

Trusting the Lord in the Desert

Exodus 15:22-16:36

Over the years I have seen two or three episodes of a show called, 'Running Wild' with Bear Grylls.

Edward Michael Grylls is his real name and he is most famous for his survival skills.

As a former member of the British Special forces he has gone through some of the most extreme training in the world in order to be able to survive in some of the world's harshest environments.

He has had a number of TV shows with survival themes and 'Running Wild' is one of them.

That show wasn't all about him though, it was about him taking a celebrity into the wild for two days to survive.

It became pretty clear from that show that surviving in the wild without bringing any food with you is a bit of a challenge.

In the episode that I watched he and the celebrity came across a dead rabbit that had been lying there for a day or two.

Grylls said to the celebrity, "That is the good source of food" and encouraged the actor to get out his knife and start carving into it.

To say the least the celebrity did not look too impressed, but nevertheless listened to the man entrusted with helping him to survive.

For a two day journey into the wild listening to the survival guide may not seem too important, but if they had to be out there for weeks on end they had better pay attention.

They had better learn to trust in their guide.

[In our text this morning Exodus 15:22-16:36 the people of Israel find themselves in a survival type of situation. They are in a desert where they run out of water and are in need of food. What they need most is not food or water though, what they need most is to trust in the LORD. In these verses we see two negative results of not trusting, a positive result of trusting, and a practical means of cultivating trust in the LORD. First we see a negative result, we see that...]

Point #1 – Failing to trust God leads to complaining.

When we live in doubt about God's future actions we will often be dissatisfied with what is happening in the present.

The Israelites have just witnessed one of the greatest miracles record in the bible and then we read this in **15:22-24**.

The problem here is not the asking for water.

They are in a desert and water is a legitimate need. God encourages us to bring our needs to Him in prayer (Matt 6, Luke 11), but that is very different from grumbling and complaining.

Asking sounds like, “Lord you know we need water and we know you are able to provide it, please show us your kindness and meet our needs.”

Complaining sounds like, “I can’t believe you brought us into the desert where there is no water, what are we supposed to do now?”

While they never stop to consider why God might have lead them into the desert, God answers the question for them (verse 25-26).

Despite their grumbling God graciously and miraculously provides them with drinkable water and we are told that God has lead them into the desert and a means of testing.

Testing is very different from tempting. Tempting is trying to get someone to sin and God doesn’t do that!

Testing, as John MacArthur points out, is subjecting something to difficulty to prove/test its quality.

Now of course God knows the outcome of every test and so we know He doesn’t do these things for His own benefit/understanding, but instead He does it for ours.

Israel doesn’t do so well because shortly after God solves their water problem, they end up with a food problem and listen to how they once again react (16:1-4).

Their memory of their time in Egypt is much different from the reality of it.

In the first part of Exodus we are told that the Egyptian king was making their labor hard for the express purpose of causing their death.

When that doesn’t work he orders the deaths of their newborn sons.

In 2:23 we are told they, “groaned in their slavery and cried out, and their cry for help because of their slavery went up to God.”

God answered that cry and now they are complaining, why? Because they don’t trust the Lord in the trial of the desert.

[When I was young I did a lot of whining and complaining, especially when it came to working around the house. I couldn’t see how it was doing me any good, I did not think they had my best interest in mind. So I said things like, “It isn’t fair” (I had no idea about fairness). I said things like, “Do I have too?” and “None of my friends have to do this stuff”. I had no idea how fortunate I was/am to have such good parents to teach me how to work hard and persevere in life.]

Take a moment and ask yourself a really hard question, “Am I a complainer?”

Are you generally a content person or generally dissatisfied with your life?

Even better, ask other people those questions about yourself?

Even better than that, ask God the Holy Spirit to search the condition of your heart.

If we find ourselves often grumbling and complaining, what does that say about us?

It says that we don't trust the LORD.

[I trust we would all agree that is bad, but it gets worse here with the people in the desert. There is another negative result of failing to trust the LORD. Not only does a lack of trust lead to being a complainer, but secondly...]

Point #2 – Failing to trust God leads to disobedience.

If people don't believe what God says, they will have no heart desire to live according to His commands.

