

"IF ONLY..."
Exodus 16:1-21

One man said to his friend: "Say, you look depressed. What are you thinking about?" "My future," was the quick answer. "What makes it look so hopeless?" "My past."

I wonder how many of us become, at times, nostalgic and think back on yesteryear? But instead of the past being hopeless and depressing, we long for the "good old' days" when things were "better" and life was not so complex. The "good old' days:" when we were not so stressed out by all of life's difficulties and challenges.

A few years ago my Father sold the house that my brother and I grew up in. It had been a part of my life for 45 years and my parents' lives for 48 years. My Mother had died in September of 2000 and that big old three story house was just too big for my Dad to rattle around in alone. I remember our girls, who were younger at the time, say that we should buy the house to keep it in the family.

After all, that was the place we all returned to for the holidays and when we were pastoring in Butler, Pennsylvania, that was the place we would escape to when the kids were small and it was my day off. So that house had a lot of memories for me for my wife, Margaret and my children. It was hard giving up 419 Dawson Ave.- I remember going through the house after all the furniture was removed, just one more time and taking my video camera and filming each and every room in that house for posterity's sake. Selling that house was the right thing for my Dad to do and it was time to move on, time to move forward and to close that chapter in our lives. But if my sentimental gene had kicked in I might have been tempted to figure out a way, anyway, to try and keep that big old house in the family. But it just wasn't feasible, it just wasn't rational.

Dr. Warren Wiersbe says this to those who long for the "good old days"- "Do not say, 'Why were the former days better than these?' You do not move ahead by constantly looking in a rear view mirror.

The past is a rudder to guide you, not an anchor to drag you. We must learn from the past but not live in the past.” And yet you and I both know people who would like to try; who would like to live in the past.

Our scripture passage this morning tells of the people of Israel who had just set out from Elim and they have come to the wilderness of Sin, which is between Elim and Sinai. But let me take you back two chapters to set the stage. In chapter 14 we read of the people of Israel being delivered from the Pharaoh and the people of Egypt who had held them captive and tried to break them as a people. God provides a way out of Egypt and God goes with them and makes a way for them to cross the Red Sea. God parted the waters and the Israelites walked across to safety. That’s chapter 14. Chapter 15:22 and following tells us that the Israelites, now free and on their journey come to Marah, a place in the wilderness of Shur, which was a three day’s journey from the triumph of the Red Sea.

And we read that the word Marah means "place of bitterness," for the Bible tells us that they could not drink the water of Marah because it was bitter.

And so these free people begin to murmur against Moses, their leader, because, well, they were parched and thirsty. And just as God had intervened and brought these people out of Egypt, God did so again. And Exodus 15:25 tells us that the Lord showed Moses "a piece of wood; he threw it into the water, and the water became sweet." Interestingly enough, if you read on in Exodus 15:27 the very next place the Israelites stopped was Elim, and in Elim there were twelve springs of water and seventy palm trees. Just around the corner there was relief. Elim was a great place to land after the difficulties they had just come through in the wilderness. And now in Exodus 16:2 and following, they have left Elim and, verses 2-3 says, "The whole congregation of the Israelites complained against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness. The Israelites said to them, 'If only we had died by the hand of the Lord in the land of Egypt, where we sat by the fleshpots and

ate our fill of bread; for you have brought us out into this wilderness to kill this whole assembly with hunger.” “If only...”

So here it is in a nutshell: From captivity in Egypt; to freedom and the crossing of the Red Sea; to the bitter water of Marah which, thanks to Moses, became sweet; to the welcomed resting place of Elim with its twelve springs; to the wilderness of Sin where they complained. Let me share a lesson to be learned at Elim that comes from F. B. Myer, a British pastor, author, Bible teacher and evangelist from the 19th century. He suggested that **God does not multiply our Elims, for He cannot trust us there.**

Myer went on to say, “He [meaning God] gems the earth with them, to teach us that it is not all blasted, and that we are not a cursed race in a cursed world. He sets them before our eyes as witnesses that there are worlds where there is no bitterness in the fountains of life. He causes us to lie down in them, only that we may be better able to tread in the paths of

righteousness in which He may lead us.” (F. B. Meyer, *Devotional Commentary on Exodus*, Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1978, p.186)

And why can't God trust us there? Why can't we live in Elim all the time? Because in Elim we can get too comfortable, we can get too lazy, we can begin to lose touch with who's God and whose not. We can take the blessings for granted and our faith can become lazy and flabby. That is why in the New Testament at the scene on Mt. Hermon, known as the Transfiguration that we read about in Matthew 17:1-8, where Jesus is transfigured in the sight of Peter, James and John, Peter wants to stay up on the mountain. Peter wants to build three dwellings or tents. He doesn't want the miracle and the event to end. But they had to come down, for Jesus had work to do. And we cannot stay in Elim, for we have work to do and sometime our work and our comings and our goings will take us into the desert. Every now- and-then we may rest in Elim, but we cannot put up our dwelling or our tent there for a long season.

And besides, if we did not experience the difficulties of life, we would not understand and appreciate the joys. I know that is true in my case, how about you?

