for even this little lunch that what was brought to him. Nothing in the hands of God is too meager, friends, for he can move mountains. God specializes in impossible. Do you believe that? So Jesus gave thanks for what they had, he didn't complain about what they didn't have. And then what happened? He provided more than they could have ever expected. In fact, remember what was left? Twelve basketfuls leftover. Can you imagine the excitement of that little boy who

brought his lunch hauling those twelve baskets home? “Look, mom, look what Jesus did!” And the scouting report about Jesus got around in a hurry.

Of course his miracle on the shore of Lake Galilee feeding 5,000+ wasn’t just about providing food for people’s tummies. Just like God providing manna for the Israelites in the desert wasn’t just a lesson about his ability to provide daily bread. That was partially true. But Jesus’ miracle on the shores of Galilee was meant to give us a scouting report of God’s ability to provide what we really, truly need the most.

And friends, what do we need the most? The same thing the Israelites needed! Not just an abundance of food, but an abundance of faith. Not just the good gifts of God, but the goodness of God himself. The full and free provision of the forgiveness of sins and freedom from the thought that everything depends on us and finally eternal life in heaven itself. Because what we need, friends, even more than our daily bread is Jesus the bread of life himself. We need the one who declared, *“I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will never go hungry, and he who believes in me will never be thirsty”* (John 6:35). And where can we find him? Right here where Jesus is present today through the preaching of his holy Word. Right here where Jesus is present today in the sacrament of Holy Communion. How do I know? Because he says so. He’s our Savior God who makes the impossible possible just like he did when fed 5,000+ with a little boy’s lunch, just like he did when he came back to life on Easter, just like he does today as he comes to us through his word and sacrament.

And if he can do things like this, if this is the scouting report!... what else can he do? He can provide all we need for daily life too. And he knows just what you need. Is the LORD’s arm too short? Nope. God can do anything! So give what you have to God and then just let him go with it, let him bless it. That’s what the little boy did with his lunch. He brought it Jesus. He put it at Jesus’ disposal. And then he got out of the way and watched what Jesus would do with it. What if we all had that attitude with our time, with our money, with our lives? Or do you think the arm of the LORD is too short? Amen.

### **My Next Steps**

**Question to Discuss:** Which is harder to do? 1) To be content with whatever God has already provided for you without complaining, craving something else, or stirring up conflict? Or 2) To expectantly trust that God is more than able to provide you with whatever you need beyond whatever you could ask or imagine?

**Treasure to Share:** *“I was young and now I am old, yet I have never seen the righteous forsaken or their children begging bread. They are always generous and lend freely; their children will be blessed”* (Psalm 37:25-26).

**Challenge to Accept:** The next time you hear a Christian brother or sister complain about their lot in life, trying responding with the question, “Is the LORD’s arm too short?” It might sound like a secret code!...but use it as an opportunity to share the scouting report on God’s ability to provide: whether abundance or contentment.