

Exod. 16:1-21

He that gathered much had nothing over, and he that gathered little had no lack – v. 18

One of the clearest indications of the bounty that we enjoy in this nation can be seen in the *all you can eat buffets*. For a fixed price you're allowed to help yourself to all that is available. You can create as large a salad as you want. You can eat all the chicken or fish you want. Children can have all the desert they want. Or if you prefer you can go to another kind of buffet and eat all the Chinese food you want.

The problem I have with these buffets is that I enjoy them too much. You almost feel obligated to indulge to a greater degree than you ordinarily would in order to justify the expense of the meal. There certainly would be no excuse for person to enter one of these *all you can eat buffets*, pay the price for access to all that food – and still go away hungry. We truly are bountifully blessed in our nation to have things of this nature.

Now the Bible abounds with examples of how the Lord has bountifully provided for the needs of His people for food. We've read one such example in our Scripture reading today. The children of Israel had been delivered from the bondage of Egypt. God brought them out with a stretched out arm. He opened the Red Sea for them to escape. He destroyed the Egyptians who attempted to pursue after them. He demonstrated to them so clearly that they were His.

But upon their deliverance they were faced with immediate needs. They needed water and they needed food. And so they murmured – and they doubted – and they wondered just why God had led them the way He had. And as we read the passage we can see clearly why God led them the way He had. He led them to a place of dependence so that they might learn of God's faithfulness to provide for them.

It's easy for us to read such a passage and marvel at the greatness of the miraculous deliverance that God had wrought. And we think to ourselves – *how could they doubt God in the light of what they had just experienced*. But when we find ourselves in a situation of dependence – not sure how our needs will be met – I'm afraid that we're all too prone to resemble these Israelites in our doubts and fears.

And yet the Lord proved Himself faithful to the Israelites time and again. It's interesting to note the use that is made of this Old Testament passage in the New Testament. Paul refers to it in 2nd Cor. 8 – in a section of his epistle where he is addressing the issue of giving. He is referring in that chapter to an offering he was collecting for the poor saints in Judea. He elaborates in that chapter the mutual dependence and ministry that the church was to exercise to other churches.

The church at Corinth had much. The saints in Judea had little. And so the abundance of those at Corinth became a supply of the want that existed in Judea and to sanction

this process Paul quotes the words of our text in v. 15 – *As it is written, He that had gathered much had nothing over; and he that had gathered little had no lack.*

And of course the Lord Jesus made reference to this passage in Exodus in John 6. The Jews reminded Him of the fact that their fathers ate manna in the desert. And then Christ pointed out to them that it was His Father that provided that manna – not Moses. And then Christ went on to draw an important spiritual application from that event. He says in Jn. 6:32ff – *my Father giveth you the true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is He which cometh down from heaven, and giveth life unto the world. V. 35 – And Jesus said unto them, I am the bread of life: he that cometh to me shall never hunger; and he that cometh to me shall never thirst.*

Realizing the spiritual truth behind this event in Exodus 16 we can certainly say spiritually that *he that gathered much had nothing over and he that gathered little had no lack.* In other words – Christ, the bread of life, is sufficient for every need we face and there is no excuse for going hungry – spiritually speaking, any more than there would be an excuse for leaving that *all you can eat buffet* still being hungry.

How is it, then, that Christians are hungry? How is it that you can meet up with those who are Christians and they testify that they're spiritually famished? They feel so unsatisfied. Their hearts are empty. There's a deep longing within them for something more. They find their religion to be a source of drudgery. Week by week their burden grows heavier as they're reminded of their shortcomings and their need to improve.

In a sense you could say they're no different from the Israelites while they were slaves in Egypt. Their masters demand more bricks and will not give them any straw. This should not be the case with God's redeemed ones. For like the Israelites, they too, have been delivered from the guilt and bondage of sin. Your salvation is no less miraculous when you consider the power that God wrought for you and in you to bring you to Himself.

