

## “Wilderness U” // Exodus 15:22–17:7 // Rescue: The Book of Exodus #8<sup>1</sup>

### Bumper/ Introduction

**Summit Institute is one of the most exciting ministries of the church...** /Historian Rodney Stark says...

**Exodus 15, if you have your Bibles. I’m calling today’s message “Wilderness U” because it’s about a series of tests God gives to the children of Israel after their encounter at the Red Sea.**

Nobody likes tests. Here’s an infamous story around the Summit Church: Early on in our church’s history we had a UNC sophomore in our church who was in an ornithology class (Do you know what ‘ornithology’ is? No? You wouldn’t do well in the class. It’s the study of birds). He took the class thinking it was an easy A, only to find out it was really difficult.

So, he studied his rear off to get ready for the notoriously difficult final exam. He stayed up all night memorizing bird facts and learning to differentiate types of birds by their feather patterns or the sound of their calls, but when he walked into the classroom to take the test, was stunned because there was no test paper, no multiple choice questions, no essay prompts--just a single ppt screen of 25 different pairs of bird legs, with the instructions, “*Identify these birds by their legs.*”

<sup>1</sup> Sources consulted: Mike Wilkerson, *Redemption: Freed by Jesus from the Idols We Worship and the Wounds We Carry*; Tony Merida, *Christ-Centered Exposition Commentary: Exalting Jesus in Exodus* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2014); Tim Keller, “[The Water of Grace](#)”, October 20, 2002, Redeemer Presbyterian; Keller, “[Envy: The Case of Israel](#),” February

The student was like, “What is this?” The professor said, “It’s your final.” The student said, “This is insane. I didn’t prepare for this. Nobody can be expected to identify birds by just their legs.”

“Well, you better give it your best shot,” said the professor. “Because this counts for half of your grade.”

The student was like, “This is not fair. I refuse to take the test.” And he grabbed his stuff to walk out. The professor said, “If you walk out, young man, then you fail the final!”

The student said, “Go ahead and fail me,” and he headed for the door.

The professor said, “Fine. You’ve failed. Tell me your name, young man,” **At which point the boy pulled up his pant legs** and said, “I don’t know, you tell me, professor! You tell me!”

That story is not only infamous here at TSC, it’s also, sadly, untrue. BUT it illustrates something important for today: **Tests reveal weak spots in our knowledge. Tests can also, however, be opportunities to deepen our knowledge, to fill in the gaps of our understanding.**

In Exodus 15–17, God walks the children of Israel through 3 tests to see if they’ve learned the lesson of the Red Sea. Remember, the Red Sea was supposed to be the defining moment of their faith, the place where God proved once for all how present he was with them and committed he was to them.

26, 1995, Redeemer Presbyterian; Jen Wilkin, “Provision from Heaven”, Session 9 of God of Deliverance Bible Study, February 28, 2022; Dr. Nijay Gupta, “[Bread in the Wilderness](#)”, July 23, 2023, Bridgetown Church; Peter Enns, talk on Exodus 15:22–17:7, date unknown; John Mark Comer, “[The Name: Slow to Anger](#),” Bridgetown Church, February 3, 2013.

Did they learn the lesson? The answer is going to be a resounding “NO”—which is going to set us up to see that humanity needs a different kind of salvation—a deeper level of salvation—than what the children of Israel had experienced in the Exodus.

**That said, these 3 tests, and the lessons learned from them,** are so fundamental to the Christian life that the writers of the New Testament bring them up again and again as ***the basics***--a kind of 101 course--of walking with and trusting in God.

### Test 1: The Bitter Water Bonus Quiz (15:22–27)

At this point, Israel is just 3 days out from the Red Sea deliverance, where, if you recall, they’d watched God split an ocean in two to lead them safely through and then close that Sea on the heads of the pursuing Egyptians and wipe them out forever. They’d even written a song about it--that’s vs 1–2.

And **here we are now, just three days later**—three days!—vs 22, and they hit a dry stretch—literally, a dry stretch. They’re camped in a place where they can’t find water, and when they finally find some, it’s bitter--meaning it’s defiled, or poisoned, or tasted like dead fish, or had rotting antelope carcasses in it, who knows... whatever it was, it was undrinkable.

