

People of God, there are stories of men who have spent so much time in prison, that once they are let out, they no longer know how to live and act as free men. The demand upon them by society to work and pay the bills becomes too much for some folks who have had to ask permission to use the bathroom everyday of their life for the past 25 years, and have been fed three meals a day. Prison life after awhile becomes comfortable and stable, even with all the attendant dangers. People adjust themselves to the routine. And when they are finally let go on parole, some people simply do not know how to think or care for themselves any more, and so they commit a crime just so they can get arrested again and go back to the familiarity of prison. And some people just end up killing themselves, because life is too hard on the outside.

This is the story of Israel in slavery in Egypt. God is committed to freeing them from their slavery, but Israel doesn't want to go free. They want to remain in bondage to Pharaoh, because the familiarity of slavery and its hardships is more comfortable than the uncertainties and dangers that freedom under God has, with its attendant hardships.

At first when Moses shows up and tells Israel that they are going to be freed, there is going to be a jail break, and so they rejoiced and they bowed their heads and worshiped God. But Pharaoh soon crushed their spirits when he took away the straw for building bricks, and yet demanded that Israel still make the same amount of bricks, and punished them for their inability to make the same amount of bricks when they didn't. And right away the children of Israel resented Moses and the Lord for creating trouble between them and Pharaoh.

But God promises again saying: *'I am the LORD; I will bring you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians, I will rescue you from their bondage, and I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with great judgments. <sup>7</sup>I will take*

*you as My people, and I will be your God. Then you shall know that I am the LORD your God who brings you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians. <sup>8</sup>And I will bring you into the land which I swore to give to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; and I will give it to you as a heritage: I am the LORD.’ ” <sup>9</sup>So Moses spoke thus to the children of Israel; but they did not heed Moses, because of anguish of spirit and cruel bondage.*

God is unrelenting in His grace, and determines to deliver Israel out of Egyptian bondage with a strong hand, and make them free men. So God destroyed Egypt with Ten Plagues, and finally Pharaoh lets them go. Israel makes it to the Red Sea but turns around and sees Pharaoh chasing after them with his chariots in order to bring them back to Egypt. “And so they were afraid and said to Moses, “Because there were no graves in Egypt, have you taken us away to die in the wilderness? Why have you so dealt with us, to bring us up out of Egypt? <sup>12</sup>Is this not the word that we told you in Egypt, saying, ‘Let us alone that we may serve the Egyptians’? For it would have been better for us to serve the Egyptians than that we should die in the wilderness.” (Exodus 14:11-12)

God then tells Moses to lift his staff over the sea and divide it, and all the children of Israel crossed through the Red Sea on dry ground. Pharaoh pursued them through the sea, but when every last person of Israel made it to the other side, God closed the sea on top of Pharaoh and his chariots and they all drowned. Israel celebrated that day before the Lord proclaiming salvation to God who had stretched out his right hand to destroy his enemies.

Three days later, the excitement of their miraculous deliverance has worn off, and now they are without water in the wilderness. And once again they complain to Moses. And as God did before, so he did again, He miraculously provided for them. God told Moses to throw a tree into the bitter waters of Marah, and it turned the water sweet, and they drank and

were filled. This by the way, is a picture of Christ' death on the cross making the bitter waters of death sweet for us.

Then, one month after they had come out of Egypt, after they saw the ten plagues, after they crossed the Red Sea and saw Pharaoh and his chariots destroyed and celebrated on dry ground on the other side, after they drank from the sweet waters of Marah, and God going before them in a pillar of cloud and fire, they complain again. And they say, "*Oh, that we had died by the hand of the LORD in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the pots of meat and when we ate bread to the full! For you have brought us out into this wilderness to kill this whole assembly with hunger.*"

God had redeemed them by his mighty hand, and now they are saying that because the demands of freedom in God are too much, too difficult and at times uncertain, they would rather have been also reckoned as God's enemies and destroyed by his hand in Egypt too, along with Pharaoh and his armies.

But notice how God responds to their complaining. They wanted to go back to the comforts of prison, they wanted to go back to the familiar and predictable life under bondage. They thought that at least there they could sit by pots of meat and eat bread to the full. But here they are in the wilderness, and they have almost nothing.

Nothing, except God of course, which to an unbelieving people, God is as good as nothing. For a people who love their slavery, God is liability. To the unbelieving heart that is enslaved to its sins, vices, and lusts, God seems like the Devil. Like God only comes to steal, kill, and destroy. But

This is how the Devil corrupts the minds of his slaves, such that the one who comes to set them free from their slavery is only seen as a nuisance and troublemaker.

And indeed, God is nuisance, and does indeed make trouble for those who have been held captive by the Devil for so long. God is the business of breaking prisoners free, and that, People of God, is more often than not is very uncomfortable. Thus they complain.

So God says to Moses in response to their complaining, *Behold, "I will rain..."* and we think, Uh oh...what is God going to rain? These people grumble and murmur and complain, they wish they would have died back in Egypt, they are not thankful for what God has done for them, they would rather be reckoned as God's enemies and die by His hand. What is God going to rain on them? A flood? Fire and brimstone? Hail?