Just as we find two examples of grumbling and complaining in this text, so we find two examples of disobedience.

I don't know if you have ever been to a desert, but there is not a whole lot of food to come by especially for such an enormous group of people.

What we need to see most here is that is not a problem for God.

He graciously provides small flakes of food that tastes like honey from which the people can make bread.

He also causes small birds called quail to show up in the evening.

So much so that we are told in verse 17 that everyone had as much as he needed.

With this miraculous gift of food God gives the people some instructions. (Verse 4, 13-16)

This was going to happen every day which means they were only supposed to gather enough for that day.

Moses makes that crystal clear in **verse 19**.

Now God could have given them enough for a week, or a month, but He only gives them a day's worth.

Why? Because it gives them a chance every single day to trust Him.

But instead of trust we find this in **verse 20**.

Notice that God makes their disobedience public.

If your tent was stinky in the morning everyone would know you didn't listen.

You may think you're getting away with your disobedience but sooner or later your sin will be found out.

Someone might think, "Well, maggots and stench is just what happens!" But look at another command God gives (Verse 5, 23-24).

God is able to preserve the manna for as long as He wishes and He does so for the people to enjoy a day of rest and worship, which the LORD calls a Sabbath.

He says there will be nothing on the seventh day, just rest and rejoice in the goodness of God on that day.

Again they disobey (**Verse 25-27**).

What's the deal with that?

Why try and keep it longer than they are supposed to? Why go look when they are told it won't be there?

The answer that makes the most sense is that they are worried they are going to run out.

They are worried they won't have enough.

[Fallen human nature has not changed a bit between then and now. I think it may have calmed down a little, but when this whole Corona virus thing started people began hoarding supplies. Toilet paper was nowhere to be found because people bought way more than they needed fearing they would run out.]

They Israelites are afraid that come tomorrow God won't provide for their needs, they don't trust Him and so they disobey.

If we don't trust God, we are going to do the same thing.

We don't trust that God cares. We don't think God has our best interest in mind. We don't believe that God knows better than we do.

If we step back and think about that for a moment we'll see how utterly foolish that is.

Even if there were no maggots, even if God sent manna on the seventh day, how long would it last if He stopped providing?

It is God Who provides for our food, clothes, air, and shelter?

Do you know what that means? It means we need God more than the rest. (Jesus in the desert).

[How are we doing in terms of obedience? Is there a resolve in our hearts to know the commands of the God and to obey them? If not, then we have a problem of faith! We are failing to trust God. The saddest part of that is that we end up missing out on the goodness of the LORD. This text also shows us the flip side of the coin. Not only do we see the negative side of failing to trust the Lord, we also see the positive side of trusting Him. That is our third lesson about trusting God in the desert. It is that...]

Point #3 – Trusting God means getting to enjoy His commands.

Listening to the LORD is always for our good, but we need to believe Him if we are going to receive the rewards of obedience.

Understandably God voices His displeasure with the behaviour of the people in response to His incredibly gracious miracles (Verse 28-29).

God has brought them into the desert to test them and to teach them that their greatest need is to depend upon Him, but so far they have done a poor job of that.

So He asks, "How long will you (plural) will you refuse to keep my commands?"

I am amazed and all of us should be amazed at how gracious God is to the people here.

He graciously provides for them despite their ungrateful grumbling and He continues to provide despite their disobedience.

But there is a sense in the tone of the question the LORD asks here that if they persist in there grumbling and disobedience there will be consequences and at produces at least a temporary change of heart in the people (**Verse 30**).

They actually obey the command regarding the Sabbath and they rest!

Who gets the benefit of that?

The people do! Remember they have been slaves all of their lives. Work has been a terrible burden to them, but now in God's cares they get a day of rest.

If you know your bibles then you know that the command to rest on the seventh day is rooted in God's creation of the universe.

God created everything in six days and then we are told in **Genesis 1:31-2:3**.

Now to get the full significance of what those verses mean we have to understand that in addition to creating everything God is also constantly exercising His power to keep everything going (**Hebrews 1:1-3a**)

God did not created the universe like a windup toy that He winds up and then let's run by itself.

He created it and He sustains it moment by moment.

