

Exodus 16:2-15
September 24, '17

“WHAT IS IT?”

THIS PASSAGE IS REALLY A FOLLOW-UP PASSAGE TO THE ONE WE USED LAST SUNDAY.

WE LOOKED AT THE END OF THE BOOK OF GENESIS & THE STORY OF JOSEPH, WHERE HIS FAMILY IS FOUND IN A PLACE OF PROMINENCE IN THE LAND OF EGYPT.

BUT AT THE BEGINNING OF THE BOOK OF EXODUS, WE LEARN THAT AFTER JOSEPH & ALL HIS BROTHERS DIED, THINGS CHANGED.

WE’RE TOLD THAT A NEW KING AROSE IN EGYPT WHO, AS IT SAYS, “DID NOT KNOW JOSEPH.”

THUS BEGINS THE PROBLEMS OF THE ISRAELITE PEOPLE & THE BEGINNING OF THE STORY OF THE EXODUS.

THERE ARE GREAT LESSONS IN THIS PASSAGE WE’VE READ THIS MORNING.

THERE’S A LESSON ABOUT THE IMPORTANCE OF FOLLOWING GOD’S GUIDELINES IN LIFE.

THE PEOPLE WERE PROVIDED DAILY SUSTENANCE WITH THE MANNA & THE QUAILS, BUT THEY WERE INSTRUCTED TO TAKE ONLY WHAT THEY NEEDED FOR THAT DAY & THEY WERE TO TAKE TWO DAY’S WORTH ON THE 6TH DAY SO THEY WOULDN’T HAVE TO WORK ON THE 7TH.

WE COULD FOCUS COMPLETELY ON EITHER ONE OF THOSE LESSONS.

HOW MUCH DIFFERENT WOULD OUR OWN LIVES BE & HOW MUCH DIFFERENT WOULD THE LIVES OF OTHERS BE IF WE TOOK ONLY WHAT WE NEEDED SO THERE WAS ENOUGH FOR EVERYONE?

AND HOW MUCH DIFFERENT WOULD OUR LIVES BE IF WE TRULY FOLLOWED THE COMMANDMENT TO “REMEMBER THE SABBATH DAY & KEEP IT HOLY?”

THE ROOT OF THE WORD “SABBATH” IS “STOP.”

HOW MANY OF US ARE WILLING TO “STOP?”

HOW MANY OF US ARE WILLING TO “STOP” & ALLOW OUR MIND, OUR SOUL & OUR BODY TO GET THE REST OUR CREATOR TELLS US WE NEED?

YES, BOTH OF THESE THEMES IN THIS PASSAGE ARE WORTHY OF OUR ENTIRE FOCUS THIS MORNING.

AND YET, THE FIRST THING THAT SEEMS TO STAND OUT IN THIS PASSAGE IS THE “COMPLAINING” OF THE PEOPLE – THE WHINING, GRUMBLING & MURMURING.

THE WORD THAT IS USED HERE FOR “COMPLAINING” IS ONLY FOUND IN THE EXODUS STORY.

IN THIS PASSAGE ALONE, IT APPEARS 7 TIMES IN THESE 15 VERSES!

THE PEOPLE SEEM TO HAVE A REMARKABLY SHORT MEMORY.

JUST 2 CHAPTERS & 6 WEEKS BEFORE THE COMPLAINING WE FIND IN *THIS* CHAPTER, THEY FOUND THEMSELVES WHINING & GRUMBLING AS THEY STOOD BEFORE THE RED SEA & IT APPEARED AS THOUGH THEY WOULD ALL BE KILLED BY PHARAOH’S ARMY.

BUT, OF COURSE, THEY WERE DELIVERED ACROSS THE SEA & MOSES’ SISTER MIRIAM LED THEM IN A JOYOUS DANCE OF VICTORY.

BUT WITHIN 3 DAYS, THEY WENT FROM BEING AN ANGELIC CHOIR TO A BLOODTHIRSTY MOB – THEY WERE WHINING AGAIN BECAUSE THEY WERE THIRSTY!

GOD PROVIDED AGAIN WITH FRESH WATER & THEY CONTINUED ON THEIR JOURNEY.

BUT NOW – JUST A FEW SHORT WEEKS LATER, THEY’RE AT IT AGAIN – WHINING & MOANING BECAUSE THEY’RE HUNGRY.

AT EVERY TURN, WHAT THEY SAY SEEMS BEYOND OUR COMPREHENSION.

“WHY DIDN’T WE JUST STAY IN EGYPT WHERE WE HAD EVERYTHING WE NEEDED?”

IS THEIR MEMORY REALLY THAT SHORT!?

DO THEY REALLY NOT REMEMBER HOW THINGS WERE FOR THEM BACK IN EGYPT?

WOULD THEY REALLY RATHER GO BACK TO THEIR LIFE OF SLAVERY?

I WONDER HOW OFTEN WE DO THAT, THOUGH.