So Israel said, **vs 24 (look at it in your Bibles)**, *“Lord, this water is undrinkable, but you already know that. And we know that you will always take care of us, given what we just saw at the Red Sea, so we trust whatever provision you have for us. Thank you for always being such a good and faithful God.”* Is that what your Bible says, vs 24? It’s not what mine says, either. **Vs. 24:** *“And the people grumbled against Moses, saying, ‘What shall we drink?’”*

Poor Moses. But Moses knew what to do, so he asked God in faith, and God, **vs 25**, showed him a fallen tree, and told him to throw the

fallen tree into the water, and when Moses did, the water miraculously turned sweet and drinkable.

OK, so what’s God teaching them? Obviously, he’s saying: “You can trust me; I’ll always provide for you.” **But! This lesson has a little more packed into it than that.** Because there’s obviously something symbolic in the bitterness of the water that God healed. That’s why **vs. 25** goes on to explain, *“There the Lord made for them a statute and a rule, and there he tested them, saying, (vs 26), ‘If you will diligently listen to the voice of the LORD your God, and do what is right in his eyes... I will put none of the diseases on you that I put on the Egyptians, for I am the LORD, your healer.’”* This is the first appearance of the name “Jehovah Rapha,” which means *“The Lord is my healer.”* If you trust me and follow me, God says, I’ll do more than take care of your physical needs, I’ll heal you from all the diseases of Egypt. Those diseases represent all the physical and sinful corruptions they had carried with them from their captivity in Egypt.

I’ll heal you, God says, at the deepest level, at the heart level, from all those diseases. And so they called the place, vs 23, **“Marah,”** which literally means “bitter,” to remind themselves that this was where God showed them he would be not just their provider, but their healer.

And then, to drive the point home, vs. 27, God led them to a place called Elim—an oasis, Exodus says, “with 12 springs and 70 palm trees,” which, in Hebrew the “12” and “70” are numbers of completion implying fullness and bounty. Think of it as God basically led them to their version of the “4 Seasons” in Malibu. *“This is the life I have for you,”* he says. *“These are my intentions for you. Trust me. I’ve got more for you than you could possibly imagine.”*

**Did they learn their lesson?**

## Test 2: The Manna Midterm (16:1–36)

Now we're a few WEEKS into the wilderness journey, and they're pretty deep into the wilderness, and by this point they've eaten through all the food supplies they'd brought along with them from Egypt. So now, they're looking for something to eat.

And so they say, **vs 2**, "God, you've faithfully led us thus far, what do you have for us now?" Is that what your Bible says, **16:2**? No, "And the whole congregation of the people of Israel grumbled against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness."

And then they repeat the magnificently stupid line: **16:3**: "If only we had died in Egypt, where we sat by pots of meat and ate bread to the full!" (Ex. 16:3) First of all, what are pots of meat? I'm in for that.

They're like, "Man, we had it so good back there. It was like we were living at the Golden Corral: 'All you can eat' pots of meat and unlimited yeast rolls service, plus a queso fountain you could hold your chips under and let the queso run all over your fingers and back down in the fountain like it has for the previous hundred patrons. *Man, we had it so good back then!*"

This, of course, was a ridiculous statement, because this is precisely NOT how it was back in Egypt. But they are doing what we often do with sin, what the entire entertainment and media complex does with it--romanticizing the pleasures and minimizing the devastation. "Adultery is amazing! But let's not talk about the devastated lives in both families that suffer from it." "Vengeance is so satisfying--but let's not talk about the bitter person you become when you hold anger in your heart."

Y'all, if I were God, I'd be about done, but God is a God who is "slow to anger" (That's how God will describe himself in Exodus 34.) Which means he gets angry, but it takes a while. BTW, fun Hebrew language

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<sup>2</sup> t'erek 'appayim

thing here: In Hebrew, "slow to anger" is literally, = "long of nostrils".<sup>2</sup> And, you may wonder: "Why would they use 'long of nostrils' to mean slow to anger?" Well, what happens when you **get angry**? Your nostrils flare. And if you're quick-tempered, your flaring nostrils get going right away. But if you're **slow to anger**, you close your mouth and breathe through your nose...slowly and say "Goosfraba" or whatever you need to say to calm you down. IOW, *you can make God mad, but you really gotta work at it.*<sup>3</sup> God is more patient than the most patient parent, thank God. That's how he feels about YOU right now...

