Following God into the Unknown - Part 7

# (Exodus 15:22-16:18)

This morning as we continue our series entitled “Following God into the Unknown” we’re walking with the Israelites in the wilderness in between Egypt and the Promised Land. We’re in part seven of this series and it’s almost like we’ve gotten lost with them, but it’s been good because there are certain things that you can learn in the wilderness that you could never learn anywhere else. And so, if you could find your place in the second book of the Bible, we’re going to continue today in the 22nd verse of Exodus chapter 15.

If you were with us last week, we saw how God miraculously parted the Red Sea in chapter 14, and it was kind of scary because even when God makes a way, even in the midst of a miracle, the process of the miracle can be scary, it can be intense. In fact, some of you are going through something right now, because so many things are different with the challenges of COVID-19, and some of us have been affected more than others. And so, no matter whether it’s your health, your job or lack of a job, childcare, the stock market or the economy; some businesses have opened and are shutting down again, and your walking through this, some of you with your family in hand, and you don’t see anything holding it up and it can be kind of scary.

This is where the people of God were in chapter 14, they had just passed through the Red Sea on dry ground with a wall of water on their right and on their left. God had told Moses, “Tell the Israelites to move on” (Exodus 14:15). And they did, the invisible mighty hand of God held up the water until the last Israelite had crossed over. And so, they came up out of that sea bed unified like never before, they went in one way and came out another, they went in terrified and came out rejoicing, they stepped in as slaves and came out as a Nation, the people of God. And so, it was their deliverance from Egypt and their passing through the Sea that literally demonstrated the power and faithfulness of their God.

Today, you and I can rejoice in his faithfulness, because just as he was a way maker then, he is still a way maker now, and he will always be a way maker. That’s what the Bible tells us in Hebrews chapter 13:

*“Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever” (Hebrews 13:8).*

And so, we’ve seen his faithfulness, we’ve seen how he opens doors and closes doors. In fact, the only reason that many of us are able to keep it together in this pandemic is because of the faithfulness of God. The economy is unstable, COVID-19 is totally unpredictable, but God has been consistent, he’s been faithful in spite of the situations and circumstances we find ourselves in.

It’s in times like these, when I’m Following God into the Unknown, that I find comfort in the words God spoke to the apostle Paul. Apparently, Paul had been experiencing something that was painful, uncomfortable at best, and three times he pleaded for God to take it away from him, but God said to him,

*"My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness" (2 Corinthians 12:9).*

And so, Paul was complaining that he didn’t like it, but God said, “I’m going to use this thorn and instead of removing it, I’m going to give you the grace to endure it.”

Today, you and I are in an age of grace and in this season of our lives things are constantly changing, there is little consistency and it can be unsettling; it’s unnerving and it’s uncomfortable, but if we want to be used by God we must be willing to let our lives be disrupted. You can see this in the life of Moses, because he was minding his own business, tending to the sheep, when suddenly God started setting bushes on fire. Now, Moses had all but forgotten about Egypt because it had been 40 years, but suddenly God disrupted his routine, and speaking to him from a burning bush he said to Moses:

*“Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy ground” (Exodus 3:5).*

Like Moses, as you and I follow God in this season, our peace of mind, even the quality of our lives, is ultimately going to be determined by our ability to handle divine disruptions. You see, life is full of surprises and as followers of Christ we need to let go of the illusion of being in control. For the sake of our own peace of mind, we need to simply focus on today and not worry about tomorrow. And so, as we walk with Moses and the Israelites into the unknown, my prayer is that we may begin to better handle those surprise seasons and situations that we didn’t see coming, sensing in a deeper way where God is taking us, and trusting him on the journey even though we may be surprised by the way he takes us there.

As we continue, let’s pick up where we left off last week in Exodus chapter 15 on the shore of the Red Sea. The Israelites are rejoicing, they’re singing and dancing because of this great victory over Pharaoh and his horses and chariots. Their enemy had been vanquished by the mighty hand of God, the waves had come crashing back in, God had fought for them, now he’d closed the door, all of this is behind them, and verse 22 says,

*“Then Moses led Israel from the Red Sea and they went into the Desert of Shur. For three days they traveled in the desert without finding water. When they came to Marah, they could not drink its water because it was bitter” (Exodus 15:22-23).*

And so, God brings them out of Egypt, he gets them on the other side of the Red Sea, he closed that door, and though they had thought about going back, they’d talked about going back, but now there was no way of going back. Moses had led them three days into the desert and it’s starting to sink in, as they recognize what they’ve got themselves into suddenly they are faced with a dilemma, they discovered that there is nothing to drink anywhere. And so, the people grumbled against Moses in verse 24 saying, *“What are we to drink?” (Exodus 15:24).*

Now, for those who enjoy backpacking into the wilderness, there are some tricks to make sure that you have clean drinking water, because obviously they can’t carry a cooler full of water; and so, they bring water purification tablets so that when they find water, they can safely drink it. The only problem was that the Israelites didn’t have water purification tablets, they couldn’t stop by the sporting goods store on the way, and so when they finally found water, they discovered that it was undrinkable. You see, there was just so much that they didn’t see coming, so much that was unpredictable, so much that they wouldn’t prefer, but God was about to demonstrate to them that he could be depended on in the wilderness.

