

Many years ago there was a young man from Tanzania in Africa who had come to the USA to attend college. A comment he often made about living here was, “In America it is always “too much”. Too many choices, too much food to eat, too many things to buy. Yet with all this abundance, no one is satisfied. Everyone always want more.”

It’s true, isn’t it? When a store doesn’t sell our favorite brand of tomato sauce or our internet connection is too slow or we can’t find the style of jeans “everyone” is wearing, we’re downright upset!

Is life really about having the things we want, the way we want, in the amount we want? What do we *really* need? This morning we visit the people of Israel when they did not have too much- in fact, they desperately needed a basic ingredient of life – food. And God provided. But their heavenly Father wanted them to have more than food for the body. He wanted to give them food – better food, REAL food – that would give them life forever. How about you?

“ARE YOU READY FOR SOME REAL FOOD?”

The people of Israel were in need. It was now exactly one month since God had miraculously delivered them from Egypt under Moses’ leadership. After crossing the Red Sea they made it to the lush, beautiful oasis of Elim, where God had supplied all the fresh water they could drink. Now they were in a desert of limestone & sand. The food they’d brought from Egypt was running out with no grocery store in sight. There were hundreds of thousands of hungry mouths to feed.

This was a prime time to trust in their faithful God. *“OK now, God’s given us plenty of reason to trust him. He’s given so much proof that he cares about us. He didn’t leave us stranded as slaves in Egypt. He remembered us and brought us out with a mighty hand to take us to the land he’d promised our forefather, Abraham. He delivered us from Pharaoh’s army, the most feared superpower of our day. When we needed water and found some, it was undrinkable. And what did God do? He told Moses to throw in a piece of wood and it miraculously became fresh and good to drink. Then he led us to a lush oasis. Isn’t it obvious? If God did all this for us, surely he has a plan to feed us in the wilderness! Let’s pray!”*

But instead of trusting God and turning to him in prayer, their “solution” was to freak out and complain against their leaders: *“Moses and Aaron, you messed up! We had it so good in Egypt, but no! You had to go and bring us out here to be inconvenienced, suffer, and die.”* But their grumbling wasn’t against their God-given leaders. It was *against God*.

God had a much different solution for his dissatisfied people. He would shed his grace on them. From now on God would supply them with a special daily provision of food in the form of thin white flakes on the ground. It was a nutritious all-purpose food that could be eaten raw, ground into flour, baked in loaves or boiled like oatmeal. It had a slight taste of honey and olive oil. No plant produced it – it just appeared out of nowhere. It truly was “wonder bread.” As they picked it up and tasted it, they asked in Hebrew, “Manna?”, which means, “What is it?” The name stuck.

Every single morning the people would wake up to find a blanket of manna on the desert floor. These were God’s instructions: every day the people were to get up early and gather about 2 quarts of manna per person to feed their households. When the sun grew hot in the late morning, the manna would melt away. And there were no DAY-OLD-BREAD stores among the Israelites. God told them: **“No one is to keep any of it until morning.”** Pretty simple instruction. But of course there are always some who ignore God’s Word and think they know better. *“That can’t be right”*, they thought. But when they got up for breakfast the next morning and reached for the jar of yesterday’s manna, **“it was full of maggots and began to smell.”**

The only exception to the rule was Friday. God told them that on that morning they were to gather a two-day supply of manna because Saturday was to be their day of rest, when no work would be done. God would not send any manna on Saturday morning. But again, some people ignored God’s Word and said, *“That can’t be right”*. Were they ever surprised when they got up Saturday morning and the ground was bare. But those who took God at His Word opened their jars of manna from the day before and it was still fresh and ready to eat, just as God promised.

