

Victory of the Lamb

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May 31, 2020

Exodus 16

Bread of life

When this pandemic hit, I tried to stay pretty positive. I was optimistic that this would blow over quickly, but about a month in I started to get irritable. Even my wife started to notice it. One day before she left the house, she looked at me and said, "You are in a bad mood."

Have you felt more irritable and angrier lately? As this pandemic continues to roll on do you find yourself getting more frustrated and anxious? I think those emotions are like the check engine light on our cars. When the check engine light comes on, it let's us know that something is wrong with the car. And we better look under our hood and figure it out.

When we start getting angry and afraid and anxious and irritable, it is signally to us that something is wrong with our heart and we'd better take a look under the hood. That's what we are going to do today. We are going to look under the hood. We are going to look at our hearts and see what's broken and find out what we can do to begin to fix it.

Today we are starting a new series called **God is here through life's wilderness**. A few weeks ago, Pastor Bill and I were thinking about what part of the Bible we should study next. We were thinking about this pandemic and all the emotions that we are feeling. We were also thinking about all the restrictions and limitations on our lives right now. We decided that our situation really connects with Israel's time in the wilderness.

Let's go to Exodus 16 and walk through Israel's story. **The whole Israelite community set out from Elim and came to the Desert of Sin, which is between Elim and Sinai, on the fifteenth day of the second month after they had come out of Egypt. (Exodus 16:1)**

This is about 1440BC. The Israelites had been slaves in Egypt for about 400 years. But after years of praying to the Lord for deliverance, God appointed Moses to lead them out of Egyptian slavery. They were rescued with God's great power as they walked through the Red Sea and overcame the Egyptians.

Now, it's been about a month and a half after they left Egypt. And instead of being grateful and positive their attitude is starting to change. **In the desert the whole community grumbled against Moses and Aaron. ³ The Israelites said to them, "If only we had died by the Lord's hand in Egypt! There we sat around pots of meat and ate all the food we wanted, but you have brought us out into this desert to starve this entire assembly to death." (Exodus 16:2-3)**

The people were getting irritable and angry. They grumbled against Moses and Aaron. They said, "Moses and Aaron, why did you bring us out of Egypt anyway. We were perfectly fine when we were slaves. We ate all the meat and bread that we wanted. But now we are starving to death."

As we go through our own wilderness experience we also might have a skewed view of the past. We might say, "Everything was going just fine. But now because of our president or because of our governor or because of this healthcare official or that person, now everything has gone wrong." And just like the

Israelites were grumbling against their leaders. We might spend all our time grumbling against our leaders.

Well, let's see how the Lord responded to their grumbling. **4 Then the Lord said to Moses, "I will rain down bread from heaven for you. (Exodus 16:4)** God promised to take care of them. He was going to provide them with their daily bread. This bread would be called Manna.

He also told Moses, **The people are to go out each day and gather enough for that day. In this way I will test them and see whether they will follow my instructions. (Exodus 16:4)** God was going to give them specific instructions to just gather enough bread for each day. And this was going to be a test for them.

Moses listen to what God told him and then he went before the Israelites and preached God's message to them. **"In the evening you will know that it was the Lord who brought you out of Egypt, ⁷ and in the morning you will see the glory of the Lord, because he has heard your grumbling against him. Who are we, that you should grumble against us?" ...You are not grumbling against us, but against the Lord."** (Exodus 16:6-8)

Moses looks under the hood of their hearts and he tells them the real problem. They are grumbling against God. They have forgotten the goodness of God. God just delivered them from Egyptian slavery. God has given them everything that they need. So they are not grumbling against their leaders, but they are grumbling against God. And their grumbling shows a lack of trust in God.

Sometimes we hear these stories about Israel and think, "If I were them, I wouldn't have been so quick to grumble against God." Well, we are in the wilderness and look at how we are responding to our situation. We need to look at our own hearts. Our grumbling and complaining, our irritability and frustration is evidence of our lack of trust in God. We have forgotten the goodness of God. I'm embarrassed how thin and superficial my faith is. How quickly I get frustrated and complain.

Then Moses says something terrifying. **'Come before the Lord, for he has heard your grumbling.'** (Exodus 16:9) In other words, come meet with a holy God. How do you think God is going to respond to all of our grumbling?

The Lord says, ¹² **"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 the Lord your God.'"**

God heard their grumbling and instead of punishing them or destroying them, he came to them with grace and mercy. He didn't give them what their sins deserve. He revealed his glory by providing them with food to eat. Every morning for the next 40 years they would find this little bread-like substance on the ground, which they called Manna.