So what does God do? He feeds them. Again, in royal fashion: **16:13** says, "In the evening quail came up and covered the camp, and in the morning dew lay around the camp."

Literally, that evening, quail just came and landed by their tents. I mean, that's better than GrubHub. The animals just fly up to your tent, land on your porch and say, "I'm here, ready to be eaten!"

And then, that night, (**vs 14**) the dew fell on the ground, and when it dried up it left this little fine, flake-like thing all over the ground, almost like a frost covering the ground. **Vs 31**: "Now the house of Israel called its name manna. "Manna" in Hebrew is *man'hu*, which literally means, "What the heck is it?" vs 31 goes on to describe it: "It was like coriander seed, white, and the taste of it was like wafers made with honey." (Like I've told you: a mix between a Twinkie and a protein bar. You thought I was just making it up, but that's basically how Moses describes it.)

Well, just as with the **bitter water bonus quiz**, God was doing more than simply teaching them that he'd provide, he was also teaching them lessons about how he'd provide. Remember, this was not just a test, it was a lesson.

<sup>3</sup> John Mark Comer, "God has a Name, part 4."

And so, God gave them 2 rules: **Rule # 1 for the Manna:** You can only gather enough for one day. If you try to stockpile it--you know, put an extra supply in your closet or try to stock your prepper-bunker with it, fearful that maybe there won't be any tomorrow when you wake up, what you stockpile will go bad. Literally it says, **16:20**, it will "breed worms and stink up your house"--which, if that happens in one night, that's like supernatural going bad. It didn't just go bad, God put some stank on it. Sometimes at our house we'll leave leftover pizza out overnight and the next morning I'm like, "*Can we still eat this?*" And then I let one of the kids have a piece to see how they do with it and it's usually fine. But imagine after one night you opened up the box and it had bred worms and stunk. This manna was some mysterious stuff.

The **one exception** to this rule was on the eve of the Sabbath, and this was **rule #2:** On that day you could collect enough for 2 days. You see, on the Sabbath, no manna fell because God didn't want them out gathering on the Sabbath; that was too much like work. The Sabbath was their "manna-pause." (Oh, y'all, I've got manna puns for days). So, on the eve of the Sabbath, and on that one day alone, you were allowed to gather enough for 2 days, and God would preserve that manna from going bad for an extra 24 hours. **This was Rule #2.**

What's he teaching them? **Trust me: I'll always take care of you, every day.** Manna is not your security for the future; I am. Don't try to stockpile the provision; trust me daily. And always put me first (shown by the fact that you honor the Sabbath), because that--putting me first--is the condition of my taking care of you.

***Did they learn the lesson?***

### **Test 3: The Rock Face Final (Exodus 17:1-7)**

Now we're in chapter 17, and they've got more than enough manna to eat every day--they're riding high with all these new recipes:

*manna-cotti, eggs manna-dict, peanut butter and manana sandwiches; manana bread...* So, they've got lots of food, but they again find themselves in a place with no water.

*Now, this should be easy. Right? I mean, it's the exact same test!*

*This should be a piece of cake! They should say, "God, every time we run into a need, every time you provide it. If you can kill the entire Egyptian army in the Red Sea, and make quail and protein-Twinkies rain from the sky, then water ain't no big deal to you."*

But is that what they do? No. The slightest delay and they start doubting! Now, maybe you say, "*But why didn't God just have it there waiting for them, so they wouldn't even have the opportunity to doubt!*"

**Because he's teaching them faith. He's trying to make them Promised Land people.** It's what I told you last weekend: the Promised Land is the Promised Land not simply because it's a place of prosperity flowing with milk and honey, but because it's a place of absolute confidence in and trust in God. The joy of the Christian life is not what he provides for you; it's the confidence you have in him.

So, God is trying to produce faith in them, and in order to develop faith, you have to be in some situations to show it! Faith is like a muscle; you have to develop it!

**So let me just ask you: How are you doing with this?** How quickly do you throw up your hands and say, "God, why have you forgotten me? Why don't I have *this*? And when do I get *that*?" Many of us say we want great faith, but we never want to be in places where we have to learn to show it.