God says, *Behold, I will rain, bread from heaven for you.* Heh... Amazing! God could have right there destroyed them for their disrespect and unbelief and thanklessness, but instead he pours grace on top of grace, and mercy on top of mercy. You see, God is fiercely loyal to his covenant that he made to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. He promised to bring these people into the promised Land, and God will in fact do it, even if he has to drag them kicking and screaming.

This is what the Bible means when it says, the steadfast love of the Lord endures forever. God is determined to bring us out of our bondage to Satan, and to break our dependence upon the pleasures of sin. And so God not only brings them out of Egypt, despite their grumbling, but through his grace and mercy and provision seeks to soften their hearts further and win them to His love by being ever gracious to them in their weakness. God is determined to not just bring us out of Egypt, but God's grace also works to bring Egypt out of us.

And so God promises to rain bread from heaven and to give them meat to eat. That is what they want, isn't it? They want to eat the meat of Egypt,

and the bread of slavery. This is what they are used to. And we too, like them, desire to be satisfied, and we often find such satisfaction in the pleasures of sin. Although God has brought us out of Egypt, so often we are tempted to go back, aren't we? So often the flesh just longs to go back to the old way of our sinful lives.

We think that if we can just sit by the meat pots, or, the flesh pots, they are called, and consume all we want, that we will feel good and satisfied.

But you know people of God, that when you go back to trying to satisfy the longings and desires of the sinful flesh, there is nothing for you there but slavery. As Paul says in Romans 6 - *"Do you not know that to whom you present yourselves slaves to obey, you are that one's slaves whom you obey, whether to sin leading to death, or to obedience leading to righteousness."*

When you eat flesh of sin and the bread of Satan to the full, you actually starve your soul and enslave it further. There is nothing there for you anymore. *"But thanks be to God that though you were slaves of sin, yet you obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine to which you were delivered. And having been set free from sin, you became slaves of righteousness."*

To bring a people to freedom God must break the slave's appetite away from the tyrant's provisions. Tyrants, both physical and spiritual, will always put themselves in the place of God. And they will keep you enslaved by first making you addicted to their delicacies and delights, and then once you are addicted to their pleasures they keep you coming back again and again by providing the pleasure for you. And then they get you to do their bidding for them by promising you free access to the thing they just enslaved you to.

This is how drug dealers create addicts, this is how tyrannical governments create slaves, and this is how Satan keep us in bondage as well.

The meat pots and bread of Egypt exist in such great abundance in order to keep the slaves ankles from growing so thin that they would slip out of the chains. But the thing is, that with so many meat pots, with so much bread that satisfies the lusts of men's hearts, you don't even need chains to keep people in bondage. They have created willing slaves. It's like Aldous Huxley saw in his book *Brave New World*, the most efficient way to control a population of people is to get them to love their slavery. And this is what our generation is like today, People of God.

We are stuffed and over saturated with the abundance of opportunities to satisfy the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life. We have our own form of meat pots filled with sins sirloins, and filets of the flesh, and the bread of bondage. And as long as these things which give us a sense of comfort or pleasure, we do not want to let it go. We would rather die in our sins, chained to the bars of bondage and be destroyed by it, rather than be set free and follow God and learn to become slaves of righteousness. So we need God to break us free even from our desire for sin.

God may have freed Israel from Egypt, but their complaints clearly reveal that they are indeed still enslaved spiritually. People who love their sin and the comforts it brings, are the same people who will groan and lament and grumble at the prospects of freedom when it is offered to them.

But in raining Bread from Heaven, God is not just giving them what they want; he is providing for them what they actually need. And he shows them what they need by providing a test for them. They need to not live

by bread alone, but they need to live by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God. They need to live by believing and obeying God's word. This is the real bread from Heaven.

So God, by providing bread for them every morning, is retraining Israel to hunger for righteousness. God knows we have hungers, God knows we seek to satisfy our spiritual longings by turning to all the wrong things, so he presents the manna every day in order to change the desires. So as the dew evaporated it would leave behind this white stuff on the ground, and the Israelites had to gather it up every morning.

They had to gather it early, for they waited too long it would breed worms and stink. And they were not to gather up too much of it to horde it, for this would not teach them to trust in God to give them their daily bread, but they would be trusting in their own ability to horde it.

And so, if they gathered too much manna and tried to store it over night for the next day, it bred worms and it was no good. So they could only gather enough for one day for each of their families.

Except on the Sabbath. God would not rain manna from Heaven on the Sabbath, and so God commanded that they gather twice as much on the sixth day to carry over to the seventh day so they could rest on the sabbath. And this was the only day when the manna did not breed worms when left over to the next day.

