

HIDDEN
MANNA

Gene Cunningham

“I am the bread of life;
he who comes to Me shall not hunger,
and he who believes in Me shall never thirst.”

John 6:35

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CHAPTER ONE

The Promise—Hidden Manna

NO MATTER HOW LONG we live, no matter how full our experience, no matter how successful we are, when life is over we will look at our time on this earth and say it was a vapor. It was here for a moment and then it was gone.

The question then for each of us is going to be: What is there of my life that carries on, that has eternal value? How much during my life was I able to focus on things that last? Or was I preoccupied in pursuing the things that last for only a little while—a day, a year, even a lifetime, but then are gone forever?

The more preoccupied we are with things that are temporal, the less we will be able to be occupied with what is eternal. Of all the things we set our hearts on in this life, only one will last forever. That is what this study is about.

He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes, to him I will give some of the hidden manna, and I will give him a white stone, and a new name written on the stone which no one knows but he who receives it. (Rev. 2:17)

The speaker here is the Lord Jesus Christ. He is talking to Church Age believers in the Asian city of Pergamus, one of seven cities to which the apostle John carried on a circuit ministry before his banishment to Patmos.

In Revelation 2:13 Jesus commends these people for holding to His name in a place where refusing to say “Caesar is Lord” could earn a death sentence. But He follows His commendation with a warning in verse 14 that He has “a few things” against them because of false doctrines they have embraced. “Repent, therefore, or else I am coming to you quickly,” He says in verse 16. He uses the emphatic personal pronoun to say, “I am coming to you as *individuals*.” The Lord Jesus Christ comes in every life. Whether He will come with judgment or blessing will depend on our attitude to Him and His Word.

It is this context that the Lord makes the apparently mysterious promise of Revelation 2:17. “He who has an ear” is an analogy of grace. Anyone who can reach up and feel an ear on the side of his head can have the fulfillment of what Jesus is about to promise. God designed every man with ears. The analogy is that God makes grace available to everyone. Anyone who wants to can hear what God says and can believe it. No one will ever be able to say that he did not have a chance.

The Bible is full of promises that God wants us to claim so that He can pour out His blessings on us. But how often do we miss out because we look at the promise and overlook the conditions to the promise? “Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you shall be saved” (Acts 16:31) is a conditional promise. The promise is salvation; the condition is believing. God will never refuse salvation to anyone who believes, and He will never

give salvation to anyone who refuses to believe. When God puts conditions on a promise, anyone who by faith accepts the conditions *must* receive the blessings; anyone who does not accept the conditions cannot receive the blessings.

In Revelation 2:17 the condition to the promise is overcoming, from the word *nikao*, “to conquer.” Specifically, Jesus is talking about overcoming the doctrinal errors alluded to in the passage, but *nikao* is a present active participle and, therefore, refers to a condition of life, a lifestyle. The overcomer here is the person who lives what we would call a lifestyle of victory.

The apostle John, who wrote the book of Revelation, defines in his first epistle two kinds of overcomers.

For whatever is born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith. (1 John 5:4)

John first deals here with a principle: whatever is born of God is victorious over the world. We know that the realm of flesh is *always* conquered by the realm of the Spirit. When he talks about “whatever is born of God,” John uses the perfect tense and the passive voice to refer to individual salvation. The perfect tense says the birth was a past act that has present, continuing results—we are saved at a moment of time and our salvation is eternal. In the passive voice, the subject receives the action of the verb—salvation is not something we can do for ourselves, it is a work of God received by faith. When John then says, “this is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith,” he is saying that every believer is positionally an overcomer.

At the moment we place our faith in Jesus Christ, we enter into His eternal victory. The Holy Spirit is placed within us, and because of that, we now have the ability to live in the power of the Spirit, something we could not do before. But having the ability and using the ability are two very different things. So John turns from the principle of our *position* in victory—achieved by a once-for-all act of faith—to the *practice* of victory—achieved by the daily application of faith to the circumstances of our lives.

And who is the one who overcomes the world, but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God? (1 John 5:5)

“The one who overcomes” is here, as in Revelation 2:17, the present active participle of *nikao*, indicating an ongoing struggle and continuous overcoming—a lifestyle of victory. The overcomer, John says, is “he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God.” “Believes” is the present active participle of *pisteuo*, indicating continuous believing, a lifestyle of faith. This is consistent dependence on the power of the deity of Jesus Christ. The person who keeps on trusting Jesus Christ is the one who keeps on conquering the world. The act of believing parallels the act of overcoming. Only the person who moment-by-moment believes that God can be taken at His Word can win the moment-by-moment victory.

To the overcomers the Lord promises three things: hidden manna, a white stone, and a new name. Stones were used in the ancient world as ballots. The white stone was a symbol of approval. Jesus is saying, “If you live a lifestyle of victory you will carry forever this symbol of My approval.”

In the Old Testament, a name change symbolized victory through grace. Abram, “father of nothing,” was renamed by God, Abraham, “father of multitudes;” Sarai, “complainer,” was renamed Sarah, “princess;” Jacob, “chiseler,” was renamed Israel, “prince having power with God.” In the same way, the overcomers in this age will be given a new name that will express the history of their lives. Only two people will know that name: the Lord and the overcomer. This indicates intimacy in eternity. Others will look on the stone, but no one else will know the name.

But what, exactly, is “hidden manna”? To understand that, we must understand manna.

CHAPTER TWO

The Picture—Manna

IN EXODUS 15, MOSES and all the Israelites sang a song to the Lord, exalting Him for the grace and the power He displayed in redeeming them from slavery and destroying Pharaoh's army in the waters of the Red Sea. "In Thy lovingkindness Thou hast led the people whom Thou has redeemed," they declared, "Thou wilt bring them and plant them in the mountain of Thine inheritance."

God's Plan: Conquest

These people had every reason to sing. Their redemption was abundant proof that the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob had not forgotten His Word to them. The Lord God had promised Abraham that He would make of him a great nation (Gen. 17:2). When Jacob and his family went to Egypt, they were 70 in all; when they walked out, despite 400 years of bondage, they were two-and-one-half million.

The Lord had a plan for taking the people of the Exodus generation in one year through the Sinai peninsula and into Canaan, where they would begin to live their lives as a nation, as God's chosen people, His light to the world. He had told them that it was "a good and spacious land ... a land flowing with milk and honey" (Ex. 3:8). In this place He would bless them and, through them, all the nations of the earth would be blessed (Gen. 17:3). To sustain them, so they could make it from Egypt to Canaan, to keep them alive so they could fulfill His plan for their lives, He gave them manna.

His Provision: Manna

Then the Lord said to Moses, "Behold I will rain bread from heaven for you; and the people shall go out and gather a day's portion every day, that I may test them, whether or not they will walk in My instruction. ..."