This weekend: What are you waiting on God to do, and how tempted are you just to *give up*?

17:3, the children of Israel say to Moses: “Why did you bring us up out of Egypt, to kill us and our children and our livestock with thirst?”

This had been comically ridiculous the first time they said it, but now it’s getting downright annoying. This is the 3rd test in a row, and they’re still failing in the exact same ways. Y’all, I mean, listen: if the teacher surprises you with a pop quiz, and you a ‘0’ because you’re totally unprepared, that’s one thing. But when the teacher, after the quiz is over, patiently walks you through the correct answers and then the next day gives you the exact same quiz and you write down the same exact WRONG answers again... well, at that point we’re going to conclude that you just don’t want to learn.

So, Moses says in bewilderment, “Why do you test the LORD?” (Ex. 17:2) And he cries out to God on their behalf again, but this time, God tells him to do something strange: “Take your staff... go to the rock at Horeb, and strike it. And water will come out of it, and the people will drink.” (Ex. 17:5-6) The word “strike” here implies a blow of anger or correction. If your kid is willfully obstinate, time and time again, you might give them a little swat on the backside. And, I know--some of you are like, “We don’t spank our kids.” Yes, we are very well aware of that...

What’s significant here is that this blow was not given to the children of Israel, but to the rock in Israel’s place.

What are we seeing? God pours out his anger for Israel’s unfaithfulness not on them, but on a rock, which then gushes out fresh, pure water for the children of Israel.

3 tests. Israel failed all three, in exactly the same ways. So, let me draw for you some **PRACTICAL** applications and then give you a **JESUS** application.

## I. The Practical Application(s):

I’m going to give you several here, but you could summarize all of them under this heading:

### ((*Trust in God’s Provision for Your Daily Needs*))

But let me break this down into various components, because, fascinatingly, the NT takes these 3 stories and applies them to the lives of believers in some really specific ways. I’m gonna draw out 3 applications from the New Testament and then I’ll throw in 1, just for fun, from the Old Testament.

The first one is obvious:

#### A. Stop worrying (Matt 6:34)

If there’s one basic thing these stories teach, it is this: You don’t need to worry! Whatever needs you have tomorrow, God can and will provide them.

In Matthew 6, Jesus was teaching his followers why they shouldn’t feel the need to worry. Matthew 6:34, calling up imagery of the manna, he says, “Don’t worry about tomorrow, because tomorrow will have... trouble of its own.” (Matt 6:34). I’ve told you before how much I love this verse, because I read, “Don’t worry about tomorrow, because tomorrow will have trouble of its own...” and I’m like, “Well, that’s exactly what I was worried about, about tomorrow...” But Jesus is saying, “Yeah, but guess what else will be there tomorrow? I’ll be there tomorrow. The God who took care of you today will be present with you tomorrow, too. His name is not “I WAS” OR “ONE DAY I WILL BE”, his name is always “I AM,” because he’s the God who is always present to supply our need for whatever challenges we face that day. (And he does it abundantly. I mean, think about it, Jesus

says, Matthew 6:26: he provides abundantly for the ravens and wildflowers, and you are of way more value to God than they are. Jesus didn't die for ravens and wildflowers, after all, but he died for you, so you can expect he'll take even better care of you than he does them. So,

- Do you have a relationship you're having trouble with? (A child, a friend, a spouse, a boss? God will give you the manna you need to face that challenge each day that you need it.)
- Are you facing a difficult decision, one that feels overwhelming? God will give the manna of wisdom that you need to make that decision, on that day. If anyone lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all men freely—and does it without giving a lecture.
- Is there an assignment ahead of you that just feels like it's too much for you? *“And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that having all sufficiency in all things at all times, you may abound in every good work.”*
- Do you feel lonely, or like there's some chapter ahead you can't face? You can with Paul, In any and every circumstance, I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need. I can do all things through him who strengthens me, because my God shall supply all my need according to his riches in Christ Jesus!”
- How about this one--do you feel defeated because you've fallen again, for the 1000th time, in the face of some temptation? *Get up, because the manna of God's mercies are new every morning.*
- Trouble may be in your tomorrow, but a God of mercy greater than the trouble will be there, too.

