

Mercy, Pilgrimage, And Providence

God's Guarantee to Supply All Our Real Needs

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Given 17-Apr-03; Sermon #606B

We're going to begin this sermon in Matthew 7, verses 13 and 14.

Matthew 7:13-14 [Jesus said] Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leads to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat: Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leads unto life, and few there be that find it.

I think it's interesting that Jesus virtually began His ministry with a charge like this. That life is often troublesome and perplexing. Some translations use the word "difficult," although "troubling" and "perplexing" seem to fit just a bit better because the word that is translated "narrow" literally means that. *Stenos* means narrow and it gives one the impression that somebody is being squeezed in, almost against his will. That actually is a pretty good picture because of what is happening to us.

Life is difficult; there is no doubt about that and perhaps for us more so because we fight human nature. And because of that, we are constrained by *this way* to hold human nature in check. This is why the picture of a narrowing in is appropriate because we have to hold human nature from its natural expression of going to extremities in things. Well, this creates all kinds of difficulties in us that those in the world do not have.

There is no doubt that life has been difficult for us in the past. I think that it is presently difficult for us and the immediate future doesn't give much hope that things are going to get any better despite the fact that sometimes we might even feel somewhat hopeful.

Does that sound pessimistic? Well it may, but I prefer to say that it is realistic without being hopeless. I say that because many verses give us reason to hope that God will supply all that we need along the road to the Kingdom of God and that many of those verses give us a flat out promise that God will supply those needs.

This sermon is going to go along one of those paths involving this subject and is actually formed around the promises that are given in Romans 8:32. But I want you to see that there is one aspect of this difficult life that we've been called to that we share in common with the Israelites of old, and maybe I should just say mankind all the time, not just of old. Let's go back to Exodus the sixth chapter because God uses Israel as an example

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that we can all relate to in regard to most of the things in life.

Exodus 6:6-9 Wherefore say unto the children of Israel, I am the LOORD, and I will bring you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians, and I will rid you out of their bondage, and I will redeem you with a stretched out arm, and with great judgments: And I will take you to me for a people, and I will be to you a God: and you shall know that I am the LOORD your God, which brings you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians. And I will bring you in into the land, concerning the which I did swear to give it to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob; and I will give it you for an heritage: I am the LOORD. And Moses spake so unto the children of Israel: but they hearkened not unto Moses for anguish of spirit, and for cruel bondage.

Like us, Israel had no major problem grasping the concept that God is faithful to His promises. We can grasp that and we don't have trouble with it. We have enough intellect to know that we can look out and see what God has made and see that there was plenty of power. There was great wisdom and awesome love in what He created, and so for a God to make promises like this is no big thing for us to say, "yes, I accept that. I see that. I understand that. I grasp it."

These people had a history, beginning with Abraham, that revolved around a relationship with God, and they could grasp the fact that God lives and that He had ample power that would enable him to do what he had promised. As a matter of fact, Israel didn't even get out of Egypt—didn't even get into the wilderness and the beginning of the pilgrimage—before God gave them eleven stupendous miracles, including the one where He divided the sea so that they could get through, and He thus made His power evident.

He made it so evident that for the last seven plagues that hit Egypt, they were completely protected while Egypt was devastated. They could see that He could draw a precise line at the boundary of Goshen and they didn't get hurt. You talk about "shock and awe" and guided missiles. God had power over bugs so that they wouldn't go in to Goshen.

You would think that would be plenty of witness, wouldn't it? But we can see even before verse 9 is over that they most definitely had major problems living with the practical application of those promises because other immediate concerns overwhelmed their attention, and it was those concerns that consumed their energies.

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Another translation renders that last phrase as "for anguish of spirit and for cruel bondage." Other translations render it "because they were so crushed in spirit in their bondage." The King James Version is a weak translation because in Hebrew that phrase actually gives the impression of a child sobbing so hard and gasping for breath. You've probably seen one of your children like that. That's the impression that the Hebrew phrase gives one.