When the layer of the dew evaporated, behold, on the surface of the wilderness there was a fine flake-like thing, fine as the frost on the ground. When the sons of Israel saw it, they said to one another, "What is it?" For they did not know what it was. And Moses said to them, "It is the bread which the Lord has given you to eat." (Ex. 16:4, 14-15)

This is how manna got its name. "What is it?" in Hebrew is *Manna*? It is significant that the children of Israel went through 40 years of wandering, and every day they went out to get what God and Moses called "bread from heaven," and every day they said *Manna*? "What is it?" They kept on calling it manna because they never really understood what it was or why God gave it to them. He told them at the beginning that it

was both a provision and a test. It sustained them for their journey and tested their response to His Word.

“This is what the Lord has commanded, ‘Gather of it every man as much as he should eat; you shall take an omer apiece according to the number of persons each of you has in his tent.’”

And the sons of Israel did so, and some gathered much and some little. When they measured it with an omer, he who had gathered much had no excess, and he who had gathered little had no lack; every man gathered as much as he should eat.

And Moses said to them, “Let no man leave any of it until morning.” But they did not listen to Moses, and some left part of it until morning, and it bred worms and became foul. (Ex. 16:16-20)

From the very first, the people did not follow God’s instructions. Some went out and gathered more than an omer; some gathered less. God had designed the manna so that two quarts would fill a person’s daily nutritional needs. But even when people disobeyed in regard to the amount they were to take in, God said, “I want you fully fed.” And so when they measured what they had, every person’s portion was sufficient. This was one of the extraordinary characteristics of manna—it was the quality, not the quantity, which sustained the people.

God also made it clear to the people that He did not want any manna left over unused from day to day. He wanted the people to feed on all they had gathered. Again, some did not listen, and again they were shown that manna was not ordinary food. The portions they tried to set aside for the next day bred worms overnight.

Now it came about on the sixth day they gathered twice as much bread, two omers for each one. ... then he [Moses] said to them ... “Tomorrow is a sabbath observance, a holy sabbath to the Lord. Bake what you will bake and boil what you will boil, and all that is left over put aside to be kept until morning.” So they put it aside until morning ... and it did not become foul, nor was there any worm in it.

And Moses said ... “Six days you shall gather it, but on the seventh day, the sabbath, there will be none.” And it came about on the seventh day that some of the people went out to gather, but they found none. (Ex. 16:22-27)

God wanted His people to rest on the Sabbath. So He gave instructions that on the day before the Sabbath, everyone should gather a double portion of manna and save half for the next day. On the Sabbath morning, the people saw another of the miracles of manna—that on six days of the week leftover manna became foul, but on the day God ordained for rest, it did not. The Lord was teaching them that when there was no new supply, He would sustain them on what they had.

But again some of the people failed the test. They went to look for manna on the Sabbath despite the fact that the Lord had told them not to and that the previous day’s manna was still good. It did them no good to go out; they found nothing.

God had told the people that manna was both a provision and a test. He wanted them to understand that He would always be faithful to provide for them and that if they would just believe Him they could enjoy the provision. He knew the people needed to build spiritual muscle; gathering and feeding on manna was the way they would do that. Every morning they had the chance to exercise their faith. Every day for 40 years God sent these people bread from heaven, every day it was a test, and every day multitudes failed the test.

Their Failure: An Example

Nevertheless, with most of them God was not well pleased; for they were laid low in the wilderness. Now these things happened as examples for us. (1 Cor. 10:5-6)

In 1 Corinthians 9 Paul talks about his desire to be a winner in the spiritual realm. So, the subject in 1 Corinthians 10 is not eternal life, but spiritual victory and eternal reward. Paul wants us to understand that while all believers can achieve spiritual greatness, not all will. There is a great difference between *having* opportunity and *taking* opportunity, between our *position* in Christ and our *practice* in the world.

Paul stresses the fact in 1 Corinthians 10:1-4 that all of the two-and-one-half million people in the Exodus generation had the same position, the same provision, and the same opportunity to enter the Promised Land. We know they were all believers because we are told more than once that they all believed the Lord (Ex. 4:31, 14:31). Because they were God's people and because He had a work for them to accomplish in Canaan, the Lord guaranteed their provision. Every one of them could have reached Canaan. But only two did.

With most of them, Paul tells us, God was emphatically not well pleased. They were "laid low in the wilderness." The Greek literally says their carcasses littered the desert.

The things that happened to the Exodus generation are "examples" for us. The word *tupos* refers to the impression left by a blow, for example, of a hammer. God wants to strike a blow that will leave an impression in the soul and mind of every believer who studies this passage. He wants us to understand that these people could have succeeded. So, why did they fail? In 1 Corinthians 10:6-10 Paul lists five reasons, five manifestations of their unbelief:

1. *Lust*. Numbers 11 tells us what the people lusted for: they wanted to go back to Egypt, to "the cucumbers and the melons and the leeks and the onions and the garlic" (Num. 11:5). They hated looking at the manna. It was not what we would think of as horrible crimes that kept these people from fulfilling the plan of God. Psalm 106:13 says simply, "They *forgot* His works; they *did not wait* for His counsel, but *craved* intensely in the wilderness." When they whined for something besides the manna to eat, God gave them what they asked for, but with it sent a wasting disease. A multitude died by divine discipline in the wilderness, but they did not have to (Num. 11:11-34).

2. *Idolatry*. Exodus 32 recounts how the people cast the golden calf. Three thousand people died here, but they did not have to. Even after Moses came down from the mountain and broke the tablets of stone, he said, "Whoever is for the Lord, come to me" (Ex. 32:26). He was giving them a chance to confess and get back in line with God—the

same chance, by the way, that 1 John 1:9 reminds us He gives to believers every day. But 3,000 would not confess and they died. Every one of those 3,000 could have made it to the Promised Land.

3. *Immorality*. Numbers 25 tells how Israel played the harlot with the Midianites, who were at that time an extremely immoral group of people. God gave the people a chance to correct themselves. In Numbers 24, He judged the Midianites just to show the Israelites what would happen if they would not accept correction. But they would not accept it, and 23,000 fell in one day.

4. *Provocation*. Numbers 21 recounts how the people became impatient and spoke against God. God sent poisonous serpents and many of the people were bitten and died. But even after the serpents struck, God made provision for any who would turn back to Him. He told Moses to lift up a bronze serpent on a standard and to tell the people that anyone who had been bitten could just look at the brazen serpent and would survive. Some of those people refused to look. Jesus in John 3:14 said, “As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so the Son of Man must be lifted up; that whoever believes may in Him have eternal life.” There are people today who will not have eternal life because they absolutely refuse to look to the person of Christ and His work on the cross.

5. *Grumbling*. The word translated “grumble” here means “to be vexed in soul.” In the present tense, it means they complained continuously, all the time. Numbers 16 tells us how they groused and rebelled against their spiritual leadership. They still could have received God’s grace and blessing, but they refused to hear the Word of God and were destroyed in judgment.

God had planned to take every one of the two-and-one-half million Israelites into the Promised Land. He had set aside there a place for each of them—a plot of ground, battles to fight, blessings and reward to be earned—but they would not listen to Him.