And did He do this for you in order for you to starve? Like the children of Israel we're sometimes tempted to wonder, aren't we? Today I'd like to face this issue – the issue of Christians going hungry – spiritually speaking. What a strange but undeniable phenomenon! What I'd like to do today is examine some of the causes behind this hunger. And I want to do so in such a way that I answer this question:

Why Would Anybody Go Hungry?

Why would anybody go hungry at an all you can eat buffet? Why would the Israelites go hungry in the wilderness with such bountiful provision all around them? And why would any Christian go hungry when Christ Himself is the bread of life?

Consider with me first that Christians go hungry:

I. Because They Look for Something Besides the Manna

In vv. 13-15 we read: *And it came to pass, that at even the quails came up, and covered the camp: and in the morning the dew lay round about the host. And when the dew that lay was gone up, behold, upon the face of the wilderness there lay a small round thing, as small as the hoar frost on the ground. And when the children of Israel saw it, they said one to another, It is manna: for they wist not what it was. And Moses said unto them, This is the bread which the LORD hath given you to eat.*

It would have been hard to miss the manna. It was in plain sight and it was all around them. I keep making reference to that *all you can eat buffet*. Has anybody ever walked into one – paid the cashier and then looked around only to say – *where's the food?* It's right out in plain sight. The only way you could miss it would be to look at the ceiling or close your eyes.

The same holds true for Christ – who is the bread of heaven. He isn't a Savior who is far off. It is true that He is seated at the right hand of God in heaven where He makes intercession for His people. But it is not necessary for us to ascend into heaven to reach Him – or to descend into the deep to bring Him up – Paul writes in Rom. 10:6,7.

But saith it? He asks in v. 8 – i.e. what saith the righteousness which is of faith? It speaketh on this wise – *The word is nigh thee, even in thy mouth, and in thy heart.* Christ is as close to us as the word of faith. Indeed – Christ is within us in accordance with His promise that He would dwell in us by His Spirit in those that believe. He is above us. He is present with us. He has promised never to leave or forsake us. He dwells within us. All of which is to say that Christ surrounds us – above us, next to us, within us – even underneath us are the everlasting arms.

And when we are aware of how near He is – and when we see His presence as the manifestation of His love and favor and grace then all is well with your soul. When the storms of life rage – still He is near at hand. He crosses the stormy sea and rides the storm with us until at last He stills the storm by His word. When we're in what may be described as life's barren wilderness – still He's with us. He was with the Israelites. The cloudy pillar guided them by day and the fire by night. There was never a moment when God forsook His people.

Even when we go through the valley of the shadow of death – He is with us. And He has trod this path before. Christ has gone to death and come back and knows how to guide His people even in such times of crisis. There simply is no place we can find where He has not been. There is no circumstance we can experience that He is not aware of.

The Psalmist captured this truth when he said in Ps. 139 – *Whither shall I go from thy spirit? Or wither shall I flee from thy presence? If I ascend up into heaven, thou art there: if I make my bed in hell, behold, thou art there. If I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea; even there shall thy hand lead me, and thy*

right hand shall hold me. If I say, Surely the darkness shall cover me; even the night shall be light about me.

There simply is no place we can go to escape the watchcare and love and grace of our Redeemer. There are those that would find the omnipresence of God to be a troubling thought. Those that know Him not through Christ are troubled by the truth that He sees and knows their sins and that nothing escapes Him.

And this could be a troubling thought to Christians also – because we still sin and we still fall. We still are compassed about with sins that so easily beset us. The thing you have to keep in mind, therefore, is that Christ knows you – and still He loves you. You must measure your value to Him by the price He paid for you. He paid for you in blood – knowing all about you – your sins and shortcomings. Still He set His affection on you and that affection never changes.

So how do we miss Him and go hungry? The answer is quite simply we miss Him by looking for something else. And unfortunately this has become too commonplace in many Christian circles. Distressed souls think they need the expertise of humanistic psychologists and so they look for something besides Christ. They're deceived into thinking they need something more. The truth is they need much more of Him.

