

Can You Follow Instructions?

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Exodus 16:2-15

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² In the desert the whole community grumbled against Moses and Aaron. ³ The Israelites said to them, "If only we had died by the Lord's hand in Egypt! There we sat around pots of meat and ate all the food we wanted, but you have brought us out into this desert to starve this entire assembly to death." ⁴ Then the Lord said to Moses, "I will rain down bread from heaven for you. The people are to go out each day and gather enough for that day. In this way I will test them and see whether they will follow my instructions. ⁵ On the sixth day they are to prepare what they bring in, and that is to be twice as much as they gather on the other days." ⁶ So Moses and Aaron said to all the Israelites, "In the evening you will know that it was the Lord who brought you out of Egypt, ⁷ and in the morning you will see the glory of the Lord, because he has heard your grumbling against him. Who are we, that you should grumble against us?" ⁸ Moses also said, "You will know that it was the Lord when he gives you meat to eat in the evening and all the bread you want in the morning, because he has heard your grumbling against him. Who are we? You are not grumbling against us, but against the Lord." ⁹ Then Moses told Aaron, "Say to the entire Israelite community, 'Come

before the Lord, for he has heard your grumbling.’”¹⁰ While Aaron was speaking to the whole Israelite community, they looked toward the desert, and there was the glory of the Lord appearing in the cloud.¹¹ The Lord said to Moses,¹² “I have heard the grumbling of the Israelites. Tell them, ‘At twilight you will eat meat, and in the morning you will be filled with bread. Then you will know that I am the Lord your God.’”¹³ That evening quail came and covered the camp, and in the morning there was a layer of dew around the camp.¹⁴ When the dew was gone, thin flakes like frost on the ground appeared on the desert floor.¹⁵ When the Israelites saw it, they said to each other, “What is it?” For they did not know what it was. Moses said to them, “It is the bread the Lord has given you to eat.

Some of the most important responsibilities that parents have is in teaching their kids instructions on how to become a fully functioning member of society. We teach them about the value of money. We teach them about how they need to be respectful to other people even if they disagree with them. We teach them the importance of following the law even when a particular law may seem unfair. Ultimately, we want them to know how to handle life, and we want them to be happy and safe. It is also important to note that much of what we learn as parents came because of what we were taught by our parents. In other words, without grandparents who could teach our parents, how could our parents teach us so that we can teach our children? It has to

start somewhere. Values must be passed down in one form or another. We have to learn how to follow the instructions that we are given.

The Israelites were not given instruction by grandparents in the same way that we do today, but they were given instructions that were hard for them to listen to. Many sought to do things their own way. When they did, it was almost a guarantee that it would not work out well for them. Remember that as we dive into our verses again.

2 In the desert the whole community grumbled against Moses and Aaron. 3 The Israelites said to them, “If only we had died by the Lord’s hand in Egypt! There we sat around pots of meat and ate all the food we wanted, but you have brought us out into this desert to starve this entire assembly to death.”

Let’s set the scene here. The Israelites were recently freed from slavery under Egypt. They saw the plagues wipe out the Egyptians. They saw the parting of the Red Sea. They saw the waters come back and destroy their pursuers, but they continued to complain and complain. Nothing God was doing for them was enough. They were given manna. They were allowed to see the glory of God appear as fire and a cloud. They were given many, many chances, but they continued to defy God. Everything they could need was being provided by miraculous means, but instead they wanted to keep complaining about what they didn’t have.

We tend to do this too. We get so many blessings from God, but we turn a blind eye to it because we don't think that we are getting the blessings that we deserve. We tend to believe that we are entitled to whatever we want because we are good people who are following God's ways, when in reality, we are so envious that we can never seem to be truly satisfied. I would like to stop being selfish and self-centered, but man is it difficult while containing the desires of the flesh!

We also have difficulty remaining faithful when hardship comes our way. I talked before about how even through hardship God is still with us, but even if we know that in our mind and have even told ourselves that enough, that doesn't mean that we are aware of Him during the trial. The Israelites knew that God was on their side with all that He did for them, but every time that something came up that was new and they were unsure of how to deal with it, they found themselves resorting back to old habits. They sought a life that although not filled with comfort in the sense that they could enjoy it, but comfort in a sense that it was completely familiar. They wanted a life where they knew what was going to happen and could prepare for how to respond to it instead of it being a complete mystery. The evidence was prominent, but their faith was severely lacking. The commentary said this: "Though the Lord may have delivered us time after time, we tend to lose our confidence and joy as we see ourselves menaced with illness or hardship for which we see no remedy. Thus these hungry, thirsty wanderers assumed that God

had merely lured them out into the pitiless desert in order to kill them there by famine and thirst.”¹

4 Then the Lord said to Moses, “I will rain down bread from heaven for you. The people are to go out each day and gather enough for that day. In this way I will test them and see whether they will follow my instructions. 5 On the sixth day they are to prepare what they bring in, and that is to be twice as much as they gather on the other days.” 6 So Moses and Aaron said to all the Israelites, “In the evening you will know that it was the Lord who brought you out of Egypt, 7 and in the morning you will see the glory of the Lord, because he has heard you grumbling against him. Who are we, that you should grumble against us?” 8 Moses also said, “You will know that it was the Lord when he gives you meat to eat in the evening and all the bread you want in the morning, because he has heard your grumbling against him. Who are we? You are not grumbling against us, but against the Lord. 9 Then Moses told Aaron, “Say to the entire Israelite community, ‘Come before the Lord, for he has heard your grumbling.’”