Now these things happened to them as an example, and they were written for our instruction, upon whom the ends of the ages have come. Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall. No temptation has overtaken you but such as is common to man; and God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will provide the way of escape also, that you may be able to endure it. (1 Cor. 10:11-13)

A second time Paul says that the experiences of the Exodus generation are an example to us. They were written, he says, for our “instruction.” *Nouthesia* is from *nous*, “the mind,” and *tithemi*, “to place.” It means “to put into the mind; to place a principle in someone’s mind so that he understands.” God wants us to understand and make an application to our lives.

The apostle has just told us in 1 Corinthians 9 that he has to be constantly vigilant; that victory requires discipline, self-denial, self-sacrifice; and that he has to beat his body into submission every day. From the context we know that in Corinth were some people who thought that they had “arrived” spiritually. Paul says if you think that you stand at the apex of spiritual growth, then watch out, because you are going to fall. The word *pipto*

was used in the ancient theater for the actor who could not remember his lines, who forgot the part he was to play.

Paul is warning us that we as believers could forget our part. The Exodus generation did. God had a part for them to play called “conquest.” But they failed because they did not trust God’s provision. He promised He would get them through the wilderness, but they would not believe. Paul says here that God is promising to get us through our wilderness. Nothing can happen to us that God has not already foreseen and provided for. The question we have to ask is not, “Is God faithful?” Paul has just laid out abundant proof that He is: every day that He sent down manna, He was saying to the Exodus generation, “I am faithful. You can make it to the Promised Land, if you will.” The pertinent question for us is, “Will I believe what God says?”

The Purpose: To Point to the Word

Near the end of the wilderness experience, Moses delivered his last exhortation to the people who were about to go in to the Promised Land. The carcasses of their parents, as Paul would later write, littered the wilderness. These young men and women who had lived through the 40 years of their parents’ rebellion now had a chance to do what their elders had refused to do. As a reminder of God’s faithfulness to them, Moses pointed to His provision of manna.

And He humbled you and let you be hungry, and fed you with manna which you did not know, nor did your fathers know, that He might make you understand that man does not live by bread alone, but man lives by everything that proceeds out of the mouth of the Lord. (Deut. 8:3)

The Lord had been using manna to make a point that had to do with more than food. He wanted the people to understand that physical survival was not even an issue, that there was only one thing on earth they needed for survival and that was the Word of God.

At the time of the Exodus, the Bible had not yet been written. But revelation from God to individuals had been passed down orally from generation to generation ever since Adam and Eve. Enoch had believed God’s Word, as had Noah and Abraham and Sarah and Isaac and Joseph. When he died, Joseph had ordered that his bones not be buried in Egypt because he knew that God would take His people back to the land He had promised them. For 400 years Joseph’s coffin had been a daily reminder to the children of Israel that God would keep His Word.

God’s testing of the Exodus generation by means of the manna was for a purpose; it was part of His training program to prepare the people for what they would meet in the Promised Land. He knew they would not be equipped to deal with either the greater tests or the greater blessings that awaited them in Canaan until they had come to terms with the Word of God. They had to understand that nothing on earth could ever be more valuable to them than the Word. Until they came to realize that they needed the Word every day they lived, they would never be ready to move beyond manna. That is why God tested them over and over and over again. He wanted them to make the grade; He wanted them to taste the hidden manna.

The Goal: To See the Lord

And on the day after the Passover, on that very day, they ate some of the produce of the land, unleavened cakes and parched grain. And the manna ceased on the day after they had eaten some of the produce of the land, so that the sons of Israel no longer had manna, but they ate some of the yield of the land of Canaan during that year. (Josh. 5:11-12)

The manna lasted until the very day the children of Israel set foot on Canaan's soil. Unfortunately, because of their unbelief, most of the people did not last that long (Heb. 4:19). Out of all the adults who walked out of Egypt, only Joshua and Caleb got where God wanted them to go. The rest died under divine discipline in the wilderness (Ex. 13-14). Their children, whom they had used as an excuse for their rebellion, went in with Joshua and Caleb to take possession of the Promised Land.

One day soon after their entry into Canaan, Joshua was standing near Jericho when he looked up and saw someone. Remember that Joshua had made it to Canaan by faith. In the 40 years of testing he had, by faith, become an overcomer. Now, in the Promised Land, he lifted up his eyes and saw a man standing with a drawn sword in his hand.

And Joshua went to him and said to him, "Are you for us or for our adversaries?" And he said, "No, rather I indeed come now as captain of the host of the Lord." And Joshua fell on his face to the earth, and bowed down, and said to him, "What has my Lord to say to his servant?" And the captain of the Lord's host said to Joshua, "Remove your sandals from your feet, for the place where you are standing is holy." And Joshua did so. (Josh. 5:13-15)

What Joshua saw on that day was the hidden manna. He had finally made it to the point where all the lessons and all the tests had fulfilled their purpose—He stood face to face with Jehovah Sabbath, the Lord of Hosts, the Commander not only of the armies of Israel, but of the angelic armies of heaven. Joshua's eyes feasted on the person of the pre-incarnate Lord Jesus Christ, the Living Word. The hidden manna promised in Revelation 2:17 is Jesus Christ Himself who is concealed in every word, every promise, and every doctrine of the Word of God.

God's goal had been for every one of the two-and-one-half million people who crossed the Red Sea to make it to the Promised Land and to stand in the presence of their Lord. Every one of them. Because they were God's people and because He had a work for them to accomplish in Canaan, God guaranteed their provision. Every one of them could have reached Canaan. Not one failed through lack of food, not one through lack of clothing, not one through defeat in battle. But millions failed because they rejected the Word of God.

Psalm 78 chronicles the sad story of these stiff-necked people God loved so much. Despite their grumbling and complaining and refusal to trust Him, still He opened the doors of heaven and rained down manna on them. In the English, verse 25 says that they ate "the bread of angels." But the word translated "angels" is from the Hebrew *abbir*, which means "to be mighty, valiant, a hero." What they ate in the wilderness was not angel food cake, but hero sandwiches, "the bread of the mighty."

Manna was designed to take these people to the point of being spiritually mighty, to make them overcomers, but they never made it. They were designed to be valiant, to be heroes of faith, but they never made it because they would not trust in His salvation (Ps. 78:22). They *had* salvation, but they would not *trust* it. Without trust, without faith, it is impossible to please God and impossible to be a hero in the spiritual conflict.

The Promised Land in the Bible is *not* a picture of heaven; it is a picture of spiritual maturity. In Canaan there were giants to be faced and battles to be fought, but before there could be conquest there had to be intimacy with the person of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Manna is a picture of the written Word of God. The Word is the food designed to carry us from salvation to spiritual maturity, where spiritual conquest really begins. With manna, even though some people gathered much and some gathered only a little, whatever they gathered was enough—provided they ate it. With the Word, some people understand much in Bible class and some people understand only a little, but whatever we understand is enough to sustain us—provided we use it. It was the quality, not the quantity, of the manna that sustained the Exodus generation. It is the quality, not the quantity, of the Word that sustains us. One promise from the Word of God has in it all the power of God Himself.