I WONDER HOW OFTEN WE LONG FOR “THE GOOD OLD DAYS,” FORGETTING WHAT “THE GOOD OLD DAYS” WERE REALLY LIKE.

THERE’S A GREAT LINE IN BILLY JOEL’S SONG “KEEPIN’ THE FAITH” THAT SPEAKS TO THIS.

HE SAYS, “YOU KNOW THE GOOD OLE DAYS WEREN’T ALWAYS GOOD & TOMORROW AIN’T AS BAD AS IT SEEMS.”

WE TEND TO ROMANTICIZE THE PAST & TURN IT INTO SOMETHING IT NEVER WAS.

I GOT A CALL NOT LONG AGO FROM A PASTOR WHO WAS SERVING A CHURCH I HAD SERVED EARLY IN MY MINISTRY.

HE SAID, “I’VE THOUGHT ABOUT MAKING THIS CALL FOR QUITE A WHILE BUT I HAVEN’T BEEN ABLE TO BRING MYSELF TO DO IT UNTIL NOW.”

HE SAID, “I’M AT MY WIT’S END HERE. NOTHING I DO IS EVER GOOD ENOUGH.

ALL THE PEOPLE EVER WANT TO TALK ABOUT IS THE WAY THINGS USED TO BE & THEY’RE ALWAYS TALKING ABOUT ‘THE GLORY DAYS’ OF THE CHURCH.

I GOTTA ASK YOU – WERE THINGS REALLY THAT GREAT WHEN YOU WERE HERE?”

I LAUGHED & I SAID, “NICK, I THINK I MADE THE EXACT SAME CALL WHEN I WAS SITTING AT THE EXACT SAME DESK THAT YOU’RE SITTING AT NOW.

I CALLED THE PASTOR WHO WAS THERE BEFORE ME & I SAID, ‘I’M AT MY WIT’S END. NOTHING I DO IS EVER GOOD ENOUGH.

ALL THE PEOPLE WANT TO TALK ABOUT IS THE WAY THINGS USED TO BE & THEY’RE ALWAYS TALKING ABOUT ‘THE GLORY DAYS’ OF THE CHURCH.

I GOTTA ASK YOU - WERE THINGS REALLY THAT GREAT WHEN YOU WERE HERE?”

AND I THINK HE LAUGHED & SAID, ‘I MADE THE EXACT SAME CALL...’”

YOU GET THE POINT.

WE HAVE A TENDENCY TO RE-WRITE HISTORY – TO MAKE THE PAST OUT TO BE BETTER THAN IT REALLY WAS.

THAT’S WHAT THE ISRAELITES WERE DOING IN THE WILDERNESS WITH THEIR WHINING & MOANING.

THEY WERE REMEMBERING A PAST THAT NEVER EXISTED.

BEFORE WE LEAVE THIS THEME OF COMPLAINING, WHINING, MOANING & MURMURING, THOUGH, I THINK WE NEED TO LOOK AT IT FROM A DIFFERENT ANGLE.

OUR NATURAL INCLINATION IS TO READ THE EXODUS STORY & CRITICIZE THE PEOPLE FOR COMPLAINING AS MUCH AS THEY DO.

WHILE THEY CERTAINLY DESERVE SUCH CRITICISM, I THINK IT'S A BIT ARROGANT ON OUR PART.

AFTER ALL, THEY REALLY *WERE* HUNGRY HERE.

BEFORE THE CROSSING OF THE RED SEA, THEY REALLY *WERE* AFRAID OF BEING WIPED OUT BY THE EGYPTIAN ARMY.

BEFORE GOD PROVIDED WATER FOR THEM, THEY REALLY *WERE* THIRSTY.

AND IF YOU LOOK AT THE PASSAGE, WHILE MOSES MAY HAVE BEEN FRUSTRATED BY THEIR MOANS & MURMURS, GOD WAS FOCUSED ON MEETING THEIR NEEDS RATHER THAN BEING DISTURBED BY THEIR DEMANDS.

THE REASON IS SIMPLE – AT ITS CORE, OUR COMPLAINTS ARE REALLY A TURNING *TO* GOD, NOT A TURNING AWAY FROM GOD.

JUST LOOK AT SO MANY OF THE PSALMS, LOOK AT THE BOOK OF JOB, LOOK AT LAMENTATIONS & LOOK AT JESUS IN GETHSEMANE.

I THINK WE NEED TO BE CAREFUL ABOUT BEATING OURSELVES UP FOR OUR OWN COMPLAINTS TO GOD & EVEN MORE CAREFUL ABOUT BEATING OTHERS UP FOR THEIRS.

AND WHAT IS GOD'S RESPONSE TO THE PEOPLE'S COMPLAINTS IN THIS SITUATION?

HE RAINS DOWN FOOD FROM HEAVEN – “*A FLAKY SUBSTANCE AS FINE AS FROST*” THE PASSAGE SAYS.

THIS STUFF WAS UNKNOWN & UNRECOGNIZABLE TO THE PEOPLE.