Since that is true, it must mean that the Sabbath rest is about far more than just doing nothing.

The Sabbath rest is a celebration of the creating and sustaining work of God.

After collecting the miraculous manna for six days the Israelites where to pause and in a focused way delight in the LORD.

It's not simply that they get to rest from their work, they get to rest in God!

This is not an arbitrary command that God gives to the people just so that they do what He wants, it is for their good and they get to enjoy it when they obey Him.

[I have to confess that I have often over the years taken gathering today for worship on a Sunday morning for granted. I wonder if you might feel the same way. I sincerely hope that one of the things that comes out of these days where we have not been able to get together is a sincere delight in gathering for worship. God commands that for our good!]

God commands all that He does for our good.

I know there are times when God's commands might seem burdensome, but believe me when I say we will never ever regret obeying the LORD.

The words of a good old hymn have it right, “Trust and obey, for there is no other way to be happy in Jesus, then to trust and obey.”

[Hopefully we are asking the question, “How do I do that?” “How do I grow in my trust of the LORD, especially when it feels like I am in the desert and I am full of worry about what tomorrow might bring.” The LORD gives us an answer to that question near the end of our text this morning. It shows us that...

Point #4 – Remembering God’s provision in the past cultivates trust.

Having a tangible reminder of the goodness of God in the past can help to shape our present and future.

Look with me at what is said in verses 32-36.

Just so that I would get a sense of how massive this miracle is I decided to do a little math.

According to my weights and measures chart in the back of my Bible an omer is about 2L.

A number of trustworthy commentators estimate the population of the people to be about 2 million.

That is 4 million litres of manna per day, a little less than 1.5 billion litres per year, and just under 60 billion for the forty years that God sustained the miracle.

If manna happened to weigh roughly the amount of flour, then that would be 15, 500 kg per person over the forty years.

That is just staggering to me, and God wants them to remember it by preserving a single jar with about 2L for the generations to come.

Now the jar this would be kept in would not be vacuum sealed or air tight and yet it does not grow maggots or take on a bad smell, nor does it melt in the sun like all the other manna.

Why? Because God preserves it so that His people can look back and be reminded that He provided for them in the desert.

What does a miraculous provision of food over the course of 40 years tell us about God?

It tells us that God is consistent.

The people of God do not have to worry about God being faithful one day and not the next, He is always faithful.

God doesn’t get tired, He is not short on power to provide for His people.

When the morning comes He will say “Do it again!”
And the manna will be there!

It is important to have a tangible reminder of that.

[Most of us know the importance of tangible reminders. How many of you have photo albums in your house? Probably most of us do. Especially now in the digital age most of us have thousands of pictures saved on our computers. Every now and again I get to looking through some pictures and I am often surprised how it jogs my memory to think about things I haven't thought about in years. When I look at our wedding pictures for example I am reminded of how fantastic I use to look and how Michelle hasn't aged a day. More importantly I'm reminded of how much I love my wife and how much she loves me! It reminds me to strive to love her as Christ loves His church.]

We know the importance of tangible reminders and they are helpful in reminding us that God is most worthy of our trust.

Two of the best things for us in this regard is the word of God and the cross of Christ.

Michelle has done a good job of this in our home! Have Scripture hanging on our walls (Know the context, apply it rightly).

Have a cross hanging somewhere to remind you that Jesus died to make you right with God.

All of the crosses that we have hanging up in our home are empty because in addition to be reminded of Jesus' death we also need to be reminded of His resurrection.

It reminds us to trust completely in Christ for the forgiveness of our sins.

It remind us that we can rest and trust in the LORD.

Of course there is need for a word of caution here.

Never fall into the trap of superstition and begin to think that tangible reminders possess mystical powers.

This has been an ongoing problem with many in the world.

People pray to hunks of wood and bow down to statues thinking it will do them good, when in fact it will bring about their destruction.

Reminders are nothing in themselves, their only purpose is to point us to the God who is worthy of our trust.

Do you feel like you are in the desert today?

Are you struggle with discontentment and disobedience?

Pray that God the Holy Spirit would give you a heart to trust Him more fully.

Be reminded that He is most trustworthy and look forward to the joy that comes from obeying Him.