You can see why their attention was diverted from the wonderful promises—flat-out promises—God made through Moses. "I will do this. I will, will, will" seven times he said, "I will do this." And right after Moses said it, they rejected it.

I'll tell you, this so shook up Moses (we won't read the rest of the paragraph there) that he, too, had an attack of self-distrust and despondency about his fitness for the leadership position that God had given to him. "*Agh! Am I going to be equal to this?*" In other words, he was feeling the same thing they were. "Would God be able to supply him what he needed to do the job given to him?"

We know he already had trouble when he said, "*You know, God, that I can't speak very well.*" So here he is giving the message to these people and already he's having a crisis of confidence just like the people that he was to be leading. Let's go a few chapters further in Exodus the fifteenth chapter.

Exodus 15:27 And they came to Elim, where were twelve wells of water, and threescore and ten palm trees: and they encamped there by the waters.

Exodus 16:1-4 And they took up their journey from Elim, and all the congregation of the children of Israel came unto the wilderness of Sin, which is between Elim and Sinai, on the fifteenth day of the second month after their departing out of the land of Egypt. And the whole congregation of the children of Israel murmured against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness: And the children of Israel said unto them, Would to God we had died by the hand of the LORD in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the flesh pots, and when we did eat bread to the full; for ye have brought us forth into this wilderness, to kill this whole assembly with hunger. Then said the LORD unto Moses, Behold, I will rain bread from heaven for you; and the people shall go out and gather a certain rate every day, that I may prove them, whether they will walk in my law, or no.

What was at the basis of their murmuring against God? Well, it was their fear that God

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would not follow through to provide for them, even though He had already shown what He could do. Now consider this example that we just read through. Here they are, just a couple of weeks away from their release from slavery, and already they had several clear examples of God's providence.

At this point in time they had just left an encampment (verse 27) and God supplied them there with a well-watered oasis that apparently also had plenty of sweet foods there as well. That's why the palm trees are mentioned. And now, a couple of weeks later, they are facing one of the first difficulties of the march itself in that they apparently had to walk for several days from the wells at Elim without an abundance of food and water. They were already bitterly complaining about their circumstance, wishing they had never left Egypt.

There is much recorded in Israel's pilgrimage about their discontented murmuring. It is recorded for our benefit, "upon whom the ends of the age are come," because discontent and its fruit—murmuring—is still a major problem. I believe that it is a major problem because it is the same problem (discontentment) Satan had. When mixed with his pride, it produced his rebellion against God. I want you to look at Ezekiel 28:12-14.

Ezekiel 28:12-14 Son of man, take up a lamentation upon the king of Tyrus, and say unto him, Thus saith the Lord GOD; you seal up the sum, full of wisdom, and perfect in beauty. You have been in Eden the garden of God; every precious stone was your covering, the sardius, topaz, and the diamond, the beryl, the onyx, and the jasper, the sapphire, the emerald, and the carbuncle, and gold: the workmanship of thy tabrets and of your pipes was prepared in you in the day that you were created. You are the anointed cherub that covers; and I have set you so: you were upon the holy mountain of God; you have walked up and down in the midst of the stones of fire.

Look at the advantages that he had, and yet it wasn't enough. There was a desire there that was insatiable, to have more than he already had. To go with that, he had a great deal of pride and when he saw his condition and position, it drove him, when mixed with his pride, to discontentment, leading him to feel that he deserved more and better than what God, in His sovereignty, had given him. And what happened to him?

You see, there is a course, a path, that this sin follows and discontentment plays an important part in this. Satan's spirit pervades this earth, so it is no wonder that mankind has this dominant attitude within him and this fear is exactly what the Israelites in the wilderness felt. We are capable of having much the same feelings today.