**Listen: Anxiety can be a symptom of unbelief.** I know anxiety can be complicated and the reasons behind it for some of us are complex--but sometimes anxiety, for a lot of us, boils down simply to not believing that a compassionate, fully sufficient God will be fully

present in that future. That's why we say **Anxiety can be “Functional Atheism.”**

You're anxious because you're just not sure that a present, sufficient, ever-faithful God will be there waiting for you tomorrow with enough manna for the day. But he will be, so stop worrying.

The second practical command flows right out of that one. Again, Jesus in Matthew 6...

### **B. Put Obedience First (Matthew 6:33)**

Just before Jesus said the thing about not needing to worry about anything because God would be there to provide, he said: **“But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.”** (Matt 6:33)

- “All these things” refers to whatever you need to accomplish the will of God, which includes, of course, your daily needs.
- You should read these verses like a contract: God promises to do this: **“all these things will be added to you”** as you do your part: **“seek first the kingdom of God.”**

The way they expressed this God-first obedience in the manna story was by not gathering manna on the Sabbath. And what did God do? He literally multiplied their provisions on the 6th day to make up for what they missed out on the 7th.

- There is a principle being taught here that applies to more than just the Sabbath. The principle is that when you obey God first, and put him first, HE multiplies your provision to meet your needs.
- Applying that principle starts, of course, with the Sabbath. When you give God the Sabbath--that is, stopping one day a week for

worship, rest and relationships, God multiplies your time and gives it back to you. You're more refreshed; you're a fuller person, and I've found he even multiplies your productivity.

- There's a story I've shared with you over the years--it's not that impressive, but it was a clear, defining moment for me that I've never forgotten. It took place when I was in college and I first decided I was going to observe a Sabbath. As for many students, Sunday was a big study day for me, but I had this thought one weekend in your church, "You know, none of the other commandments do I break at will... I should obey God in this 'one day of rest' command, too." The problem was that this was the busiest semester I'd ever had. I was taking 21 hours and had gotten involved in 3 campus clubs, 2 of which I was in leadership. And I thought, I've got NO time left to do anything. I need every free second of the weekend. But I said, "No, I'm going to do it God's way. I'm taking off one whole day for worship and rest and reading spiritual books and hanging out with friends who replenish me." And y'all, that semester I made the highest GPA I had of any semester before. And I knew that God was demonstrating to me that if I'd honor him, first, he'd multiply my time. Even more than that, God used those times of Sabbath in that season to grow my relationship with him in deeper ways that I'd ever experienced before, which was by far the biggest blessing.
- You may not think you can afford the time for a Sabbath--I often don't--but when I put him first, God multiplies your provision.
- And this principle runs all throughout the Christian life, whether we're talking the Sabbath, the tithe--giving God the first an the best of what he gives to us--or any other command of God--obey

God *first*; seek him and his kingdom first; *and all the other things you truly need to flourish in life* he'll faithfully supply for you. You do your part; I assure you he'll do his part.

### C. Don't Turn God's Provision into an Idol (1 Cor 10:7)

In 1 Cor 10, Paul says that ultimately that generation of Israelites failed because they were idolaters. Meaning, they put something in the place of God. And, in this case, it was the manna. You can see that in how they tried to stockpile the manna--they wanted excess amounts of it just in case God didn't show up for them tomorrow.

But God said, I don't want you trusting **in the manna**, I want you trusting in me, so, he made the excess, stockpiled manna go bad because he didn't want them to trust in IT instead of trusting in HIM. He didn't want their eyes on the provision, he wanted them on the Provider. MANNA wasn't their security for tomorrow, he was--and if they tried to make manna their security, God made it rot.

That's a symbol of what happens to anything you trust in more than God--even good things. You see, the great irony of the Christian life is that some of God's greatest gifts to us can become idols. I'm talking about things like money or marriage or family or whatever. Whatever you cling to for security in the future, that God provided for you (like manna), except God, ultimately rots on you and stinks up your life.

