

Worms

Drash on Parashah 16; Beshalach

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If I was some sort of Special Forces Rambo type and went into some terrorist camp to rescue a POW that had been there for multiple years, assuming my mission was successful, I would have one desire once it was over. I would want to get that person back to his home where he was safe and able to enjoy a normal life. This is what would make sense, but what if instead of bringing him home, I dropped him off in the middle of a desert and left him there. Would it make sense to take him from one form of suffering to another? Would it make sense to free him of his captivity, just to leave him in a place where he would be likely to die? As much as this does not make sense, this is exactly what God did to His own people.

We would think that when God defeated Pharaoh and the other forces of darkness in Egypt, that he would do the same in Kena'an and bring His people straight into the land flowing with milk and honey. Instead, He brings them into the middle of a wilderness with no food or water. Some may think this to be cruel. He could have brought them to the Promised Land and then taught them His Torah. Why so much testing so soon?

Let me take you to a different scenario. Many have seen the movie "The Great Escape". It is the story of a group of Jews in a concentration camp who manage to secretly dig a tunnel and escape the camp. The problem was they were still in enemy territory after the escape, and most of them were hunted down and killed before they could get to safety. This was the reality of the situation for God's people, Isra'el. The forces of darkness that enslaved them in Egypt were not just in Egypt. The Egyptians were civilized compared to most of the cultures in Kena'an. Truth is, Satan is the prince of the whole world. In a spiritual sense, there is no safe place in the world. The whole earth is enemy territory.

After being saved from Egypt, Isra'el had to learn quickly the importance of trusting in God before they met any real threat to their physical and spiritual lives. Finding themselves in the middle of a wilderness with no food or water was their first test. Would they panic and wonder how they were going to live, or trust in God to provide for their needs though it seemed impossible. They had already seen some amazing things at the hand of God. Why would they not expect the same in their new

time of need? Remember what I said a couple of weeks ago about how in stressful situations people tend not to think straight. Despite the miracles they had seen, they were in a wilderness with no apparent way to survive. I don't know what caused their lack of faith, but they panicked rather than trusted.

God still came through and provided manna from heaven and water from a rock so they would survive, but not without a bit of anger for their lack of trust. The provision led to a new problem, also caused by their lack of trust. Greed.

Here is what Adonai has ordered: each man is to gather according to his appetite – each is to take an `omer [two quarts] per person for everyone in his tent." The people of Isra'el did this. Some gathered more, some less; but when they put it in an `omer-measure, whoever had gathered much had no excess; and whoever had gathered little had no shortage; nevertheless each person had gathered according to his appetite. Moshe told them, "No one is to leave any of it till morning." But they didn't pay attention to Moshe, and some kept the leftovers until morning. It bred worms and rotted, which made Moshe angry at them. [Sh'mot/Exodus 16:16-20]

As good as it is when God blesses us, we always wonder how much we can actually count on His continued blessing. Sure He has given us what we need for today, but what about tomorrow? Will He still provide then? What about the next day? I'm sure it was tempting to try to save what they could, just in case. However, they found out that God gives us our daily bread, and stockpiling does not always work. It shows a lack of trust in God.

This trust would be tested further when it came to the sixth and seventh days. They received a double portion on the sixth day so they would not have to go out to gather the manna on the Sabbath. The other days, leftovers had worms by the next morning. Wouldn't the second half of the double portion also get worms? As they found out, this was not the case. When they listened to God, He provided for them and kept the worms away. When they failed to trust, the worms of corruption came to render the food they had useless.

Our ancestors in Egypt failed to grasp the meaning of your wonders. They didn't keep in mind your great deeds of grace but rebelled at the sea, at the Sea of Suf. Yet he saved them for his own name's sake, to make known his mighty power. He rebuked the Sea of Suf, and it dried up; he led them through its depths as through a desert. He saved them from hostile hands, redeemed them from the power of the foe. The water closed over their adversaries; not one of them was left.

Then they believed his words, and they sang his praise. But soon they forgot his deeds and wouldn't wait for his counsel. In the desert they gave way to insatiable greed; in the wastelands they put God to the test. He gave them what they wanted but sent meagerness into their souls. In the camp they were jealous of Moshe and Aharon, Adonai's holy one.

[Tehellim/Psalms 106:7-16]

If you are not going to trust in God, and instead, you are going to rely on your own understanding, be careful what you complain about. God may grant you what you long for, but the consequences may not be what you imagine. You may get the six figure income job you want, but it may keep you away from home so much, your relationship with your family will be broken. You may find a way to get that car or your dreams, but at what expense? Will you be able to get it without a huge debt that you can't pay for? Will you have to have to violate your personal integrity to get it? Who will get the glory if you get it? Solomon achieved all a man could ever hope to achieve, yet it did not bring the joy and fulfillment in his life that he had hoped. He had a thousand wives and concubines, yet these wives and his departure from trust in God led to his downfall.