The biblical record shows fully that even in the midst of being provided for, human nature is fully capable of desiring more and better and the result is that discontentment is produced. Human nature is insatiable. That's something that we have to learn. It is never satisfied. Now, God's spirit can give contentment, but human nature on its own is always capable of desiring more and better than it already has.

We see men in the United States who have wealth beyond our dreams, and yet they don't stop to distribute it to everybody else, do they? And so they seek more wealth, more power, more notoriety and recognition, more, more, more and the fruit is to become discontented even though greatly blessed.

That process is shown very clearly there in Exodus 15 and 16. God had provided so well, and yet it wasn't enough. There is a song that is instructive in regard to this and we're going to look at it. It is in Psalm 78 and we're going to look at a good bit of it. First we'll read the first eight verses.

Psalm 78:1-8 Give ear, O my people, to my law: incline your ears to the words of my mouth. I will open my mouth in a parable: I will utter dark sayings of old: which we have heard and known, and our fathers have told us. We will not hide them from their children, showing to the generation to come the praises of the LORD, and his strength, and his wonderful works that he has done. For he established a testimony in Jacob, and appointed a law in Israel, which he commanded our fathers, that they should make them known to their children: that the generation to come might know them, even the children which should be born; who should arise and declare them to their children: that they might set their hope in God, and not forget the works of God, but keep his commandments: And might not be as their fathers, a stubborn and rebellious generation; a generation that set not their heart aright, and whose spirit was not steadfast with God.

The law that is being spoken of here is that we *must* teach and train our children not to be discontented with what we are able to supply them with, and at the same time teach them to put their trust in God's past works, in order to form a foundation of trust in God for their adult life.

I think you are all aware, because you shop in the same kind of stores we all do... You are aware of the public—people shopping with their children—and you overhear conversations and pick up little bits and pieces as you are doing your own shopping and hear what the children are saying to their parents. There is an ***incessant*** drumming for

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things: "buy me this, buy me that" and there is whining and murmuring and moaning about one thing and another.

Why is this so important? Because, as we're going to see as we go through this Psalm, we must live by faith. We are to live trusting God to supply our needs. Discontentment with His provision breaks forth into complaining; griping and murmuring are strong evidences of the lack of faith. Now look at this record:

Psalm 78:12 Marvelous things did he in the sight of their fathers, in the land of Egypt, in the field of Zoan.

Let me go back and read one more verse to you. It is verse 7. I just want to read it to you again showing *why* we are to teach our children.

Psalm 78:7 That they might set their hope in God, and not forget the works of God...

Psalm 78:12-22 Marvelous things did he in the sight of their fathers, in the land of Egypt, in the field of Zoan. He divided the sea, and caused them to pass through; and he made the waters to stand as an heap. In the daytime also he led them with a cloud, and all the night with a light of fire. He clave the rocks in the wilderness, and gave them drink as out of the great depths. He brought streams also out of the rock, and caused waters to run down like rivers. And they sinned yet more against him by provoking the most High in the wilderness. And they tempted God in their heart by asking meat for their lust. Yea, they spoke against God; they said, Can God furnish a table in the wilderness? Behold, he smote the rock, that the waters gushed out, and the streams overflowed; can he give bread also? Can he provide flesh for his people? Therefore the LORD heard this, and was wroth: so a fire was kindled against Jacob, and anger also came up against Israel; because they believed not in God, and trusted not in his salvation:

Psalm 78:36-42 Nevertheless they did flatter him with their mouth, and they lied unto him with their tongues. For their heart was not right with him, neither were they steadfast in his covenant. But he, being full of compassion, forgave their iniquity, and destroyed them not: yea, many a time turned he his anger away, and did not stir up all his wrath. For he remembered that they were but flesh; a wind that passes away, and comes not again. How oft did they provoke him in the wilderness, and grieve him in the desert! Yea,

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they turned back and tempted God, and limited the Holy One of Israel. They remembered not his hand, nor the day when he delivered them from the enemy.