- If you depend on money, for example you become greedy and materialistic and you're always anxious about it and constantly comparing yourself and never satisfied. Some of the least satisfied and least happy people I've ever encountered in my life are really rich people. You know what's happened? The manna rotted on them.
- Or, if you depend on marriage or family--which is a good thing, but if you depend on it, you become possessive or co-dependent and you ruin your family or marriage, or bitter that you DON'T

have the marriage or family that you've always wanted. What happened? It rotted on you.

- If you depend on your looks for the future, you become obsessive about diet and skin products and plastic surgery and get jealous of anyone who looks like you want to look. The manna is rotting.
- The irony is you may not even recognize how much this rotting manna is stinking up your soul, but everybody else does!

Hey listen, I constantly ask myself, what is it that God has blessed me with that I now look to as security for my future? Is it this church? Or, is it my preaching ability? These are gifts of God, but if I start to trust in them more than God, they sour and rot on me. I experience degrees of that when I preach. If I'm preaching well, I feel like, "You know, the future is bright... I've been successful in the past and obviously I will be in the future." And that has a rotting effect on my soul. I get jealous of those who are more gifted, and there are plenty of those. Or, I get worried about someone coming along who is better than me--some young, cooler, funnier guy y'all wanna replace me with--an AI preacher or whatever. My 17 daughter Ryah, every time Bryan preaches, is like "Man, that was awesome. He's my favorite." The other day she said that and I said, "You know, I also preach at the Summit Church." And she said, "Yeah, I don't know, Dad. I just think I have a thing for black preachers." So there you go. If you live by preaching, you die by preaching.

Or, here's another way I experience it: I start to annoy Veronica by needing constant affirmation: If I'd preach a bad sermon one weekend, and that happens a lot, Veronica has to scrape me up off the floor on Monday morning with a spatula. What's happening is my preaching ability is rotting my soul.

The same thing is true for you with whatever you trust in: Good things! Your job; your marriage; your looks; your boyfriend, whatever. Remember, idols are not usually inherently bad things, they are usually good things you turn into God things that turn into bad things.

So, what are you clinging to for the future? Is it the manna, or the manna-provider? Because if it's **the manna**, it will go bad on you!

OK, one more, and this is the one from the Old Testament--it's the bonus:

#### D. Trust God in New Situations (Isa 43:19–21)

"Behold, I am doing a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it? I will make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert... to give drink to my chosen people, the people whom I formed for myself so that they might declare my praise. Isaiah 43:19–21

Honestly, I'm really **encouraged by Isaiah's application** here. Isaiah uses what Israel experienced in the Exodus to encourage himself about what God might do in his day. He says to God, "Just like you made a way for them in the wilderness and provided rivers of water for them in the desert, I'm confident you'll do something similar in our situation."

Maybe you're facing some desert in your marriage: God can cause new springs of fresh water to sprout up in that dead marriage.

Maybe you're depressed at the bitterness of your own heart and how you cannot seem to shake addictions and temptations. I've got good news: He's Jehovah Rapha, your healer, who can make those bitter waters sweet.

Maybe there's some obstacle in the way of something you believe God is calling you to do and you don't know how to get around it. Good news: We serve a God who splits oceans in half and brings water out of rocks in the desert. He can make a way for you, too.

OK.. those were the practical applications. **I. The Practical Applications: Trust in God's Provisions for Your Daily Needs.** Now,



## II. The Jesus Application: Trust in God's Son for Your Ultimate Need

In **1 Corinthians 10**, Paul makes an important connection. He says: "For I do not want you to be unaware, brothers, that our fathers were all under the cloud, and all passed through the sea, [2] and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea, [3] and all ate the same spiritual food, (he's talking about the manna) [4] and all drank the same spiritual drink (he's talking about the water). For they drank from the spiritual Rock that followed them, and the Rock was Christ."

**IOW, all these tests prefigured our relationship with Jesus.** Which makes it significant that Israel failed all of them. Badly. *Which set us up for this--write this down:*

### Jesus passed all the tests that Israel failed

Jesus, at the beginning of his ministry, went through the same tests Israel did. Do you recall his first temptation in the wilderness? Satan tempted him to turn stones into bread instead of trusting God to take care of him through the fast. In other words, he tempted him to idolize bread, to replace the provider with the provision. How does Jesus respond? Many of us know he says, "Man shall not live by bread alone." But the most significant thing about his quotation is where it's from: it's from the time of the Exodus. Jesus was like, "I know what this is. This is me repeating Israel's test in the wilderness. But I know,, *"Man does not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God."* So if I have to choose between the word of God and bread, I'll take the word every time.