Here's what you need to know: **God meets our grumbling with grace.**

He doesn't give us what we deserve. God revealed his grace to Israel by giving them manna everyday. How does he reveal his glory and grace to us? **"I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never go hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty...For my Father's will is that everyone who looks to the Son and believes in him shall have eternal life, and I will raise them up at the last day."** (John 6:35,40)

Jesus says that he is the bread that came from heaven. We received him when we believe in him. And we can receive him in a very real way when we take the Lord's Supper. God meets our grumbling with grace. We might be embarrassed of how we responded in this pandemic. It has exposed how weak our faith is and our lack of trust. And so we might be filled with guilt and shame. But receive right now this good news. Jesus is the bread of life. He is what your heart desperately needs. He is the bread of from heaven that will sustain your soul.

As forgiven children of God, we need to look at this pandemic differently than the rest of the world. We can't just grumble along with the rest of society. This is our wilderness experience. And how are we supposed to understand the wilderness?

Remember how the Lord your God led you all the way in the wilderness these forty years, to humble and test you in order to know what was in your heart, whether or not you would keep his commands. ³He humbled you, causing you to hunger and then feeding you with manna, which neither you nor your ancestors had known, to teach you that man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord. (Deuteronomy 8:2-3)

Moses said that God led them into the wilderness to humble them and test them. It was an opportunity to reveal what was in their heart. And he wanted to teach them to follow him. Just like good father disciplines his children, God was disciplining his people.

How did he test them? Well, do you remember what God told them to do? Each day, they were only to gather enough manna off of the ground for that day. They weren't supposed to keep any for the next day. God was testing them and teaching them to trust in the Lord for their daily bread. However some of them failed the test.

²⁰ However, some of them paid no attention to Moses; they kept part of it until morning, but it was full of maggots and began to smell. So Moses was angry with them. (Exodus 16:20)

Some of them, paid no attention and kept some until morning. Some of them failed the test. Some of them doubted God's Word.

Here's the good news. You don't have to follow their bad example. You don't have to grumble your way through the pandemic. You don't have to live in anger and fear and anxiety and frustration. So how do we face this test in the wilderness? We follow Christ's example.

In the book of Matthew, Jesus is portrayed as a new kind of Israel. Jesus goes to Egypt and they comes out of Egypt, just like Israel. Then, just like Israel passed through the Red Sea, Jesus passed through the waters of his baptism. Just like Israel went into the wilderness to be tested, Jesus also went into the wilderness to be tested. But that's where Jesus is different than Israel. He didn't eat for 40 days. And he was hungry. And the devil came to him and tempted him saying, "Poor you, your Father sent you out into the wilderness with nothing to eat. Not even a piece of bread. You must not be the son of God. You better turn these stones into bread and take care of yourself."

But Jesus didn't listen to the devil. He didn't give into frustration or grumbling or anger or anxiety. Instead he responded with Scripture. Jesus said, **"It is written: 'Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.'" (Matthew 4:4)**

Jesus stood up under the test by believing the Scriptures and living in the truth of the Scriptures. And that's how we are going to get through our wilderness experience as well. I want to teach you what to do next time you get irritable and angry. I want you to remember these three letters: **I V A**.

I stands for **Identify**. Identify the emotion that you are feeling in the moment. Are you feeling anxious or irritable. Say it out loud. The "V" stands for **Validate**. Validate that emotion. We are going through a real crisis. This is really hard. Finally, the "A" stands for **Align**. Align your heart with Scripture. Do what Jesus did and speak the truth of God's word into your situation. If you are feeling angry, remember the verse of the Bible that says, "may the peace of God that transcends all understanding guard your hearts and minds through faith in Christ Jesus."

We are going to experience all sort of emotions but we don't have to live in them. It makes me think of something that Martin Luther once said, "You can't keep the birds from flying over your head. But you don't have to let them make a nest in your hair." In other words, you can't keep yourself from feeling all these different emotions. But you don't have to live in them. You can identify them, validate them, and then align your emotions with the truth of Scripture.

I don't know all the reasons that God is allowing this pandemic to happen. But I do think one reason is to test us. This is our wilderness experience. This is our time of testing our faith. This is the time that we are to see if we really believe this stuff or not. Don't let the circumstances of this pandemic led you away from your faith. Now is the time to live day by day on the bread of life. Let us not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God. Amen.