In the desert, the people gathered manna in the morning. God made it clear that He did not want any manna left over unused from day to day. He wanted the people to feed on everything they had. When they failed to do that and left some over until the morning, they found it had bred worms. Whatever portion of the manna they refused to eat or they tried to save for another day went bad on them. God wants us to feed on the Word every day. If we study today and use what we study, it will sustain our lives *today*. But if we reject what we are taught or if we try to live on what we learned yesterday, the things we know will become foul and rot in our souls.

Though the manna had bred worms when it was left overnight during the week, God caused it to remain fresh when it was gathered the day before the Sabbath. As long as He provides teaching for us, we are to use it. If He allows us to be isolated and unable to gather with other believers, then we should relax and know that He will sustain us on what we have in our souls.

Based on their exegesis of some of the biblical passages dealing with manna, Jewish rabbis taught that how manna tasted depended on the attitude of the person who was eating it. To the one who took it with an unthankful attitude, manna did not taste good at all, but to the grateful it was wonderful. The same is true of the Word. To the spiritually hungry, it always tastes good and is always filling. As Mary declared, expanding on the principle of Psalm 107:9, “He has filled the hungry with good things; and sent away the rich empty-handed” (Luke 1:53).

God’s manna was free to all who would receive it, but the price of rejecting it was awesome. Exodus-generation believers who turned their backs on the provision of God never saw the Promised Land. They never became the conquerors and the heroes God wanted them to be. They were never a light to the world and never entered into fellowship and intimacy with the Lord. Church-Age believers who turn their backs on the Word pay the same price in time and lose the potential to earn rewards for eternity.

God wants every one of us to go beyond the written Word to find the reality of the Living Word in our lives. *Hidden* manna is a picture of the Living Word. To feed on hidden manna is to have intimacy with Jesus Christ. The apostle Paul did not say, “I

know *what* I have believed, “ but “I know *whom* I have believed.” And further, “I am convinced that *He* is able to guard what I have entrusted to *Him* until that day” (2 Tim. 1:12).

Anything less than intimacy with the person of Christ is less than the plan of God for us as believers. The only way to know the Living Word is through the written Word. We have to daily feed on and metabolize God’s truth; we have to daily study and apply the Word of God. We will never see the hidden manna if we do not feed on the manna.

To the Exodus generation, the bread from heaven was always “Manna?” “What is it?” They never understood, and they never went beyond the provision to fellowship with the Provider.

A Memorial: To Remember

This is what the Lord has commanded, “Let an omerful of it be kept throughout your generations, that they may see the bread that I fed you in the wilderness, when I brought you out of the land of Egypt.” (Ex. 16:32)

The Lord commanded that a jar of manna be kept as a memorial to His grace because He wanted every generation of Israelites to know that every day for 40 years He fed His people on the bread of the mighty. They could have come into the land of Canaan; they could have been heroes. The provision was there. In the same way, the Bible will be enshrined in eternity forever (1 Pet. 2:23-25). The Bible will stand as a memorial to the sufficiency of God’s grace, a perpetual reminder that God supplied everything His children would ever need to accomplish His plan.

CHAPTER THREE

The Reality—Jesus Christ

IN JOHN 6, JESUS declares Himself eight times to be the bread of life. One of the basic rules of biblical interpretation is what is called the law of repetition. The more often a word or idea is repeated in a passage of Scripture, the more important it is. When God says something over and over and over again, it is because He wants us to understand and remember that point. The point of John 6 is that Jesus Christ is the bread of life.

The day before Jesus categorically declared Himself to be the bread of life, He had miraculously fed 5,000 men—and probably twice that many women and children—on five small barley loaves and two fish. There was method to His miracle—no miracle was ever just for show, and this one He had performed as an object lesson to teach the people what they really needed to know. He had taken the bread, broken it, and fed the multitudes, thereby fulfilling the prophecy of Psalm 72:16 that when the Messiah came, there would be bread for all. Jesus had proved that He was sufficient to meet the people’s physical needs.

Some in the crowd wanted to take Him by force and make Him king on the spot, but He eluded them. The next day when the multitude crossed the Sea of Galilee to find Him, He rebuked them. Thousands of people pursued Jesus across the water, but for the wrong reasons, and He gave them a warning: “Do not work for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to eternal life” (John 6:27).

When they asked what works they should do to earn this food that endures, Jesus said, “This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He has sent.” Their response was something like this: “Show us a sign, and we will believe you. Our fathers ate manna in the wilderness, can you top that?” Remember that the day before, these people had been fed from the five loaves and two fish.

Declaration: The Bread of Life

Jesus said therefore, “Truly, truly, I say to you, it is not Moses who has given you the bread out of heaven, but it is My Father who gives you the true bread out of heaven. For the bread of God is that which comes down out of heaven, and gives life to the world. ... I am the bread of life; he who comes to Me shall not hunger, and he who believes in Me shall never thirst.” (John 6:32-35)

In the Greek it is clear that when Jesus refers to the one who “comes” to Him and the one who “believes” in Him, He is talking about two very different actions. This statement

is parallel to John's description in 1 John 5:4-5 of those who are overcomers by position and those who are overcomers by practice.

The verb *erchomai* speaks of coming to Christ at the moment of salvation. It is in the middle voice, indicating that this person receives the benefit of the action which he initiates. He chooses to come to Christ, and because of that choice, something happens to him. When Jesus says he "shall not hunger" he uses the emphatic double negative with the aorist subjunctive of the verb *peinao*. It means he will never be hungry again. Absolutely never. It is not possible for him to be hungry.

But when He talks about the one who "believes" in Him, Jesus uses the present active participle of the verb *pisteuo*, which speaks of a continuous act of choosing to trust. Thirst is a picture of insufficiency in life. Again, Jesus uses the emphatic double negative, but this time with the future active indicative of the verb *dipsao*. This construction tells us that as long as this person is believing, his thirst is being quenched.

Jesus is the bread of life. He is the source of both eternal life and abundant life (John 10:10). Everyone who believes in Jesus Christ has eternal life. Not everyone who believes in Jesus Christ has abundant life. Everyone who believes in Him has overcome the world in salvation. Not everyone who believes in Him overcomes the world on a daily basis. The writer of Hebrews says that the word preached to the Exodus generation did not profit them because it was not mixed with faith (Heb. 4:2). They were a generation of believers, but they were believers living in unbelief. They had life, but not abundant life. Their hunger had been satisfied, but they continued to thirst.

The point Jesus was making in the feeding of the 5,000 and in His teaching the next day was that He is the source of all satisfaction and all fulfillment, the only source of the abundant life. But when He tried to tell the people in John 6:50-65 that the fulfillment He offered could not be received apart from service and commitment to Him, "many of His disciples withdrew, and were not walking with Him anymore" (John 6:66). They enjoyed His teaching, but when He wanted them to apply the teaching to their lives, they lost interest.