The people of Israel are in the wilderness with Moses and Aaron, their leaders. And they were yearning for Egypt and the "good old' days," and even though they were not that good, they at least knew what the score was- they were the captives and the Egyptians were their oppressors. They at least knew they had their fleshpots and their bread and their stomachs had some food in it and they had a roof over their heads. So here is what they faced and were dealing with- captivity in Egypt with water, food and shelter or freedom in a wilderness with the uncertainty of the bare essentials to stay alive. So now even captivity was looking better than freedom. If only....

I want to share three points from this passage that gives us a glimpse of the mighty acts of God and it all centers in on one word- MANNA. The people cry out, "If only..." and God says, "I am going (to)...."

First, **there is a token**. The people can do nothing but complain. Their faith was shaken, no, it was shallow. They had superficial trust in the God that had just rescued them from the Egyptians, and did it in, if I must say so, a pretty dramatic way- parting the Red Sea for them to cross over. But their tummies were speaking and not their hearts and minds. But here in this passage we read about a God who hears the cries of His people. Verse 11 tells us that the Lord says to Moses, "I have heard the complaining of the Israelites." God, in His loving kindness promised and provided manna so that they might know again that He is the Lord. In this miracle of manna we find a token of God's loving-kindness, loving patience and forgiveness.

God has a way of providing, not always what we think we need but what He knows we need- and there are those times that what I think and

what God thinks are not always on the same page. And that is where trust and faith comes into play.

Missionary statesman J. Hudson Taylor, (1832-1905) was an English missionary to China. He founded the China Inland Mission which at his death included 205 mission stations with over 800 missionaries, and 125,000 Chinese Christians. Taylor had complete trust in God's faithfulness. In his journal he wrote: Our heavenly Father is a very experienced One. He knows very well that His children wake up with a good appetite every morning... He sustained 3 million Israelites in the wilderness for 40 years. We do not expect He will send 3 million missionaries to China; but if He did, He would have ample means to sustain them all... Depend on it; God's work done in God's way will never lack God's supply.

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Second, **there is a test**. The manna in the morning became a test in the fact that it was given daily by God and only what was needed for that

day. Think about it- God only gave them what they needed for that day- not for that day and the next or that week, only for **that day**.

There is a phrase that goes something like this- God's provisions are "fresh every morning." Do we believe this? You know there is something about habitual hoarding- storing up in our grain barns for down the road. And while that is good for the farmer, there is something about hoarding and storing up everything that we can for tomorrow. Some of the happiest people in the world are not people who don't have any needs, but those whose needs are met by God. It is the retired person living on a fixed income but gives a tenth of their income to the church and its mission and sacrifices and makes choices that do not compromise that commitment to the tithe. And there is another type of person who is happy who has been blessed extravagantly with material resources, and, knowing that it truly is a blessing from God, gives thousands of dollars to a food pantry so that the feeding of the poor continues.

What I think God wanted to teach the Israelites through this experience is daily dependence on Him and Him alone. If God had provided over and above for these people it would have been easy to take God for granted. And God was teaching them to have total dependence and trust in Him.

And third, **there is a truth**. In providing the manna daily, God showed forth a truth in a miraculous and temporary way that speaks God's eternal word. For it is the same God who sent the manna who provides for us our daily bread and, as a result, we are dependent on Him. And this daily bread that God provides cannot be stored up or hoarded. It is new and fresh every morning.

There was another truth that was spoken in the wilderness many, many years later when Jesus said in Matthew 4:4, "One does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God." In this wilderness experience, God brought the Israelites to a humbling moment.

He allowed them to be hungry in order to provide for them manna so that He might teach them that we do not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God. And just to make a brief point to take this to yet a deeper truth, the manna in the wilderness is a "type," remember I said a "type" of Christ. For Jesus Himself said in John 6:32-33, "Very truly, I tell you, it was not Moses who gave you the bread from heaven to eat, but it is my Father who gives you the true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is that which comes down from heaven and gives life to the world." Our God does provide for His people- He provided for them in the wilderness and He provides for us now. And He provided the ultimate in His Son, Jesus Christ. Let us not repeat the mistake of the people of Israel and say, "If only" but rather focus and believe in our God who says, "I am going to," and in doing so, believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and we will be saved.

Amen.

"IF ONLY..."
Exodus 16:1-21

Introduction: I wonder how many of us become nostalgic and think back on yesteryear? We long for the "good old days"

Exodus 14 & 15

A way out of Egypt Exodus 14

At Marah which means "place of bitterness" 15:22

At Elim- 12 springs of water and 70 palm trees 15:27

Exodus 16:2-3- the complaining; "If only"

A lesson learned at Elim- **"God does not multiply our Elims, for He cannot _____ us there"** F. B. Myer

Why can't we live in Elim all the time?

Three points from this passage that gives us a glimpse of the mighty acts of God and it all centers in on one word- MANNA

First, **there is a _____**
God has a way of providing...

Second, **there is a _____**
God's provisions are "_____ every morning"

Third, **there is a _____**

Matthew 4:4

Conclusion: Let us not repeat the mistake of the people of Israel and say, "If only" but rather focus and believe in our God who says, "I am going to."