God was good to those gripy, whiny people. And he’s good to us gripy, whiny people, too. Friends, I

would like to believe that we have no reason at all to grumble or complain about our situation in life. We live in huge houses. We eat the best foods that the world market can provide us. We have heat for the winter and air conditioning in the summer. Most of us could live for weeks and months with what we have frozen in our freezers or stored in our shelves. Unfortunately, prosperity isn't a cure for grumbling, is it? Grumbling is what we do when we stand in front of a closet full of clothes and say, "I have nothing to wear!" Grumbling is when we say, Can you believe these mosquitos? They're driving me crazy!" That may be but we can be thankful that the same rain which has helped hatch so many bugs also nourishes our gardens and crops. "Road construction! When is it going to end?" But aren't you glad they fix roads around here? Life isn't perfect but it would be worse...much, much worse if God didn't continually provide for us. Don't lose sight of his blessings. His blessings are literally **covering the ground** of our lives.

Luther said in his explanation to the First Article. "All this he does only because he is my good and merciful Father in heaven, and not because I have earned or deserved it." Every time we put food in our mouths, we should remember that God loves us for Jesus' sake and does not treat us as our sins deserve. Every time we put our shirt on or tie our shoes, we should thank him not only for our clothes, but for not listening to our grumbling and complaining.

Our heavenly Father provided Israel with food every single day - a total of about 156,000 bushels per day, 1,092 million bushels per week – 6 days on, one day off – like clockwork. And he did it for 40 long years. Many years later Jesus would teach his disciples to pray, "**Give us this day our DAILY bread.**" God's people are not like other people. We know he cares for us so there is no need to worry or fret about tomorrow or wonder how we're going to make it. Our God will provide.

"Oh, Lord, help us to receive with thanksgiving our daily bread! We have more than enough – keep us from always wanting "too much" ...and help us to hunger for better bread, for food that lasts forever." Let's trust him for better bread, bread that satisfies the soul.

The point God wanted his people to remember was that they were on the way home. Their life wasn't about **here-** it was about **there-** in the Promised Land. They were headed toward a destination. And God would bring them safely there. But he had far more in mind than just giving them a place to settle down. They were marching toward the fulfillment of his promise to send them a Savior from sin.

So as Aaron was telling the people about the food God was going to send them "**...they looked toward the desert, and there was the glory of the LORD appearing in the cloud.**" Instead of destroying them for their grumbling, the LORD appeared to them reassure them of his faithfulness. God would carry out his greatest promise. He would bring a Savior into this world who would deliver us from death and hell by becoming the sacrifice for every sin of every sinner of all time- and nothing, not even a barren desert, could keep him from doing what he promised. He would keep his people alive and bring them to the land He had promised so that from them could be born the Savior, Christ the LORD.

As they ate their manna each morning, God wanted them to remember that life is more than food and the body is more than clothes. Their bodies would eventually grow old and die, no matter how much food they ate. The LORD who fed their bodies was giving them better bread to eat through the promise of the Savior. Just as they depended on God for daily bread to keep their bodies alive, so they depended on Him for eternal life.

God still gives us this better bread. After feeding the 5,000 Jesus told those who came to him for more, "**Do not work for food that spoils, but for food that endures to eternal life...For the bread of God is he who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world. 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 6:27,33,35)

No matter how much food we eat, no matter how comfortable our lives are, it does *nothing* for the deeper needs of life- the problems of sin that we grumble about: our lonely times, times when we hurt, when we are confused about what's going on around us, times when we are afraid, and times when we feel the guilt of our sin. Those are *hunger pangs of the soul*, and God has directions about where to get food to feed the soul. We've all tried to do it our way – by trying to fill up on the things of this life- the things for the body – but that doesn't work. God never intended it to work.

Those hunger pangs of the soul are satisfied only with food for the soul- Jesus, the Bread of Life- which God gives us to “eat” in His Word. Aren’t you ready for some real food?

God commanded Moses to gather up a bowl of manna and to put it with Aaron’s rod and the stone tablets of the 10 Commandments in the Ark of the Covenant, where it would be preserved as a lasting memorial of his faithfulness for centuries to come. As the generations came and went, it also reminded them that manna could not keep them from dying. For that they needed better bread – the Savior who would come down from heaven with eternal life for the world.

The Bibles we hold in our hands and listen to each week can do what manna could never do. Through these words Jesus feeds us with himself, the better bread from heaven. As we sit down to eat lunch today, we will expect the food that our LORD gives us to keep our bodies alive a little longer. Expect his better bread to do much more. Trust it to keep you alive forever. Amen.