This is important because there are seasons of life that are necessary, there are seasons of preparation, and as Moses cried out to the Lord, God performed a miracle that changed their entire situation.

*“The Lord showed him a piece of wood. He threw it into the water, and the water became sweet” (Exodus 15:25).*

Suddenly what was a life-threatening condition became life-giving situation. God was teaching them, he was taking them to school, he was testing them, and they weren’t even aware that they were in class, but verse 25 says,

*“There the Lord made a decree and a law for them, and there he tested them. He said, "If you listen carefully to the voice of the Lord your God and do what is right in his eyes, if you pay attention to his commands and keep all his decrees, I will not bring on you any of the diseases I brought on the Egyptians…” (Exodus 15:25-26).*

And so, God performs this miracle and then he takes them to school and tells them that in order to receive his blessing they must do three things: they must listen to him, pay attention to his commands, and keep all of his decrees. Then he declared in verse 26,

*“…for I am the Lord, who heals you” (Exodus 15:26).*

And so, he said, if they would believe, if they would do these three things, he would protect them from disease and his declaration still applies today.

I want to encourage you to open yourself to his healing power, to listen to him, pay attention to his commands, and keep all of his decrees, because God’s blessing is a present-day reality. He brought the Israelites into the desert and tested them because it was a place of preparation. He was teaching them that he’s not just their Creator, he’s not just their Savior, but he’s their healer. Later he would teach them through the prophet Isaiah about his Son Jesus Christ; who was pierced for our transgressions, crushed for our iniquities, whose punishment brought us peace, and by whose wounds we are healed (Isaiah 53:5).

Now, last week we saw that the miracle was in the movement, but it’s not just attached to what we start doing, it is also attached to what we stop doing. God said, listen to him, pay attention to his commands, and keep all of his decrees, because he is the Lord who heals. And so, he’s teaching them to put themselves in a place positionally to receive his blessing and they’re going to discover in this season that there are certain issues, certain things that had to be cut away, that had to be let go of before they could enter the Promised Land.

And so, God is schooling them, teaching them to obey him, to depend on him, and giving them the opportunity to deal with some things that can’t go with them where they’re going. And the Bible tells us in verse 27,

*“Then they came to Elim, where there were twelve springs and seventy palm trees, and they camped there near the water. 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. In the desert the whole community grumbled against Moses and Aaron” (Exodus 15:27, 16:1-2).*

Now, remember for 400 years they’d been slaves, they simply followed directions and all their needs were taken care of, but now they’re out of Egypt, but Egypt wasn’t out of them. And so, God was teaching them and helping them adjust their attitudes so they could see him and see themselves properly. This was a season that was unavoidable and how they managed it would determine whether or not it was just a short season or prolonged indefinitely.

And so, they’ve grown accustomed to having all the food they wanted and now it’s not there anymore and so they grumbled against Moses and Aaron but God was teaching them to depend on him, because there were some things that they needed to learn about God’s provision. And in verse three, they started getting hungry and so they were like we want some bread, we want something to eat and they complained,

*“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 16:3).*

They were in for a surprise because they were going to learn to trust God for their daily provision. But right now, they’re wishing they were back in Egypt, they don’t understand what God is doing, they’re trying to do his will, but they’re feeling these hunger pains. And in verse four, the Lord said to Moses,

*“I will rain down bread from heaven for you. 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).*

In other words, God promises supernatural provision, he’s going to provide for them new resources, new provision, each new day, just as Jeremiah tells us, his mercies are new every morning (Lamentations 3:23). And so, they are going to get it fresh every morning and that has been God’s plan ever since.

You see, God’s desire is that we would gather each morning all the spiritual resources we need for today. In fact, Jesus said this speaking of himself,

*“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 6:33,35).*

And so, each morning we’re to get a fresh helping of Jesus, getting his perspective, and getting his strength, because old, dry, crusty bread just won’t cut it. You need what Jesus has prepared for you fresh each day; you need to hear from heaven each day if you’re going to live victoriously in this season.