Temptation: Proving the Word

For the children of Israel, manna was a daily object lesson given by God to teach them that physical bread could never sustain them, that only His Word could give them life. When Jesus declared Himself to be the bread of life, He taught the same lesson. But before He taught the lesson, He had proved it in His own life.

Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. And after He had fasted forty days and forty nights, He then became hungry. (Matt. 4:1-2)

Then is a strategic word in this verse. When was Jesus led into the wilderness? Immediately after His baptism, after an act of great commitment and spiritual victory. With His baptism by John, Jesus inaugurated His public ministry and identified Himself with the plan of God, knowing that meant the cross.

Every spiritual decision must be tested, because only testing can prove faith. This is true for us, and it was true for Jesus. On the heels of His public commitment to the plan of God now came the private testing of His faith.

In the Greek, Mark's account is much more emphatic about the Holy Spirit's work here. He says that the Spirit *impelled* Jesus, He *drove* Him into the wilderness to be tempted (Mark 1:12). "Tempted" is the Greek *peirasmos*. It can mean "to test" or "to tempt." It has the idea of solicitation to evil. Hebrews 4:15-16 tells us that Jesus was tempted in every way that we are, and His experience in the wilderness is an illustration of that.

First the Lord fasted. True fasting is setting aside physical needs because of spiritual priorities. This is what Jesus did—He set aside the needs of the body so He could concentrate on the needs of the soul and the spirit. For 40 days Jesus was completely preoccupied with the Word of God and totally absorbed in His communion with the Father.

And the tempter came and said to Him, "If You are the Son of God, command that these stones become bread." But He answered and said, "It is written, 'Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God.' " (Matt. 4:3-4)

When the tempter said to Jesus, "If you are the Son of God," he used a first-class condition. In the Greek this means, "If, and it is true"; it can be translated, "Since you are the Son of God." Satan has never had any doubt about the deity of Jesus Christ. In fact, what he suggested to Jesus here is something that only God could do: "Command that these stones become bread." The devil was testing the priorities of the Lord Jesus Christ.

When He answered, Jesus wanted to make His priorities absolutely clear; He wanted Satan—and wants us—to understand that obeying the Word of God is more important even than survival. So each time He answered the enemy He began by saying, "It is written." The Greek verb *grapho* in the perfect tense means "It has been written, with the result that it will stand written forever." The Word of God is going to last. Jesus knew that bread and His flesh-and-blood body and the earth on which He was standing were all passing away, but that the Word would abide forever.

When He said "Man shall not live by bread alone," He used *zoe*, a Greek word for life that means not just existence or survival but abundant life. Jesus was quoting Deuteronomy 8:3—the Old Testament passage that best explains God's provision of manna to the Exodus generation. Jesus was saying that the Word of God is more important than even the necessities of life. He was saying that He had a priority that was greater than survival. Satan's temptation was, "Will You use Your power to satisfy Your own needs?" The Lord's answer was, "My needs can be met by the Word of God."

Then the devil took Him into the holy city; and he had Him stand on the pinnacle of the temple, and said to Him, "If you are the Son of God throw Yourself down; for it is written, 'He will give His angels charge concerning You'; and 'On their hands they will bear You up, lest You strike Your foot against a stone.' " Jesus said to him, "On the other hand,

it is written, 'You shall not put the Lord your God to the test.' ” (Matt. 4:5-7)

Satan took Jesus to the top of the temple where a wing of the structure overlooked the Kidron Valley some 500 feet below. Down below on the other side, in the courtyard, were multitudes of people. The Lord Jesus Christ stood on the pinnacle and the enemy commanded Him to throw Himself down. The creature had the nerve to command his Creator!

The devil was bold here because he was about to quote Scripture. But, like so many people, he only knows how to quote out of context. He took a passage from Psalm 91:11-12, but he conveniently left out a little phrase that explains that God gave the Spirit charge over the Lord Jesus Christ not so that He could force God's hand, not so that He could spectacularly prove who He was, but “to guard Him in all His ways.”

The temptation here was for Jesus to take the initiative in showing who He really was, to prove Himself to the multitudes below. This would be forcing God's hand, trying to make Him act at what humanly seemed like a perfect time, instead of waiting and trusting that He knew when to strike.

Again Jesus met temptation with Scripture. He quoted Deuteronomy 6:16 where Moses rebuked the nation of Israel for what happened at Rephidim (Ex. 17:1-7). The people had come to a place where there was no water, and instead of trusting the Lord, they grumbled against Him and demanded He prove Himself. Moses cried to the Lord, and He provided water. But the name of the place was changed from Rephidim, which means “rest,” to Massah and Meribah, which mean “test” and “quarrel.” What should have been a memorial to the rest God intended to provide became a reminder of these people's bitterness and unbelief.

By quoting this passage, Jesus was saying to Satan, “Stop provoking God. Do not demand that He make Himself visible. Man walks by faith and not by sight. It is not for us to see; it is for us to trust and believe.”

Again, the devil took Him to a very high mountain, and showed Him all the kingdoms of the world, and their glory; and he said to Him, “All these things will I give You, if You fall down and worship me.” Then Jesus said to him, “Begone, Satan! For it is written, ‘You shall worship the Lord your God, and serve Him only.’ ” (Matt. 4:8-10)

In 2 Corinthians 4:4 Satan is called “the god of this world.” When Adam fell, the devil took the reins of authority and the scepter of rulership over the earth. When he offered “all these things” to Jesus in exchange for worship, he was talking about something he could deliver.

Here, “if” is a third-class condition, which in the Greek is equivalent to the English “if,” meaning “maybe and maybe not.” Satan was saying, “What are You going to do, Jesus? I will give you the crown, and You will not even have to go to the cross. Why go through this ridiculous plan of suffering, when You can have what You are seeking right now?”

The Bible tells us that in His humanity, Jesus was just like we are, only without sin. As a man, He would have been tempted by the thought of averting the terrible suffering

He knew was ahead. But He overcame the temptation because He knew that what we have means nothing if we have to receive it from the wrong person.

This time the Creator commanded the creature: “Begone, Satan!” But again, His authority was the Word: “For it is written ...” And Jesus quoted, again from Deuteronomy 6, the passage based on the Meribah incident: “you shall worship the Lord your God and serve Him only.”

Then the devil left Him; and behold, angels came and began to minister to Him. (Matt. 4:11)

The apostle James tells us that if we resist the devil, he will flee from us (James 4:7). Satan cannot stand up to the Word of God, and in each of the temptations recorded here, Jesus relied only on the Word.

In all His temptations, the Living Word was sustained by the written Word. And because He trusted in the written Word through testing, He entered into a deeper spiritual experience. After the devil left Him, angels came and began to minister to Him. This is the first time since His birth that angels are mentioned in the experience of Christ.

This tells us that God the Father was faithful to give Jesus the very experience that Jesus offers to us: “To him who overcomes I will give some of the hidden manna.” Jesus Christ had His own experience of hidden manna when angels came and ministered to Him.

None of the gospel writers tells us what the angels brought or how they ministered. They do not tell us because this was hidden manna. This was the Lord Jesus Christ entering into a spiritual, mystical provision that no other human being could ever understand. In the same way, God wants to lead each of us into communion, fulfillment, and satisfaction that we will never be able to describe to anyone else.

