

Could you be happy, if you lost everything tomorrow.

I'm sure a lot of people here are familiar with the Lee Greenwood song God Bless the USA. They play it a lot around Independence Day, elections, and other patriotic events. The song talks about being grateful for the freedoms we enjoy in America, and one verse reads: If tomorrow all the things were gone/I worked for all my life/And I had to start again /With just my children and my wife/I thank my lucky stars/To be living here today/'Cause the flag still stands for freedom/And they can't take that away.

Now, I think that if we did in fact experience this, if we really had to start all over, we would be deeply grieved and upset. If you've ever had to start all over you know just how hard that can be. But what this song points to is that the most important things in life and in death cannot be so easily taken from us.

This is the lesson that Jesus teaches us here, that the real prize is God, not worldly things.

This passage takes place immediately following the feeding of the 5000. The people have just seen Jesus provide for their physical needs in an amazing way. Still, the people wanted more. They had high expectations. If I asked you who is the most important person in the bible, who would you say? Jesus! Jesus is always the right answer. But if you were an orthodox Jew five minutes before you meet Jesus, who would you say? King David is a good guess, but the answer would almost certainly be Moses. Still to this day, if you posed this question to an orthodox Jew, they would probably say Moses.

This is because Moses knew God in a very special way, in a way deeper and more special than any man before or after him. It was Moses who God called first to lead the people, to save the people, to judge the people and to love the people. It was to Moses that law of God was first given, and the true character of God.

There's a lot of talk these days about the intolerance of Christianity and Judaism. That's not at all the nature of God I see in Scripture. I see a God that cared about slaves. I see a God that never abandoned God's people. I see a God that cared for oppressed people, the outcast, the lowly. I see a God who sees and saves, and chooses an outcast, a murderer and a poor speaker to lead God's people.

God did many signs and wonders through Moses, such as the ten plagues of Egypt, and various things which took place in the wilderness, such as causing water to

spring from a rock, curing the people of snake bites, and providing quail for meat. There was another very important miracle however. Can you guess what it is? Manna! God caused a material to fall from the heavens which was white in color, about the size of a small grain or seed, and which could be ground and used to make bread and cakes. No one, then or now, knows exactly what it was, and even the name means “what is it?”

This heavenly bread was a symbol to the people, so much so, that some of it was preserved by Aaron and kept in the ark of the covenant and a sign and witness to the people. Manna was a symbol of God’s power and God’s provision. The people are essentially asking if this Jesus is as great as Moses before him. If Moses could feed them, imagine what one greater than him could do.

The people ask Jesus for bread for heaven, but they’re clearly missing the point. They think they’re being offered a life of ease, lacking the struggle to survive. There’s an old country song by the Chicks that is sung from the perspective of someone who has died and in it there is a line that goes I wished it’d been easier, instead of any longer. No one seeks a harder life, and there is no one who wouldn’t wish for an easier. Do we sometimes choose harder paths because we know it is right? Of course, but even those brave people wish for a world where such choices were not necessary.

But what Jesus is offering is not an easier life, free from the struggle to make money or work to provide food. In fact, Jesus always tells the people that the life of a Christian will not be easy. It’ll be hard, wondrous and important, joyful and even happy at times, but not easy. The people don’t seem to understand this right now, focusing instead on material needs, and failing to see that Jesus is the real prize.

This world and this life are so overwhelming. These bodies, these minds, require constant attention. It’s easy to forget that this is just the prologue to eternity, to the things which matter most. God has already given us everything, God has given us God’s very own self. There is nothing that will happen to us in this life, no matter how terrible, that God cannot make right in the next life. There is nothing that will happen to us in this life, no matter how good, that will be greater than what we’ve already received. God is the prize. It wasn’t the manna from heaven or the multiplied bread and fish, it was Jesus himself.

I don’t like to share personal stories because my mindset has always been that it’s my job to take care of you, and not the other way around, and I also just see a lot of preachers who preach themselves instead of the Gospel, and I don’t ever want to be

a distraction. I'll break that rule today and share a little story that happened to us recently. About two years ago Jake bought me what I call a pulpit cross. It's a cross you wear in the pulpit. It's usually big enough that it can easily be seen but not distracting. He bought it at my favorite place in the country, the Ohio Renaissance Faire. I had taken it off one Sunday and the void that is my home claimed it. Looked everywhere, couldn't find it. Well, as some of you know I was called away for a family emergency recently. I was feeling pretty lonely as we were heading toward a very unknown situation. The morning we are getting ready to leave, my husband calls me over, and the kittens we recently adopted had found the cross and put it by their food bowl. It's a silly thing, I'm not superstitious, I know that cross is just a piece of metal, but it did remind me of something very important that I often forget, and I bet you do too. I'm never really alone. No matter what happens, I've already won. God is with me, my salvation is assured. No matter what the outcome was, I would still have the important thing, the bread of heaven, God himself. As a side note, everything worked out fine.

Friends, our physical experience can be an all-consuming distraction. These bodies need food and water and sunlight, among other things, and then beyond that there's so much to want. Nice fluffy pajamas, tasty food, good books, and the like. But let us try to remember to that the best thing, the most important thing, belongs to us already, and that is the bread of heaven, God's very own self.

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