Then to the people he said, "Be careful to guard against all forms of greed, because even if someone is rich, his life does not consist in what he owns." [Luke 12:15]

In the Tanakh, greed is closely associated with coveting and lust. These concepts go beyond simple desire. This is a level of desire that ignores the will and law of God. There is nothing wrong with wanting nice things any more than there is anything wrong with having them. The difference is whether the things in your life has been given to you by the King or if you have obtained them on your own initiative. As God's servants our lives are not our own. Anything we have has been given to us for a purpose, which is ultimately for His glory, not our luxury.

In the reading from Iyov/Job 20, we see the fate of the wicked who let greed feed their passions. They may achieve success and glory for a time, but when their success is built on the backs of the poor, and their wealth is not in line with the will of God, then eventually destruction awaits them and all they have.

"For he crushed and abandoned the poor, seizing houses he did not build, because his appetite would not let him rest, in his greed he let nothing escape; nothing is left that he did not devour; therefore his well-being will not last. [Iyov/Job 20:19-21]

The manna that God gave His people in the wilderness was to last for one day, with the exception of day six, which had provision for the seventh day as well. This was to teach Isra'el to fully rely on God for what they needed each day, just as our Messiah Yeshua taught us to do in Mattityahu 6:11. In the same chapter, He teaches us not to store up for ourselves treasure on earth, where the worms or moths of corruption destroy, but to store up treasure in heaven. This is also where He teaches us not to worry about what we will eat or what we will wear, because it is pagans who worry about such things. We are to trust that God knows we need such things. The focus of our life is seeking first His Kingdom and His righteousness, according to His Torah.

"Listen to me, you who know justice, you people who have my Torah in your heart: don't be afraid of people's taunts, don't be upset by their insults. For the moth will eat them up like clothing, the worm will eat them like wool; but my justice will be forever, and my salvation for all generations." [Yesha'yahu/Isaiah 51:7]

The worms of greed not only destroy what we have, but will destroy our lives as well. As we seek to live according to God's Word and His Will, we are to desire no more and no less than what He wants for our lives.

I have asked two things of you; don't deny them to me as long as I live – keep falsehood and futility far from me, and give me neither poverty nor wealth. Yes, provide just the food I need today; for if I have too much, I might deny you and say, "Who is Adonai?" And if I am poor, I might steal and thus profane the name of my God. [Mishlei/Proverbs 30:7-9]

This is not to say that if we are poor we are justified in stealing. The writer is simply stating the reality that when resources are low, people are tempted more to steal. It is safer to be in a lion's cage when he is well fed than when he is hungry. Have you noticed the increase in thefts and robberies with the increase in economic troubles? In the same way, if God blesses with wealth, we must never forget whose hand the wealth comes from. God blessed Isra'el with the wealth of Egypt, but it would later be required of them to build the tabernacle and its furnishings. It was not for them to build an idol for themselves to worship instead of God who gave it to them, even though, as we will see, this is what they did. The key is to maintain trust in God, whether in times of plenty or times of poverty.

So imitate God, as his dear children; and live a life of love, just as also the Messiah loved us, indeed, on our behalf gave himself up as an offering, as a slaughtered sacrifice to God with a pleasing fragrance. Among you there should not even be mentioned sexual immorality, or any kind of impurity, or greed; these are utterly inappropriate for God's holy people. Also out of place are obscenity and stupid talk or coarse language; instead, you should be giving thanks. For of this you can be sure: every sexually immoral, impure or greedy person – that is, every idol-worshipper – has no share in the Kingdom of the Messiah and of God. Let no one deceive you with empty talk; for it is because of these things that God's judgment is coming on those who disobey him. So don't become partners with them! For you used to be darkness; but now, united with the Lord, you are light. Live like children of light, for the fruit of the light is in every kind of goodness, rightness and truth – try to determine what will please the Lord. [Ephesians 5:6-10]

Trust in God realizes that without Him we are nothing. If what we have has been given by God, and we do with it as His Word dictates, then it will be preserved and so will our lives. The more we feed our lusts with our own work and wisdom, the more the worms of greed causes decay and corruption on our hearts.

Adonai said to Moshe, "Here, I will cause bread to rain down from heaven for you. The people are to go out and gather a day's ration every day. By this I will test whether they will observe my Torah or not. [Sh'mot/Exodus 16:4]"

It is God's desire that we follow His Word. In doing so, the light of His wisdom will fill our hearts instead of the worms of our greed. Instead of corruption, we will have compassion. Instead of decay, we will have life as we daily partake of the Bread of Life, who is our Messiah Yeshua Himself.