The temptation account begins with Jesus being hungry and ends with Him being fed. But He was hungry through natural means, and He was satisfied through supernatural means. This is what God wanted for the Exodus generation and it is what He wants for all His children today.

CHAPTER FOUR

The Way—Faith

THE MESSAGE OF Revelation 2 was sent out to all the churches of Asia Minor, but the promise of hidden manna was—and is—not for churches, but for individuals. “Say to the churches,” Jesus said, “To *him* who overcomes I will give” the hidden manna.

Anyone can be an overcomer. Anyone, that is, who wants to. The instant we choose to place our faith in the Lord Jesus Christ for salvation, we become partakers of the strategic victory of Jesus Christ. But how do we turn that eternal victory into day-to-day victory in our lives? What can we *do* to become overcomers now, in time?

When Jesus was asked in John 6:28, “What shall we do, that we may work the works of God?” He replied, “This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He has sent.” The only “work”—the only thing we can do—that is acceptable to God is faith. Jesus used here the present active subjunctive of *pisteuo*. The present tense says, “Keep on believing.” The active voice says, “It is up to you to choose whether to believe.” And the subjunctive mood says, “It is possible for you to choose to keep on believing, but it is also possible for you to choose not to.”

To be overcomers, we have to develop a lifestyle of making the right choices, the choices of faith. There are at least six right choices we can make every day that will lead us to the hidden manna.

[1] Be Hungry

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied. (Matt. 5:6)

When Jesus talks here about being hungry and thirsty, He speaks from experience; He has only recently come out of the wilderness after 40 days of fasting and testing.

“Blessed,” from the Greek *makarios*, means “happy.” The word originally meant to share the happiness of the Greek gods, and it is always in the plural—it means, “double happiness.” The blessing Jesus is talking about is the blessing of sharing God’s happiness, His joy. But something must precede this happiness: hunger and thirst for righteousness.

Both “hunger” and “thirst” are present active participles. The present tense refers to continuous activity; in the active voice, the subject produces the action of the verb. Jesus Christ is declaring blessed the person who chooses to keep on constantly being hungry and thirsty for righteousness. This is the person whose life is marked by a constant desire

to be conformed to the image of Christ. God blesses such hunger and thirst because it seeks spiritual nourishment.

The way Jesus framed this sentence in the original language would have caught the attention of every Jew in the crowd. When a Jew wanted to say he was hungry, he would use the genitive case. He would say, literally, “I want of bread,” indicating that he wanted a piece of bread. Jesus here uses the accusative case. In the first person this would be, literally, “I want *the* bread.” In the accusative, it is referring to the whole loaf, not a portion of it. Jesus says, “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for the whole loaf, those who want it all, who want *all* of righteousness.” The language here means to have such a great hunger that only the whole loaf can satisfy.

What is the difference between wanting a piece of bread and wanting the whole loaf? It is the difference between having life and having abundant life (John 10:10) or the difference between enjoying the rest Jesus gives when we come to Him and the rest that we find when we take up the yoke and begin to learn from Him (Matt. 11:28-30). It is the difference between overcoming by one-time faith in Jesus Christ for salvation and overcoming by daily faith in Jesus Christ for sanctification (1 John 5:4-5).

When we believe in Jesus Christ, God gives us half the “loaf”—the imputed righteousness of Jesus Christ; this has to do with our position. But He wants, during our lifetime on earth, to give us the other half of the loaf—the imparted righteousness of Jesus Christ; this has to do with our practice. Unless we choose to hunger for that practical righteousness—for spiritual growth, service, sanctification—we will never be satisfied in life because we will not be fulfilling the plan of God.

Jesus promises that whoever keeps on hungering and thirsting for righteousness shall be filled. This is a future indicative that says as surely as a person hungers and thirsts, he certainly shall be filled. Jesus uses a word that means to be stuffed. It refers to someone who walks away from a banquet table, someone who has eaten so fully and so well that he has no room left for another bite. That is the way God wants us to feel in life.

[2] Follow

And He went up to the mountain and summoned those whom He himself wanted, and they came to Him. And He appointed twelve, that they might be with Him, and that He might send them out ... (Mark 3:13-14)

The real dynamic in the Christian life is the power of association with the person of Jesus Christ. When the Lord called the apostles, His number-one objective was relationship: “that they might be with Him.” The verb “to be” is *eimi* in Greek. The present tense refers to continuous association. The Lord Jesus Christ wanted these men to be near Him all the time. The Bible does not say that He chose them in order to teach them or to proclaim certain things to them or to use them. The first and foremost object in the ordination of the twelve was association with Himself.

The greatest challenge that has ever been offered to the world is the invitation: “Follow Me” (Matt. 4:19). Here the only perfect man, the only real celebrity, the only real hero of the human race set His life on the line and said, “I am the only perfect standard by which you can guide your life.”

By their daily association, the disciples who accepted the challenge saw Jesus in every possible circumstance. They saw Him deal with the adoring crowds when it would have been so easy for Him to have become arrogant. They saw Him in His private mundane life, when it would have been so natural for Him to become frustrated in dealing with details, irritations, interruptions, discouragement—all the little things that we have to deal with every day. They saw Him when He had been maligned and reviled and ridiculed, when it would have been reasonable to have lashed out at His enemies. They saw Him when He had the opportunity to let down and be something different from what He was in the public view. But He never did become arrogant; He never did become frustrated; He never did lose control; He never was inconsistent.

Living and walking daily in His presence, the disciples came to understand that His life was proof that He really was who He claimed to be: God in the flesh. As they observed His life and His example, they saw God's Word put into practice, and they saw that in every situation He faced Jesus proved that the Word was true. He proved that the Word of God was the greatest power on the face of the earth.

Our association with Jesus Christ is different than theirs. They lived with Him, ate with Him, slept with Him, walked with Him, ministered with Him—in the flesh. Our knowledge of and association with Jesus Christ has to come through the study of the written Word. But we have something they did not have when Jesus was on earth: we have Christ Himself and the Father and the Holy Spirit indwelling us. We have the ability, through the filling of the Holy Spirit, to be experientially near to Him, to be in fellowship with Him, all day, every day.

[3] Train

A disciple is not above his teacher, nor a slave above his master. It is enough for the disciple that he become as his teacher, and the slave as his master. (Matt. 10:24-25)

A “disciple,” *mathetes*, is a student, one who learns and discovers by instruction and by experience. Jesus uses here the emphatic negative to emphasize that while the student's experience and discovery will lead him through the stages of spiritual growth, they will never lead him beyond the person of Christ.

In Luke 6:40 Jesus said that “a pupil is not above his teacher; but everyone, after he has been fully trained, will be like his teacher.” Everyone, after he has been fully supplied, fully equipped, fully trained, fully prepared, will be an amazing thing—a facsimile of the Master. God wants us to be conformed to the image of His Son, to be replicas of the person of Jesus Christ, representations to the world of the dynamic of the greatest life that was ever lived.