With them, it was always like the saying, "*What have you done for me lately?*" They could not remember fifteen minutes ago, it seemed.

Well, I think this is enough to show the general pattern of their attitude and conduct and what it was that was driving their concerns. They never really trusted God to provide for their needs, in spite of the fact that intellectually they knew God had every power needed to do so. But in their own minds, their fearful concerns for themselves limited God's ability to provide as He promised because they would not turn to Him and instead sought their own means to get themselves out of their circumstances. We're getting to the crux of the issue here.

As God goes on to show, when they turned to their own resources to get them out of their circumstances, it invariably involved sin. Their limiting God was a product of the deceitfulness of their own minds. God had plenty of power to supply their needs and He had provided more than enough examples by actually doing so.

What they did was to set boundaries in their own minds that they felt He could not pass. The boundary, in some cases, might have been nothing more than a timeline—if He doesn't do it by such and such a time, then He's not going to. They limited Him and decided that beyond that period of time (that they set in their own mind), they weren't going to trust Him. They limited Him. They felt that He had neither the ability nor the inclination to do the things that they felt needed to be done. In their own mind, they decided that He wasn't going to do it.

I don't know if you are aware of this, but in the Bible it is recorded that some Israelites, who were working to conquer the Promised Land, were afraid to go into the mountains to fight because in their minds they thought God was only powerful in the valleys—up in the mountains He had no strength, they thought.

They limited what God could do by setting boundaries in their own minds and He didn't do it because they weren't living by faith. He could have done it, but they limited Him by their lack of faith. So what happened then is that God became—along with his power—defined by *their* minds.

Again, this is understandable. But understanding it does not make it right for us to

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duplicate their faithless performance. We are reminded strongly in the New Testament of our responsibility.

I Corinthians 10:8-11 Neither let us commit fornication, as some of them committed, and fell in one day three and twenty thousand. Neither let us tempt Christ, as some of them also tempted, and were destroyed of serpents. Neither murmur you, as some of them also murmured, and were destroyed of the destroyer. Now all these things happened unto them for examples: and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world [or ages] are come.

Are you aware that the Bible records **ten times** that Israel grumbled against God in the first two years? They grumbled a lot more after that—but it was **ten times** in the first two years alone. Okay, the inference is strong, that murmuring is in the same category as idolatry, fornication, and tempting God.

We don't tend to think of it as being a sin of that magnitude, because the others are very, very prominent as sin. Is there any sin greater than idolatry? Well, here it is listed along with idolatry and fornication, and so it begins to put it in to a category that might be more dangerous than we might have thought.

Now, why might this be so? I really don't think it is the murmuring per se. I think that murmuring is an indicator. It is a symptom of an underlying sin—a spiritual cancer that is working to destroy a person from within.

Grumbling, griping, and murmuring are a lot like a runny nose and a fever and the aching all-over feeling that we get when we have the flu. They are symptoms or it is a symptom of an internal problem. In the case of the runny nose and the achy feeling, it's the symptom of the internal problem that is the invasion of a virus.

In the case of the grumbling, it is a symptom of a spiritual problem that might be defined as pride—thinking that we should be treated better than this and that God owes us something. It might also be directly tied to a lack of faith. The "just shall live by faith" and, you see, the grumbling indicates that the person is *not* living by faith. The grumbling indicates doubt, which is the opposite of faith. This subject of murmuring pops up in a very interesting location in the book of Philippians.

Philippians 2:12-16 Therefore, my beloved, as ye have always obeyed, not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence, work out your own

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salvation with fear and trembling. For it is God who works in you, both to will and to do His good pleasure. Do all things without murmuring and disputing, that ye may be blameless and harmless, the sons of God, without rebuke in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, among whom you shine as lights in the world.

Why would Paul mention murmurings and arguments in a context that involves obedience? Well part of the answer is that one can obey either grudgingly or cheerfully and willingly. We have that choice, but grudging obedience is not really obedience at all because it indicates a badly divided mind that is in reality in disagreement with God.