Now this happened throughout the whole 40 years of wilderness wandering. God miraculously provided bread from heaven for them until they came to the boarder of the promised land, where God then provided the land filled with food for them. God was trying to create within them new habits and hungers for him and his word, by testing them morning and evening. And in this way, God says, that you shall know that I am the

Lord who brought you out of the land of Egypt. The Lord who brings us out of our slavery to sin, self, and Satan creates new habits and hungers, such that Jesus says, I am the Bread of Life. *“He who comes to me will never hunger.”* This doesn’t mean that Jesus will quench all hungers altogether, but spiritually speaking, there is no reason to go looking around to be satisfied with anything else. The quest stops with Christ. Once you tasted that the Lord is good, and the He is the best and true Bread of Heaven, you will no longer crave anything else.

So, God has to test them, and of course they fail the test. They tried to gather up too much in order to carry it over to the next day. And of course, it turned to worms and it stank, as God said it would. And then on the Sabbath people went to gather manna when there wasn’t any, despite God’s clear command. And God said to Moses, and this is the key part here – *“How long do you refuse to keep My commandments and My laws?”* Remember, the test was this: *“to see whether they will walk in my law or not.”*

The story immediately afterwards in Exodus 17 shows Israel complaining again, this time that they had no water. And they said the same thing to Moses again, *“did you bring us out of Egypt to kill us and our children and our livestock with thirst?”* It is the same old thing. Numbers 14 tells us that Israel had complained and murmured Ten times in the wilderness, never learned to trust God, which means they had their bondage to Pharaoh broken. Sure they might not be in Egypt physically anymore, but they were still very much slaves to Egypt. They were not obeying God’s word, not seeking to live by the words of eternal life, but instead they only ever sought to live for the satisfaction of their flesh, and because of this God at last swore in His wrath that they would all die in the wilderness and not enter into God’s rest.



God is trying to teach us here, People of God, that the real food we need to be concerned about is the True Bread of Life from Heaven – the Word of the Lord, the Lord Jesus Christ. And if we do not find our satisfaction in Him, if we do not seek to develop new daily habits of hunger for God and Word, then we are in danger of replacing the life of God's word with the false life of sin, or even just the physical gifts of God, that are not sin.

The Lord Jesus Christ relates this whole narrative to himself in John 6. Jesus says to the Jews,

*“Do not murmur among yourselves. <sup>47</sup>Most assuredly, I say to you, he who believes in Me has everlasting life. <sup>48</sup>I am the bread of life. <sup>49</sup>Your fathers ate the manna in the wilderness, and are dead. <sup>50</sup>This is the bread which comes down from heaven, that one may eat of it and not die. <sup>51</sup>I am the living bread which came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever; and the bread that I shall give is My flesh, which I shall give for the life of the world.”*

If you want to no longer remain a slave to sin, and you want to learn how to be a slave to righteousness – which is to say, how to be a free man under God, and if you want to make it through the wilderness of this life, and make it beyond the Jordan River and enter into the Promised Rest of the Father in Heaven, then you must understand that true life is spiritual life, true life is obedience to God's word first and foremost. True life is found in faith in Jesus Christ and obedience to His word. And you must be developing habits which will train your soul to love the Lord and His word, and to see that obedience to God's word is true life indeed.

This is the what God teaching the children of Israel with the test – Deuteronomy 8 says: *“Every commandment which I command you today you must be careful to observe, that you may live and multiply, and go in and possess the land of which the LORD swore to your fathers. <sup>2</sup>And you shall remember that*

*the LORD your God led you all the way these forty years in the wilderness, to humble you and test you, to know what was in your heart, whether you would keep His commandments or not. <sup>3</sup> So He humbled you, allowed you to hunger, and fed you with manna which you did not know nor did your fathers know, that He might make you know that man shall not live by bread alone; but man lives by every word that proceeds from the mouth of the LORD.*

You do not live by bread alone, People of God. You do not live by sustaining your physical life with earthly bread. Nor is life found in fleshly gratification.

The Lord Jesus Christ is the True Bread from Heaven, and He commands you to eat His flesh and to drink His blood, and live forever. Which means you must believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and walk in the ways of his words. For the words that He speaks are spirit and life. True life is found in obeying the word of God. And one way that you can instill this truth within yourselves is this – just as God had Israel gather the bread in the morning and the quail flesh in the evening, so too I think we should develop habits of morning and evening Bible reading with prayer.

We need to be convinced and trained to come to this realization, that we do not live by starting off our day with a piece of bread or any other breakfast food. We must begin and end our day with the word of God. The spiritual life should take primacy over the physical life in our priorities and habits and hungers, but because we have been trained in the Egyptian slave school of Secularism, we don't believe that. Which is all the more reason we need to reprogram ourselves to believe in the spiritual necessity of morning and evening prayer and bible reading as necessary for our eternal life. Because it is there in the pages of Scripture that we meet Jesus Christ, and are taught His word, and are taught to

believe and obey him. This is the most necessary thing to our eternal life and is the remedy to our spiritual hunger, and will train us in righteousness that we may be free men in the Lord, and not be enslaved to the lusts of the flesh any longer. May God give us His spirit to cultivate these desires and form them into habits, that we might learn that man does not live by bread alone but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God. Amen.