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Sermon Notes

Term – Spring 2020

Series – Guided by the Fire

Gathering & Date – 11.00 Livestream, 10 May

Title – Who's feeding you?

Preacher – Paul Langham

Reading – As we Journey with God's Old Testament people in an unknown season and an unfamiliar place, we're going to consider lessons from the most significant desert journey in scripture. You can read it the story in Exodus 12 – 40. **Our readings today** are Exodus 16: 19-31 & 35 / John 6: 25-51

Rhythms

In the desert, survival depends on water, food and shelter

In chapter 16, God gives remarkably precise instructions about the collection of manna

- It's to be collected each morning
- Once the sun grows hot, it disappears
- It won't keep for tomorrow
- Once a week, there will be enough for two days, so that God's people can enjoy a Sabbath rest

We see how the people struggle to live within the parameters and rhythms which God sets out. In what ways do you struggle in the same way?

Teaching about physical food in the OT can have spiritual parallels in the NT. As we feed on God's word, it's worth remembering

- Morning is best for most people
- Once the day gets going, the moment is often lost
- We can't store it up, having a mega-session on Monday and hoping it will see us through the week

What has the pandemic meant for your rhythms? Have they become more urgent, more intense? Or have you suddenly got little external order? In either case, who is setting your rhythms? Is God asking you to change anything about them?

Rest

Many people are surprised that Exodus 16:23 is the first mention of the Hebrew word 'sabbath' in the bible. The reference is back to God's own rest on the 7th Day, after his work of creation was finished. Note that in Genesis 1, each day begins with evening, which is why the Jewish sabbath begins at sundown on Friday and ends at sundown on Saturday. We normally see our day as starting with the work we do, and the night's rest as our reward. Biblically, we do better to see our day starting with the gift of God's rest, and the work to which we rise as our response to his goodness. I am not referring to 'work' in the narrow sense of paid employment here. Each of us is employed by God for his work in this world. There are no unemployed people in the Kingdom of God.

In v. 28, God expresses dismay (and I believe surprise) that some of the people ignore his instruction to observe the sabbath. I read it this way because in v. 29 he says that sabbath rest is a gift to his people. This explains why Jesus becomes so angry with the Pharisees' oppressive interpretation of the Day of Rest, reminding them that it was made for humankind rather than the other way round.

How might this recalibrate your approach to daily rhythm?

Remembrance

The incident with the manna is one of the few that Jesus takes and reinterprets to refer to himself. Read John 6:25-end, but also note the context in the first half of the chapter: a miraculous feeding and a supernatural passage across a sea.

In essence, in this passage, Jesus points to himself as the 'true bread from heaven' which brings life to all who eat of it. There are some wonderful promises in this passage, especially if you don't yet know Jesus and his invitation to life, but are hungry for truth and meaning:

³⁵ Then Jesus declared, 'I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never go hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty. ³⁷ All those the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never drive away. ³⁸ For I have come down from heaven not to do my will but to do the will of him who sent me. ³⁹ And this is the will of him who sent me, that I shall lose none of all those he has given me, but raise them up at the last day. ⁴⁰ For my Father's will is that everyone who looks to the Son and believes in him shall have eternal life, and I will raise them up at the last day.'

Spend some time this week praying for someone you know to look to Jesus and believe in him and so receive the promise of eternal life.

Jesus invites us to feed on him by faith.

Christians do this as they share communion, taking bread and wine to remember that Jesus gave his own life for all of us.

Archbishop Thomas Cranmer, the spiritual and liturgical architect of the English Reformation, wrote the following prayer as the people's response to having taken bread and wine. I've put it in contemporary language and invite you to use it as means of reflecting on what it means to feed on Christ.

Almighty and ever-living God,
we thank you that you graciously promise to feed us,
who have duly received these holy mysteries [*the bread and wine*],
with the spiritual food of the body and blood
of our Saviour Jesus Christ.

By this you assure us of your favour and goodness towards us:

we are incorporated into the mystical body of your Son,
the blessed company of all faithful people;
we are heirs, through hope, of your everlasting kingdom,
by the merits of Christ's precious death and passion.

Assist us with your grace, heavenly Father,
that we may continue in that holy fellowship,
and walk in goodness the way you have prepared for us;
through Jesus Christ our Lord,
to whom, with you and the Holy Spirit,
be all honour and glory, now and forever.

Amen.

Who and what will feed you this week?