And the Bible tells us, that day, the glory of the Lord appeared in a cloud and verse 13 says,

*“That evening quail came and covered the camp, and in the morning there was a layer of dew around the camp. When the dew was gone, thin flakes like frost on the ground appeared on the desert floor. When the Israelites saw it, they said to each other, "What is it…?” (Exodus 16:13-15).*

They asked for bread and I guess they thought they were going to get a loaf of Wonder Bread, I don’t know, but what they saw on the ground looked so much different from what they were expecting, they didn’t even recognize that God had answered their prayer. God rained down manna from heaven, it wasn’t gluten-free, but it was good, and it was sweet. They’d never seen anything like it before and so they said to each other in verse 15,

“What is it?" For they did not know what it was. Moses said to them, "It is the bread the Lord has given you to eat. This is what the Lord has commanded: 'Each one is to gather as much as he needs. Take an omer for each person you have in your tent” (Exodus 16:15-16).

And so, God is dropping bread out of heaven and all they had to do was walk out of their tents in the morning with their baskets, gather it up, and bring it back to their mother to bake it. What’s amazing about this chapter of Scripture is how in this season of their lives, when their faith was the weakest, God was the most miraculous. And so, he brought them out of Egypt and into the desert to teach them to depend on him, to seek him for their daily bread, and here they are in the desert and God sends them quail and manna to eat.

I wonder if any of you have been in that place where you felt like God cut you off from something, and you were tempted to think that God had abandoned you, but the reality is that you were just in school, because God knows how to feed you in every season. Sometimes the way he feeds you may change, the frequency may change, the form may change, but he’s teaching you to be content whatever the circumstances. The apostle Paul said it this way,

*“I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want” (Philippians 4:12).*

In other words, “I’ve learned the secret in any season, that when the supply I’m used to isn’t there, God is leading me into another season, because his provision is seasonal but it’s also proportional.” You can see this in verse 17,

*“The Israelites did as they were told; some gathered much, some little. And when they measured it by the omer, he who gathered much did not have too much, and he who gathered little did not have too little. Each one gathered as much as he needed” (Exodus 16:17-18).*

And so, God’s provision was proportional to their need. In other words, it’s just as the Lord taught us to pray, “Give us today our daily bread,” give us the provision that we need to get through this day, not today’s bread tomorrow or tomorrow’s bread today, but give us today our daily bread (Matthew 6:11).

What I hope you understand is that what God was teaching them way back then, he is still trying to teach us today, because not only does he know what you need, but he is able to meet your needs today. In fact, the apostle Paul said it this way in Philippians chapter 4,

*“My God will meet all your needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 4:19).*

And so, God will give you strength for today’s weaknesses, provision for today’s needs, peace for today’s problems, hope for today’s worries, comfort in the middle of today’s pain, because God knows exactly what you need. He’s going to measure it out according to your need, because his provision is proportional.

I hope you’re getting this word, that it’s settling deep in your soul, that God is feeding you right now, he’s nourishing you in the words of faith (1 Timothy 4:6). Because we don’t “live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God” (Matthew 4:4). And so, I want to encourage you in the Word, teach you the Word, getting you in the Word, so that as first Peter says you,

*“Desire the pure milk of the word, that you may grow thereby” (1 Peter 2:2, NKJV).*

You see, God’s going to feed you in a way that is proportional to what he has called you to do. And so, I don’t want you to miss the fact that he created you for a purpose and his provision is dependent upon your next step of faith. The miracle is in the movement and I hope that you can get this, because I’m trying to get you to see that we often overlook what is right in front of us because we’re so distracted by what we used to have or where we used to be.

Sometimes we can be so busy looking for a miracle that we miss the one we’re experiencing. You know, that was one of God’s greatest critiques of Israel, that he had done all these miracles and yet they had this sense of entitlement and hadn’t even responded properly to what he’d already done in their lives. And so, he said through the prophet Isaiah:

*“What more could have been done for my vineyard than I have done for it?” (Isaiah 5:4).*

Of course, the proper response to the miracles and the provision of God is praise because it is an expression of gratitude. And I know a lot of us feel like we’ve lost a lot, we’re going through a lot in the midst of this pandemic, but I think we would do well to pause for a minute to reflect on the manna we’ve experienced, the miracles he’s already performed, so that we’re not affected by this same spirit of entitlement.

Some of you were surprised by this season of COVID-19, but just because you were surprised doesn’t mean that you’re not prepared. Your management of this time is not based upon whether or not you saw it coming, because if God allowed you to experience it, you need to recognize that God has prepared you for it. If he brought you to it, he’s going to bring you through it. And so, when those plagues hit Egypt, he was getting his people ready. When he brought them to the shore of Red Sea, he was getting them ready. When he split the Sea and they walked through on dry ground he was getting them ready. And there are some of you right now whom God is getting you ready, he’s getting you prepared, he’s taking you to school.

Now, he doesn’t always do what we want him to or what we ask him to, he doesn’t always come through in the way we expect, but there has never been a time that he hasn’t come through. You may not have seen it coming in the spring of 2020, but God got you ready for it, and if you are willing to manage this season, to manage this manna, you will discover on the other side of this wilderness is a land flowing with milk and honey, because God always makes good on his promises.

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