The Israelites tended to believe that when they complained they were really complaining against Moses who was supposed to be leading them. Little did they know that their complaining was actually seen as an insult against God. There is an animated series that Sarah and I enjoy called “Avatar the Last Airbender.” There is a scene where a boy speaks out against using members

¹ Accordance App, The Complete Biblical Library

of his empire as expendable, so he challenges the one who makes this suggestion to a battle. He shows up ready to do battle with this commander, but instead it is his father standing there ready to fight. Since the outburst transpired within his father's war room, it was seen as insult against his father. There is more to the story, but I think that you get the point.

God promised Moses that He would respond to the complaints of the Israelites. They would see it as some kind of relief at first, but eventually they grow to detest what God provides. It should sound familiar. "Be careful what you wish for, you just might get it!"

When this transpired, they were given specific instructions about how to gather it. They were to work for six days, but on day six they were to gather twice as much so that they could not gather any on the seventh day. If they tried to save any, it would instantly mold and be covered with worms and be completely inedible. God wanted to know if they would be capable of doing what they told. It was a test, and for a while they would pass, but eventually their envy would get the better of them and it wouldn't take long before they were spending their days complaining again and again and again.

The commentator brings up how it was important to understand that whatever was gathered on most days would not be any good to sustain them on the next day. Let me share what the commentator had to say. "Every successive morning they were to gather it anew. Yesterday's manna would not suffice, just as

yesterday's devotional study and prayer will hardly avail us for the needs and activities of today. Only by faithful daily feeding on the manna of Holy Scripture can we make the progress the Lord intends for us day by day." We can come to church on Sunday and learn about God, but if we don't take the time each day to spend with God, then we are essentially starving ourselves. We need food every day for nourishment, so too do we need daily time with God to fulfill us spiritually. Whatever we feed ourselves with on Sunday will not last until Monday. God instructs us to feed each day. Will you listen to those instructions? Are you capable?

10 While Aaron was speaking to the whole Israelite community, they looked toward the desert, and there was the glory of the Lord appearing in the cloud. 11 The Lord said to Moses, 12 "I have heard the grumbling of the Israelites. Tell them, 'At twilight you will eat meat, and in the morning you will be filled with bread. Then you will know that I am the Lord your God.'"

These people who had such a hard time believing that the same God who rescued them from Egypt would continue to provide for them along this path to the Promised Land would be allowed to see the glory of the Lord appear before them. This was meant to not only reveal that the God Moses was speaking for was real, but that they were to humble themselves because they could realize that this same God who parted the waters was hearing them complain. Let me tell you, I would certainly find it harder

to complain if God showed Himself in person to me. I would have a hard time doing anything except falling onto my face in worship. I would feel so small if, while in this sinful and broken body, compared to the greatness that exists in God. Yet, even though these people should have responded in like manner they still had no fear in complaining time and again to Moses like the glory of the Lord was absolutely nothing. They continued to remain selfish and self-absorbed. The wilderness treatment was very much deserved with the wickedness they possessed.

13 That evening quail came and covered the camp, and in the morning there was a layer of dew around the camp. 14 When the dew was gone, thin flakes like frost on the ground appeared on the desert floor. 15 When the Israelites saw it, they said to each other, "What is it?" For they did not know what it was. Moses said to them, "It is the bread the Lord has given you to eat."

Hearing repeatedly about this magical bread that was going to fall from the sky should have been easy to believe, but as stubborn as the Israelites were, God had to prove this to them as well. Even after being told of the meat and the bread that was to come, the people still had the nerve to say, "What is it?" God had only told them about a dozen times what was going to take place, and even when it is placed before their very eyes, they still had trouble believing what they were seeing. In numbers we even read about their rebellious hearts because of how they wanted even more. The commentator brings this up. "The only

possible ground for dissatisfaction had to do with additional appetizers, such as fish and cucumbers, melons and leeks, onions and garlic, the lack of which was much bemoaned by the ‘rabble’ (or ‘mixed multitude’) who were largely non-Israelite camp followers who had chosen to accompany Moses upon his departure from Egypt. This episode is recorded in Num. 11:4, where the Lord had to punish them with an oversupply of quail accompanied by a plague that proved fatal to the rebels who had raised such bitter complaints.”

They were given such simple instructions. Gather what they needed for each day and a double supply on the sixth day. It was not complicated in the slightest, and yet, they would even mess that up because of their greediness. They would complain in time about how they were beginning to despise the manna. Nothing was good enough.

We may find ourselves yelling at the Israelites to simply get their act together, but how easily do we follow the instructions that we were given. We know that Jesus came and died on the cross and returned from the dead to revisit the disciples. He gave them a command to go and make disciples of all the nations, yet, many of us hear these words and immediately dismiss them because they “must be for someone else.” “I’m not called to be a missionary.” We act like the commands of Jesus simply don’t apply to us, but “we’re a great Christian!” There are many things that we may do that we believe makes us a great Christian, but it doesn’t. The way we vote can’t

determine how much of a Christian we are. The way we decide to spread the Gospel doesn't determine how much of a Christian we are. The amount of tech involvement in our church doesn't determine how much of a Christian we are. Whether we give blood or not doesn't determine how much of a Christian we are. No, what determines that is if we follow the commands of Jesus. Do we care for the orphan? Do we care for the widow? Do we love our neighbor as ourselves? Do we have faith and trust in Jesus and believe that what He claims He did is completely true? Do we tell people about how much Jesus loves them? If you have trouble with any of that, please, I'm begging you, come to the altar and give it to Jesus. Give it up so that He can be your guide. Respond to the call that He has placed upon you. You won't regret where Jesus will bring you if you simply let Him lead the way!