Guilty souls think they have to improve themselves in order to commend themselves to Christ and so they endeavor to do something that is both unnecessary and impossible. He offers Himself freely to them. And so much the more so once the sinner has gained an interest in Him. He doesn't save us and then leave us. He doesn't provide for us and then challenge us to live without Him. He meets with us in His word. And He's everywhere to be found in His word. It is unfortunate many Christians look for so many other things in the word that they miss Him – but He's there. *Search the scriptures*, He says, *for they are they which testify of me.*

Dissatisfied souls think they need a more entertaining performance and so they seek to find one – and they're not hard to find – but neither do they satisfy. They'll satisfy the flesh but eventually the heart will yearn for Christ who satisfies the deep longings of the soul. The knowledge of sins forgiven brings peace and joy. The truth that God's burning anger against us is appeased and that our sins truly are washed away is what brings strength to our souls. The truth that heaven is our home and everlasting life is our portion and Christ is our inheritance is what sets us free and motivates our love and zeal.

So let's feed upon Christ. Let's not look to the things that can't satisfy. Let's draw near to Him. Let's dwell in His presence. Let's enjoy His nearness. Let's bask in His love and favor and grace. If you'll do so you'll never go hungry. So Christians go hungry because they look for other things besides the true manna. Consider next that Christians go hungry:

II. Because They Think They Can Store Yesterday's Blessings –

Verse 19 tells us – *And Moses said, Let no man leave of it till the morning. Notwithstanding they hearkened not unto Moses; but some of them left of it until the morning, and it bred worms, and stank: and Moses was wroth with them.*

What is illustrated for us here, historically, is also taught to us as a matter of precept when Christ instructs His people to pray – *Give us this day our daily bread.* We need Christ on a daily basis.

Now in our text we're told that there were those who gathered much. And it turned out to be the right amount for them. They had plenty and enough to spare. And there were those who gathered little. There may have been those among the Israelites that were aged and infirmed. It may have taken a great effort for them to gather anything at all. And perhaps there were those who did not have the strength to gather at all. The passage teaches that what was gathered was pooled together and then distributed according to the needs and desires of each family – the point being that everybody needed something.

You could not survive long without a little food. And the passage teaches us further that God is sufficient to supply every need and every want especially in the spiritual realm. I think Christians leave off seeking Christ because they don't think they have time. There are those who are more awake in the morning and find the morning is the best time for meeting with Christ. And there are those who find the evenings to be the time when they seem the strongest.

Don't you wish you fell into one category or the other? I'm afraid that for many – maybe even most – they peel themselves out of bed in the morning. They're wasted and dog tired by the time the evening comes and they think that the effort spiritually speaking to gather manna is more than they can handle. And so they chose to go hungry instead.

They can recall times when they met with Christ. They may even recall seasons when fellowship seemed so steady and blessed. But circumstances change – responsibilities change – demands increase and so they attempt to live on yesterday's blessings. And for a time they may fool themselves into thinking that yesterday's blessings will suffice. And if this mindset is not checked then they grow weaker and weaker because of their neglect. They begin to starve without even realizing it.

Now the thing I find striking about this passage is that it didn't take a lot for some folks but it did take something. Dr. Cairns use to draw a good distinction between spending hours in study with little or nothing to show for it – versus finding 5 minutes in which you truly have met with Christ. The point being – it may not take 10 chapters a day of Bible reading. I have no doubt that such a demand would be very strenuous to some. But even a single verse can be used by the Holy Spirit to minister Christ to your soul.

There have been times when I've read chapter after chapter in search of the next sermon and I've come up empty. And then later in the day I may glance at a verse from a stack of memory verse cards that I occasionally carry with me and that single verse will come alive and reach my heart.

The Lord knows your circumstances. To those that have circumstances that are favorable to seeking Christ – then utilize your time to that end. There is more of Christ than you can possibly take in and you'll be blessed in your efforts to gather much manna so to speak. But to those who don't find themselves in those circumstances who cannot gather much – make sure you gather a little. A psalm, or a portion of a chapter – or a single verse to memorize and pray over and think upon in the course of the day can be used of God to supply your spiritual needs.