If the mind were really in agreement with God, it wouldn't grumble or gripe. It would just go ahead and comply, knowing who God is. But if we are grumbling and griping and kind of being forced to do something because we know that God is really powerful, it actually indicates that the mind is in disagreement. *"I'll do it because you are more powerful than me."*

You know the saying, "A person convinced against his will, remains unconvinced still." The unconvinced person, in regards to disobedience, is indicating disagreement and isn't convinced. That is why Paul mentioned this.

We have to work out our own salvation and there are going to be times when working our salvation out is going to be difficult. There are going to be sacrifices that are painful. As we are narrowed in and human nature is constrained to follow a path that it really doesn't want to follow, then we are faced with making a decision about whether we are going to do something willingly and cheerfully or whether we are going to grumble our way through it—sort of fighting, dragging our heels, digging in, even though we know it was God who said, *"I want you to do this."* It doesn't indicate a willing and generous spirit, does it? This is a mind that needs to be convinced.

See, there's the problem. The conviction that one holds in relation to God in this is not there yet. The faith is weak and really the pride there is great because we're still holding on to the idea that maybe I'm right about this and God isn't. So this is not a good situation and that's why Paul brings it up. Now he wrote about it again in a more familiar setting:

I Timothy 6:6 But godliness with contentment is great gain.

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Discontentment (which reveals itself in murmuring) and godliness are contrary one to the other. "They don't belong together," is basically what Paul is saying here. It is interesting that the word translated here as "contentment" literally comes closer to being a synonym of the English word "sufficient" or "sufficiency." Therefore it would be godliness combined with a sense of satisfaction or sufficiency. In other words, looking at what one has, they feel that what they have is sufficient. They're contented with it.

But you see that discontentment always arises when one feels that what one has isn't really what one wants. So godliness with a sense of satisfaction, godliness with a sense that what one has is sufficient, is what Paul says is great gain. Contentment is shown in God's word to be the counterbalance of envy, pride, arrogant ambition and anxiety—the counterbalance.

If one is envious of what others have, isn't there discontentment there because one wants what they have? Therefore they are discontented because of what they *don't* have or discontented with what they *do* have. The same is true of pride and arrogant ambition. Arrogant ambition drives a person, because they are discontented with what there are, to get something from somebody else: a position, power, influence, or whatever.

The context here in I Timothy 6:6 in no way implies that a person who has godliness with a sense of satisfaction is never concerned about his own welfare, nor does it imply that a Christian should never have a sense of uneasiness or distress about his condition. It no way implies or even begins to suggest that one should be lazy and not work to improve their lot in life, their circumstances. But what it does imply is when we reach this state of godliness with contentment that our desires have become moderated.

We are growing and that is why he says that it is great gain. We have gained—especially in the area of faith—the understanding that God really is going to supply our needs. It further implies that when we do reach this state that we will not indulge in any unlawful means to better ourselves because we already feel the sense of satisfaction.

Paul said that he had learned how to be content in every circumstance, every situation. But notice, he had to *learn*—and it was not something that he had immediately and automatically. He had to live life and see God supply his need time after time, even though he was stoned and left for dead or whatever the circumstance might have been. He always looked back and remembered, "*Hey, I'm still alive, and I'm still eating, I'm still walking.*"

Of course, Psalm 78 comes back into the picture. It also implies that we are not ridden

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with anxiety and that we will make the best of our circumstance, whatever it might be. We need to understand that this is not stoicism. What Paul is talking about here, this kind of contentment, is distinctively Christian because this state of contentment rests on God's providence, not self-sufficiency. We've got to make that distinction.

One of the major reasons that it is great gain is because it is the fruit of humility, stemming from the certain conviction God is involved with our lives and that our hopes are fixed on His providence and promises that God is always present with His people and He provides their needs from His fullness, and He has more than enough.