Everything Israel did wrong, Jesus did right. Which is the heart of the gospel: Jesus lived the life we were supposed to live, a life without sin—he passed all the tests that we failed—then he died the death we were condemned to die, in our place. Around the Summit Church, we always say you can summarize the gospel in 4 words: **Jesus. In. My. Place.** Because Jesus, who was sinless, died under the curse of sin, he could release those of us under the curse of sin and lead us to new life.

*So... here's our Jesus applications:*

### A. Jesus' cross is the tree cast into the bitter waters of our soul that makes them sweet

- Charles Spurgeon said this--I've always loved it: "Just as when Marah's waters were bitter, Moses commanded them to take a tree and cast it into the waters, and they became sweet, so the Spirit of God, finding our natures bitter, takes the tree of Calvary, casts it into the stream, and everything is made pure."<sup>4</sup>
- Jesus' cross is the tree that cleanses the soul and makes us whole. You see, his blood not only pays the penalty for our sin, it cleanses us and heals us from the diseases of Egypt.
- **Many of us realize, in our more honest moments,** that something is wrong with our hearts. Do you at least have the humility and presence of mind to admit that? They're like polluted wells. We can blame all our problems on other people for a while, but sooner or later you're going to have to acknowledge that one of the things that is really broken is "you." **I can tell you firsthand:**

<sup>4</sup> Sermon, "Threefold Sanctification."

no one has lied to J.D. Greear more than J.D. Greear. No one has broken more promises to me than me. No one has disappointed me more than me.

- And I don't think any of us would be prepared for others to see what actually goes on in our hearts. Right? I've asked you before to consider what life would be like for you if we could attach a monitor to your head that would display, at any given point, whatever you were thinking at that moment--what you're thinking about, how you feel about someone. That'd be terrible, wouldn't it?
- The well of our hearts is poisoned down deep; we need a Savior who can heal us at the heart level, who can make these bitter waters sweet.
- I saw an article a couple of weeks ago **announcing that one of the world's most prolific blood donors, James Harrison**, had died at the age of 88. He was known as the "Man with the Golden Arm" because his blood had saved the lives of at least 2.4 million babies. You see, Harrison's blood contained a rare antibody, called anti-D, that prevents a fatal disease that kills a lot of newborns.
- The fascinating thing about the article to me was that he had an aversion to needles. He hated them; they made him want to pass out and sometimes he did. Yet, he still donated blood 1,173 times because his blood was some of the only blood that could save these babies.<sup>5</sup>
- Jesus Christ died because his blood was the only thing that could cure our hearts at the source level.

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.npr.org/2025/03/03/nx-s1-5316163/james-harrison-blood-donor>. One other interesting note: The reason James Harrison went through with this, even though he hated it, was because when he was 14, he got really sick and had to

## B. Jesus is the bread of life

It's obvious there was something deeply mysterious about the manna: the magical way it appeared; the weird Sabbath stuff about how it was preserved.

- But the way we really know how special this bread was: **Exodus 16:33**, Moses said to Aaron, "Take a jar, and put manna in it, and place it before the LORD to be kept throughout your generations." That jar was placed in the Ark of the Covenant, which housed the presence of God; it was kept right below the Mercy Seat, where they sprinkled the blood of the sacrifice.
- Which makes what Jesus says in **John 6:31** that much more significant: "Our fathers ate the manna in the wilderness; as it is written, 'He gave them bread from heaven to eat'... They said to him, 'Sir, give us this bread always.'" Jesus said to them, "*I am the manna. I'm the bread of life. Whoever comes to me shall not hunger.*"
- The manna was him! That's why they put it into the Ark of the Covenant under the Mercy Seat where God dwelt, because the manna represented Jesus who would be the very presence of God that sustains our souls.
- If there's another thing we can all agree on, it's that our hearts are not only messed up, they feel incomplete. We go through life unsettled, often unhappy... like we're on a quest to find something. Self-help books tell us certain things they say will make us whole; psychologists tell us different things; romantic movies tell us it's finding that one; and money counselors and sex therapists point us to even more options.

have one of his lungs removed. The grueling process involved a three-month hospital stay, 100 stitches and nearly two gallons of donated blood. And that inspired him to donate his own later. He said he knew he needed to donate, because he didn't "know how many people it took to save my life." This was his way of saying thank you.