Training takes time. It is the Lord's desire that we let the Holy Spirit guide us through the stages of spiritual growth from infancy through adolescence to maturity—the point at which the normal Christian life really begins. Once we enter that promised land—the place where we realize that we have a destiny, a part to fulfill in God's plan—then we begin the life of conquest that will lead us to the hero-of-faith status attained by men and women listed in Hebrews 11.

And then, if we continue to hunger for the whole loaf, for all of righteousness, we will ultimately achieve the highest status possible—friend of God. Very few people in the Bible—Abraham, Moses, and Rahab the harlot among them—are specifically called friends of God.

We only become friends of God when we have become so conformed to the character of the Son of God that we have maximum compatibility with the person of Jesus Christ. Our compatibility with the Lord is based on conformity to Him. We have studied the Lord, analyzed His life, and followed hard on His heels until, as Paul says in Galatians 4:19, “Christ is formed in you.” The more our character reflects Him, the more basis we have for intimacy with Him.

[4] Think

Therefore, holy brethren, partakers of a heavenly calling, consider Jesus, the Apostle and High Priest of our confession. He was faithful to Him who appointed Him, as Moses also was in all His house. (Heb. 3:1-2)

Jesus Christ is *the* celebrity of human history. If we fail to recognize the uniqueness of the Savior, we will fall short of the great goals of the Christian life—occupation with the person of Jesus Christ, conformity to His character, and ultimately, becoming a friend of God. The author of Hebrews does not want us to fall short.

“Consider” is *katanoeo*. *Noeo* means, “to think”; it refers to objective—not emotional—thinking. This is thinking based on facts, and the facts concerning the Lord Jesus Christ are recorded in Scripture. The preposition *kata* means “down.” The author is telling us to bear down with our minds on the written Word of God. We have to let the Word of God dominate our thinking, dominate the processes of our mind, so that we are able to fully understand just how great Jesus Christ is.

The author uses an ingressive aorist tense here that says, “You need to *begin* to think about Jesus Christ in this way.” The active voice says, “*You* have to choose to think this way.” The imperative mood is a command that says, “Do it now! Bear down with your mind on the person of Jesus Christ!” And then to give us something concrete to bear down on, the author points to two roles of Jesus Christ: His apostleship and His priesthood.

“Apostle” is from the Greek *apo*, which means “from” and *stello*, which means “to send or commission.” Jesus is called the Apostle simply because He has the right of absolute authority and because He was commissioned by God the Father to bring to the human race the message of salvation. He is the ultimate Apostle, infinitely superior to all others. Later, in Hebrews 4:14-16, the author will hold up Christ’s priesthood as an encouragement for us to boldly approach the throne of grace. We have, he says, a great High Priest who can sympathize with our weaknesses because He “has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin.”

In Hebrews 3, the author chooses just one characteristic of Jesus Christ on which to focus: His faithfulness. God the Father had a plan for His Son. He sent His son to redeem mankind, and the Son was dependable, trustworthy, loyal, and faithful in accomplishing His mission. He was faithful to the absolute degree—never once a failure. He never failed

in mental attitude, never failed in the words that He spoke, never failed in His overt activities. He constantly, moment-by-moment was faithful to the plan and the purpose of the Father.

Jesus is compared here to Moses because for the Jewish believers in Jerusalem to whom this was written there was no higher human standard of faithfulness than Moses. It is virtually impossible to convey the reverence the Jews had for Moses and the honor which God Himself gives to Moses in Scripture. But compared even to this most faithful of men, Jesus Christ is infinitely greater.

Jesus “has been counted worthy of more glory than Moses, by just so much as the builder of the house has more honor than the house. For every house is built by someone, but the builder of all things is God” (Heb. 3:3-4). Jesus Christ is the unique person of all history. He is, as the writer declares here, God, the builder of all things. He is the only Son of God (Rom. 1:4); He is the eternal Son of David (Rom. 1:3); He is the only Savior (Heb. 5:9; Acts 4:12); He is the unique Apostle and High Priest (Heb. 3:1); He is the only God-man (John 1:14; Phil. 2:5-9). He is the only man without sin (2 Cor. 5:21). No one else can measure up to Him. He stands unique in all history. If we do not bear down with our minds on every aspect of that truth, we will miss the hidden manna.

[5] Focus

Therefore, since we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let us also lay aside every encumbrance, and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. (Heb. 12:1-2)

“Therefore” tells us that the author is about to throw down a challenge based on what he has said in the letter leading up to and including Hebrews 11, the hero of faith chapter.

In the cloud of witnesses that surrounds us are the great heroes of the Old Testament who have run their races and are now in the stands. They are surrounding us to cheer us on and give us support as we run our race. As we study their lives, these men and women call to us and challenge us from the pages of Scripture. As we consider our own weaknesses and areas of sin, we can draw strength from these people. Abraham overcame; Moses overcame; Rahab overcame, and Gideon and Samson and David and more.

Whatever particular encumbrances weigh us down, whatever particular sins entangle us, we have someone in the stands cheering for us, someone in the Bible who faced the same problems and yet overcame.

We are to run with endurance the race set before us. The word for race is *agon*. We get the English “agony” from this word. It means “struggle, fight, battle, agony, pain, suffering, difficulty.” No matter how hard our race gets, we are exhorted to endure, to bear the pain but keep up the pace. The only way to do this is to fix our eyes on Jesus.

The author uses here the verb *aphorao*. *Apo* means “away from.” *Horao* means, “to take a panoramic view, a good long look.” Together they mean to look away from all the

distractions that loom on the horizon and set our gaze on one thing: Jesus Christ. The point is that we can never look *to* Jesus Christ unless we look *away from* everything else.

Our example in concentration is the Lord Himself, the author and the finisher of faith, the hero who has opened for us the way to God. Jesus Christ looked away from every distraction on His horizon—including all the suffering He endured and would endure—and set His gaze on the promise of a future joy. What possible kind of joy could make the suffering of the cross seem worthwhile? Only one: the joy of the Bridegroom calling His bride (John 3:29; Eph. 5:22-32; Rev. 19:7-9, 21:2). The story of redemption is the ultimate love story, and the Lord Jesus Christ is the ultimate lover.

[6] Reflect

For consider Him who has endured such hostility by sinners against Himself, so that you may not grow weary and lose heart. (Heb. 12:3)

“Consider Him” is the third of three verbs of concentration used by the author of Hebrews to encourage us to be occupied with the person of Jesus Christ. In Hebrews 3:1: “Consider Jesus”—*katanoeo*, bear down with your mind on the Apostle and High Priest of our faith. In Hebrews 12:1: “fixing our eyes on Jesus”—*aphorao*, turning away from all the distractions and focusing only on the author and finisher of faith. Finally, here in Hebrews 12:3: “Consider Him”—*analogizomai*, think about Him who endured such hostility, think about Him over and over and over again.