David wrote Psalm 34, and I think that we know enough about his life to know that there were times when he had great power. There were other times that he was in privation. There were times that he was running for his life; there were other times that he was exalted. He went the whole scope of human experience, it seems.

Psalm 34:8-10 O taste and see that the LOORD is good: blessed is the man that trusts in him. O fear the LOORD, you his saints: for there is no lack to them that fear him. The young lions do lack, and suffer hunger: but they that seek the LOORD shall not lack any good thing.

It is from circumstances like these verses that Paul drew conclusions like those in Romans 8:28. Paul said, "all good things work together for good to those who love God and are the called according to His purpose." So I think that we need to go back to Romans 8 and examine more closely the kind and generous seriousness of God's promise to supply all of our needs.

Romans 8:28 And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose.

This verse sets the stage for what follows near the end of this chapter. Maybe it's a good idea to think back to the beginning of the book of Romans and understand that Paul gave all of the basic doctrines of the church of God, those that we're being constrained by, to submit to as we go along on our pilgrimage. And he is getting ready for the time when he is going to begin giving them practical applications of these doctrines, just a little bit later around chapter 12.

Right here he is setting the table for something that is absolutely essential to us, to not just know, but to believe with conviction so it becomes practically applied in our lives.

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This way that God has called us to is going to require practical application.

We know from what we see about the Israelites in the wilderness that we are on our own pilgrimage, and we are going to be required by God even to a higher level of trusting Him to supply our needs. And, in most cases, the needs that we are going to have to trust Him for are the spiritual things. Surely there are going to be times when we're going to have to trust Him for the physical things as well, but the spiritual are far more important.

So he begins this paragraph with "we know that all things work together for good." Those *all things* are going to involve a lot of difficult circumstances. Will God supply? That becomes the issue in just a few verses. Can God be trusted? For you and me, what does that trust hang on? What underwrites His promise that He will never ever fail us—*ever*? Paul tells us within the next five or six verses. So he goes on to explain a bit further.

Romans 8:29-30 For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren. Moreover whom he did predestinate, them he also called: and whom he called, them he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified.

Do we see a progression? Those who were the called—they were predestinated, they were called, they were justified, and he carries it out into the future to something that has not happened yet. We're going to be glorified. So he is marking out a journey—a spiritual journey and we have to have things supplied to us along the way so that when we get to the end of it, we are prepared to enter into the Kingdom of God

Romans 8:31-32 What shall we then say to these things? If God be for us, who can be against us? He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?

Paul was encouraging us to see that we are being led by a strong God who is more than capable of getting us there. So in verse 31 he interjects the question, "who can be against us?" Well brethren, like the Israelites in the wilderness, there's almost a limitless number of possible enemies and pitfalls. The Bible groups them into three categories—the world, the flesh, and the devil.

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The world is an enemy because Christianity, true Christianity, is an offense to it and Christianity is an enemy of it. That is, the world's God-rebelling ways. The world is on one side and the godly person, the Christian, is on the other. They are enemies and there is warfare between them, and we know that the world is going to attempt to get us to conform to it. Failing that, the world will eventually try to do us in, and they've succeeded a lot of times over the course of the history of the church.

The flesh is an enemy because we carry within it the seeds of sin everywhere we go. There is no escaping it and it pulls us toward extremes of behavior in order to satisfy its demands. It's an ever-present prod of self-centered behavior and instant, immediate gratification. In one sense, it is the cross that we bear that Jesus mentioned in Luke 14:27.

And then if those two aren't bad enough, we have a powerful and deceitful enemy in the devil. Peter calls him a "roaring lion seeking to devour whom he may."

So there are all kinds of enemies that we have to be protected from and that we have to be enabled to fight. Paul asserts that God is equal to the task of providing whatever we need to fend them off and overcome everything that these enemies can throw at us in hope of deflecting us from the completion of God's purpose. Since God is for us, it makes all the difference in the world.