The Bible makes it clear that what we're really missing is God himself. The human heart, Blaise Pascal famously said, has a gigantic void in it, and we spend our whole lives trying to fill that void. We try success and sex and family and even things like psychedelic drugs but nothing ever works because that void can only be filled by the love of God. Do you ever notice that in all those rom-com movies, the process of falling in love is much more exciting than a lifetime of being in love? And that's because romantic love, as exciting as it is, is not what your soul most craves.

I'm telling you, for all you who are unhappy, for all of you who feel unsettled and incomplete; for those who hunger and thirst, what you're looking for is Jesus. He's the bread and water of life that your soul craves!

Lastly:

VAMP

### C. Jesus is the rock struck for our sin

- In Exodus 17, God told Moses to strike the rock instead of striking the people, and when he did, water flowed out that saved the people.
- In the same way, Paul says in **1 Cor 10:4**, Jesus, the Rock, was struck in our place, for our sin, just like that rock was struck for their sin. And get this, literally, on the cross, when he was struck, water flowed out from his side.<sup>6</sup> Do you think that symbolism was accidental? No! It's because Jesus was being struck. God the

Father was saying, "Hey! **Look back to the Exodus!** Jesus was struck, like the rock, and water's flowing out from him, just like it flowed out for them and saved their lives."

- And so, **On the last day of the feast, the great day, Jesus stood up and cried out, "If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink. [38] Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, 'Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.'"**

Jesus is the sacrifice that cleanses you, the bread that feeds you, and the water that sustains you. And he could do all of that because he was struck in your place, because he passed every test that we failed. That's why we call him the Savior.

### So, what do you do with this? There's only one thing you can do?

**Believe and receive!** Salvation is what God does, it's not what you do. God does it; you just believe and receive it. As John 7:38 says, Jesus promises to save anybody, **but you have to believe on him**--you have to receive him for yourself. So, I want to give you a chance to receive Jesus if you never have.

There are two primary reasons you need a personal relationship with Jesus:

- You have a sin penalty that needs to be paid. You've all grumbled and complained against God. The Bible says the penalty of sin is death. Eternal death. And there's only two ways to pay for sin: either you can pay for it yourself by dying eternally, or Jesus can

<sup>6</sup> John 19:34.

pay it in your place. He'll pay it for you, but you have to receive him.

- Here's the other reason you need to be saved: you have a heart wound down deep that needs to be healed. Sin has made the waters of your heart bitter--only Jesus can heal you. And how does he do that? Not by coming to church or resolving to be a better person or taking communion--those are all important things but they are not what saves you. What saves you is receiving Jesus personally as your Savior, believing on him. That's what he said, John 7:38: "Just believe in me!"

If you've never done that, and you'd like to, I want to give you a chance to do it right now. Pray this with me:

***Jesus, I believe you were struck on the cross for me, and I receive your offer to save me. I receive you as my Savior and I'll spend the rest of my life saying thank you to you.***

**If you prayed that, raise your hand?**

I'd like everyone to stand.

I'm going to pray, and if you raised your hand, or you should have, I'm going to ask you to do something incredibly bold—it's going to be bold, it's gonna take a lot of nerve but it will be a defining moment that will change your life.

- Step out. Someone will meet you in the aisle. Prayer team members and counselors are getting into place in the aisles at all campuses right now. They'll meet you and take you somewhere quieter where they can pray with you and you can receive Christ

and get this settled. Take the friend that invited you. Nobody should come alone. In fact, everybody, look at the person to your right and left and tell them, "If you want to go, I'll go with you."

- I'm going to pray, and then we, Summit Church, we're going to clap in anticipation of them coming, and then I want you to step out and come. OK? This is a life-changing moment. Don't put it off or delay it or resist it. Your whole eternity will change based on what you do in this moment.

(Prayer...) OK, you come.

**Campus Pastors:** If you didn't come and want to receive Jesus, text READY to 33933.