Logizomai means, “to think; to concentrate.” *Ana* means “again.” This is another aorist active imperative. It says, “Start considering Him now! Start now thinking about Him over and over, concentrating on Him, mentally reviewing what you know about Him, reflecting on His greatness.”

Why does the author give such urgency to this command? Because he knows that if we do not start concentrating on Jesus we most certainly will grow weary and lose heart. Only concentration on the person of Christ will give us the power to overcome the soul fatigue that pulls so many believers off the track. And only concentration on the person of Christ will give us the momentum to press on in spiritual growth.

Fulfillment

There is, in the soul of every person created by God, a hunger—a yearning, an empty place designed by God to be filled by Him alone. “Thou hast made us for Thyself,” wrote the fourth-century believer Augustine, “and our heart is restless, until it repose in Thee.”

Apart from salvation by faith, there is absolutely no hope of that hunger ever being satisfied, because true satisfaction and fulfillment are products of the grace of God. They can come from no other source in the universe. “Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden,” Jesus said, “and I will give you rest” (Matt. 11:28). This is the rest of salvation—the security that comes from knowing hostilities have ceased, that we have peace with God and are now His children, secure forever.

Jesus did not stop there. “Take My yoke upon you, and learn from Me,” He went on, “for I am gentle and humble in heart; and you shall find rest for your souls” (Matt.

11:29). This is the rest of spiritual growth—the moment-by-moment refreshment of fellowship and intimacy with Jesus Christ Himself. This rest, like the first, comes only by grace through faith. This is the rest that two-and-one-half million believers in the Exodus generation missed because they would not look beyond the physical manna to the real bread of life.

In John 4 we find a story about Jesus trying to get His disciples to look beyond physical bread to spiritual truth. Jesus and His men, traveling from Jerusalem to Galilee, came to the Samaritan village of Sychar. They were all hungry, and the disciples had gone into the city to buy food. It was noon. It was hot. Jesus, weary from the journey, was sitting by the well when a woman came to draw water.

He struck up a conversation with her. They were talking about water, and He said to her, “Look, you come out here every day to draw from this well, but you need a different kind of water—you need spiritual water; you need the water of life.”

She wanted to hear more about this living water, and eventually they came to the point where He began to explain to her what true worship is about; He told her that God seeks people to worship Him in Spirit and in truth. She was full of questions, but she said, “I know that when Messiah comes He will have answers for me.” And Jesus looked at her and said, “I am the Messiah.”

This woman was so thrilled that she dropped her waterpot, ran back into town, and began telling all the men about Jesus. Soon they were streaming out of the city toward the well. In the meantime, the disciples returned with the food and began urging Jesus to eat. The tense of the verb here tells us that they kept on saying over and over and over again, “Rabbi, eat!” They knew that He had to be hungry, and they did not understand why He would not eat.

When He told them, “I have food to eat that you do not know about,” He was talking about a spiritual hunger that physical bread cannot satisfy. But the disciples still did not understand, and they were turning to each other saying, “No one else brought Him anything to eat, did they?” The only thing the disciples could think about was physical food.

Jesus began to teach the spiritual lesson: “My food is to do the will of Him who sent me and to accomplish His work.” This is an amazing statement. He wanted them to understand that there is more satisfaction and fulfillment in obedience to the Word of God than in any food we could ever eat.

He directed the disciples’ eyes to the multitude of people in their white robes coming out from the village and He said, “Can’t you see that the fields are white for harvest? Already the one who reaps is receiving wages, and is gathering fruit for eternal life; that the one who sows and the one who reaps may rejoice together.”

What was His point? Twelve disciples walked into town and had no spiritual impact at all, and yet this one woman who had just met Jesus Christ ran in and led a multitude to Him. Here is a woman who was hungry—spiritually hungry. What happens when we are spiritually hungry? We not only find satisfaction, but we get to dine with royalty. This is what happened to her. Jesus said, “already the one who reaps is receiving wages”—that is blessing in life—“and gathering fruit for eternal life”—that is eternal reward. But better even than blessing or reward was the fact that the one who sowed—the Lord Himself—and the one who reaped—this woman—would rejoice together.

Harvest in the ancient world was a time for both working and feasting. This woman and Jesus Christ had worked together and so were feasting together. No one else understood what was going on—the Lord Jesus Christ and the woman at the well were having a banquet, and the disciples were still wandering around saying, “What’s He eating? Who brought Him food? We don’t understand! What’s going on?”

In a loving rebuke to the disciples, Jesus said, “I sent you out to reap, but you did not do it, so someone else did.” Why had Jesus sent the disciples into town? It was not just to buy bread; He always had a higher purpose for everything He did. John tells us earlier in the chapter that Jesus had to go through Samaria. There were other ways to get to Galilee, and “good” Jews did everything they could to avoid contaminating themselves by contact with the Samaritans, whom they despised.

But Jesus knew that in Sychar was a multitude of people hungry for the spiritual food of truth, so He set up this test for the disciples. Could they walk into a town that was hungry for spiritual truth and find the people who wanted the gospel? Well, they walked in, bought bread, and walked out, and they never touched a soul. The whole time they were in the city they were probably thinking, “Isn’t it terrible the way these Samaritans live!”

This passage is teaching about the opportunities that we pass up every day. God has ordained the opportunity for us to find spiritual fulfillment every single day of our lives. If we reject the opportunities, we lose both the fulfillment for that day and the reward we could have earned for eternity. But if we accept the opportunities, we will see both.

In Revelation 3:20, the Lord makes a standing offer: “Behold I stand at the door and knock; if anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him, and will dine with him, and he with Me.” The word translated here “dine” is not the normal word for eating; instead it is the word for feasting. Jesus says to every one of us daily, “If you will just hear My voice and open the door, I will come in and we can celebrate together!”

“I AM.”

- Are you hungry for fulfillment, for satisfaction? Jesus said, “I am the bread of life”(John 6:35, 48).
- Are you confused, lost, and in need of direction? Jesus said, “I am the light of the world” (John 8:12, 9:5, 12:46).
- Are you looking for something permanent, solid, unchanging? Jesus said, “Before Abraham was, I am” (John 8:58).
- Are you looking for security, protection? In the ancient world, when the sheep entered the door of a sheepfold, they were safe. Jesus said, “I am the door” (John 10:7, 9).
- Are you lonely; do you need provision and care? Jesus said, “I am the good shepherd” (John 10:11, 14).
- Are you seeking God? You will never know the Father without knowing the Son. Jesus said, “I am the Son of God” (John 10:36).
- Are you afraid of death? Jesus said, “I am the resurrection and the life” (John 11:25).
- Are you in search of someone to teach you, of a cause to serve? Jesus said, “You call Me Teacher and Lord; and you are right, for so I am” (John 13:13).
- Are you looking for guidance, for truth, for something more than just existence? Jesus said, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life” (John 14:6).
- Are you tired of emptiness and vanity and futility? The vine in Israel, as the source of wine, was a symbol of happiness and production and fulfillment. Jesus said, “I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me, and I in him, he bears much fruit; for apart from Me you can do nothing” (John 15:5).

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