They who gathered little had no lack our text says. Christ ministered to their needs also. The thing that must be noted is that they gathered something. If I could just note before we leave this point that those who gather much as well as those who gather little will always have something of Christ to share. And oftentimes sharing what we've gained of Christ can be used not only to supply yourself but to supply someone else also. There's no excuse for going hungry. Our provision in Christ is too bountiful for that. But we can't live on yesterday's blessings. We need Christ on a daily basis. He is our daily bread. Let's make sure we gather something of the spiritual manna that we need and that is our blessed portion.

So Christians go hungry when they look for something beside manna. And they grow hungry by trying to store up manna beyond what they can or should. Consider finally that they grow hungry:

III. Because They Grow Weary of Manna –

We read a sad testimony concerning the Israelites in Numbers 11:4-6 *And the mixed multitude that was among them fell a lusting: and the children of Israel also wept again, and said, Who shall give us flesh to eat? We remember the fish, which we did eat in Egypt freely; the cucumbers, and the melons, and the leeks, and the onions, and the garlick: But now our soul is dried away: there is nothing at all, beside this manna before our eyes.*

What is it that would cause one to lose his appetite for the spiritual manna? The answer is the same as that which caused the Israelites to lose their appetite for the literal manna. It was their longing for Egypt. Or if I could put it spiritually – the longing for the world. They longed for the world's pleasures.

There is strong irony in this statement in Numbers 11. It shows how twisted and distorted a man's memory can become. They remember the fish and the cucumbers etc. But they forgot that they were slaves. They forgot the burden of their labor under cruel taskmasters. They forgot the groans and the sighs that they heaved toward heaven during those days. And most ironic of all – they forgot that their children were targeted

for destruction. They use to complain that Moses brought them into the wilderness to kill them and their children. The very opposite was the case – they were brought into the wilderness to save their children.

And they forgot their deliverance. They forgot the mighty hand of God moving against the Egyptians. They forgot the protection they enjoyed during that time of judgment demonstrating to them so clearly that God was for them. And because of these lustings – or as the margin in my Bible reads: *They lusted a lust* – their appetite for manna was gone.

We would do well to take the lesson to heart that fleshly lusts and worldly wanderings kill our appetite for the true riches of Christ. And these lusts and wanderings must, therefore be mortified. There is no place for peaceful coexistence between the world and Christ. And I'm afraid that it is the preference for the world that causes many Christians to lose their vitality and their testimonies.

It is with good reason that Paul tells us in Col. 3:5 to *mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth; fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection, evil concupiscence, and covetousness, which is idolatry.*

It is on account of these things that the wrath of God comes on the children of disobedience. They wreck our testimonies. They have the potential for destroying our homes and our churches and they rob us of what is truly blessed and satisfying.

What a mark of the strength of inbred sin that Christians could lose their appetites for the spiritual manna. It's sad that many churches and many ministries – rather than addressing the problem seek to accommodate the worldly and fleshly appetites of many. *You can have the best of both worlds* – according to this mindset.

God's word tells us however that we're to *Love not the world, neither the things in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth forever.*

Christ is the bread of life. *I am that bread of life* – He said in Jn. 6:48. He goes on to say *Your fathers did eat manna in the wilderness, and are dead. This is the bread which cometh down from heaven, that a man may eat thereof, and not die. I am the living bread which came down from heaven: if any man eat of this bread, he shall live for ever: and the bread that I will give is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world.*

Let's indulge in the right spiritual food. The Israelites were allowed to use as much manna as they desired. Everybody needed some. Much was available. There was certainly no excuse for going hungry. Neither is there any excuse for Christians to be spiritually impoverished.

There is no such thing as spiritual gluttony. In the physical realm we desire leanness of our bodies. But in the spiritual realm we dread leanness of soul. Let's think much, therefore on Christ. This is a day ordained by God to worship and fellowship with Him. May God help us all to put it to good use and feed on Christ.