THEY LOOKED AT & THEY ASKED THE QUESTION -“WHAT IS IT?” OR, IN HEBREW “MANNA?”

THAT'S WHERE THIS "*FLAKY SUBSTANCE AS FINE AS FROST*" GETS ITS NAME.

IT WAS SUCH A LITTLE THING & YET A LITTLE THING THAT WOULD SUSTAIN THEM THROUGHOUT THEIR 40 YEARS OF WANDERING IN THE WILDERNESS.

I THINK THERE'S AN IMPORTANT LESSON HERE ABOUT THE LITTLE THINGS OF LIFE THAT WE TEND TO OVERLOOK – THE TIMES WHEN GOD SUSTAINS US WITH SOMETHING SMALL & WE CAN ONLY FIND OURSELVES ASKING "WHAT IS IT?"

WE HAVE A TENDENCY TO FOCUS ON THE BIG THINGS OF LIFE. WE WANT THE BIG STUFF OF GOD.

WE WANT TO STAND ON A MOUNTAIN & SEE THE GRANDEUR OF GOD'S CREATION.

WE WANT TO SINK OUR FEET INTO THE SANDS OF AN OCEAN'S SHORE & LOOK OUT AT THE GREAT EXPANSE OF AN OCEAN THAT EXTENDS FAR BEYOND THE HORIZON.

WE WANT GLORIOUS SUNSETS & VAST FORESTS AS FAR AS THE EYE CAN SEE.

AND THAT'S WHAT WE WANT IN OUR OWN LIVES.

WE WANT THE BIG THINGS.

WE WANT OVERWHELMING DIVINE MIRACLES THAT WILL SHAKE US TO OUR CORE.

BUT WE TEND TO OVERLOOK THE LITTLE THINGS OF LIFE.

WE'RE LIKE THE ISRAELITES IN THE DESERT WHEN GOD SUSTAINS US WITH SOMETHING SMALL & WE CAN ONLY ASK "WHAT IS IT?"

"WHAT IS IT" THAT LIFTED MY SPIRITS TODAY FOR NO APPARENT REASON?

“WHAT IS IT” THAT ENABLED ME TO MAKE IT THROUGH SUCH A TUMULTUOUS ORDEAL WITHOUT FALLING APART?

“WHAT IS IT” THAT BROUGHT A SMILE TO MY FACE WHEN I LEAST EXPECTED IT?

OUR DEEPEST FAITH IS FOUND IN A TINY BLADE OF GRASS AS MUCH AS IT IS IN AN ENORMOUS OAK.

IT’S FOUND IN A BARELY NOTICEABLE ACT OF KINDNESS, A BRIEF MOMENT OF PRAYER, A GENTLE TOUCH OF LOVE & COMPASSION, AN UNEXPECTED CARD OF THANKS.

IT’S FOUND IN A TINY INFANT IN MARY’S ARMS, IN THE HEM OF JESUS’ GARMENT, THE TIP OF A NAIL IN THE CENTER OF HIS PALM.

“WHAT IS IT?” WE ASK & IT IS NONE OTHER THAN THE HAND OF GOD OFFERING US MANNA IN THE WILDERNESS OF OUR LIVES.

I’LL NEVER FORGET A MOMENT WHEN THIS CAME THROUGH TO ME.

IT WAS MANY YEARS AGO BUT I THINK OF IT OFTEN.

WE WERE IN FRANCE, OUTSIDE PARIS AT THE MAGNIFICENT PALACE OF VERSAILLES – ARGUABLY THE MOST BEAUTIFUL GARDENS IN THE WORLD.

DEREK WAS JUST A TODDLER & HE WAS STANDING AT MY SIDE AS I LOOKED OUT FROM THE TOP OF THOSE GARDENS ONTO ACRES & ACRES OF BEAUTY THAT LITERALLY TOOK YOUR BREATH AWAY.

I SAID, “DEREK, LOOK AT HOW PRETTY IT IS!”

AS I LOOKED DOWN AT HIM, I REALIZED THAT HE COULDN’T SEE OVER THE PRECISELY MANICURED SHRUB IN FRONT OF US.

I WAS ABOUT TO PICK HIM UP SO THAT HE COULD SEE THE BEAUTY ALL AROUND US WHEN I REALIZED HIS ATTENTION HAD BEEN DRAWN TO SOMETHING ELSE.

HE HAD REACHED DOWN & PICKED UP A TINY PEBBLE & HE HELD THAT PEBBLE IN HIS HAND & WAS ROLLING IT AROUND, COMPLETELY CAPTIVATED BY ITS COLORS.

I LEARNED A VALUABLE LESSON FROM A TWO-YEAR OLD TODDLER THAT DAY.

REGARDLESS OF OUR VANTAGE POINT, THERE IS BEAUTY THAT STANDS IN FRONT OF US.

“WHAT IS IT?”

IT IS THE HAND OF GOD REACHING DOWN TO SUSTAIN US IN ALL TIMES OF LIFE. AMEN.

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