It's right here that Israel fell short. God was for them, but they limited God. Will we do the same thing? How did they limit Him? I gave you some descriptions, but I'll just give you one brief overview from Hebrews the 4th chapter.

Hebrews 4:1-2 Let us therefore fear, lest, a promise being left us of entering into his rest, any of you should seem to come short of it. For unto us was the gospel preached, as well as unto them: but the word preached did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in them that heard it.

That's a simple statement, but it is the lack of faith mixed with a certain amount of pride that produces grumbling. When those are combined, they produce sin. The grumbling, of and by itself, is no big thing, but it indicates that a weakness is there and if we don't watch out, it will lead to something that is very destructive to the relationship.

What is the evidence of the lack of faith of the Israelites? I didn't read it, but Paul goes on to say that their bodies were strewn from one end of the wilderness to the other. That's almost literally what it says. Their bones were strewn from one end of the

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wilderness to the other end. In other words, the proof of their lack of faith was that they didn't make it into the Promised Land. If they had the faith, they would have made it. If they had the faith, they wouldn't have grumbled.

The further evidence that they didn't trust Him was provided in the recorded evidence that they didn't conduct themselves rightly. You can see that in the narrative that is given in the wilderness journey. They simply didn't make right choices and Psalm 78 clearly shows that they forgot because it says that they remembered not the faithful providence of God—His past works and His promises.

Romans 8:32 He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?

This particular promise has its foundation anchored in God's magnanimous sacrificial gift of Jesus Christ. Here's where we begin—Christ's sacrifice had its beginnings with the Father. It is essential that we understand this—that the Father gave the Son *before* the Son gave Himself.

All too often we kind of gloss over the Father's part in this, perhaps because we don't think of His emotional involvement. It's almost as if we kind of carelessly take it for granted that He was simply stoically above it all. But brethren, I want you to think of your feelings and how they might be in a similar circumstance when one of your loved ones—your son, your daughter, your wife, or your husband—is being tortured totally and completely unfairly.

How would you feel about that? It would be something that would be extremely difficult to take. You would be enraged. You would be beside yourself with grief. You could hardly contain yourself, and you would want to take whatever it was in your hand and do everything you possibly could in order to free your child or your loved one from that circumstance that they were in.

Did God just sit there taking it stoically while all of this was going on? No, we need to understand that Christ's sacrifice began with the Father, not the Son, and it was He that proposed this solution to the sins of mankind. It was His idea and He gave the one thing that was most precious to Him in order that we might have life.

The tiny amount of feeling, I guess you might say that we have, is really a pale shadow of the reality of all of the love that is contained within Him who is the source of love. Our emotions were designed after His, and again, they are just a pale shadow of what He is

capable of.

God is love. He personifies it and it is expressed in every one of His other attributes. And love (you understand this in yourself) is sensitive to what it loves. God spared not what He loved, knowing full well the humiliation, the ignominy, the hatred and the opposition that His Son was going to suffer during His ministry to us. Even when Christ appealed to Him to remove that cup—the crucifixion—the Father turned His back despite the extreme unfairness that He knew Jesus was going to be put through. Well, that would enrage us.

God had the power to blow the entire creation into cosmic dust, but He held His peace because of His love for us. What Paul is saying, in this verse, is the undeniable truth of the monumental scope of the Father's sacrifice. The truth is that God went so far as to give up what meant the most to Him, and if He was willing to do that—not just willing; He *did* it—in like manner He will not fail to give us whatever is needed by us. By those Christ died for—the predestinated, the called, the justified, and the glorified (of verse 29)—US. That is His guarantee—the fact that He gave the Son.

There is nothing greater that He can give. He's given the utmost; He's given us the evidence that there is not a thing that He will withhold from us that is for our good—*not one thing*. There is nothing more, brethren, that He can do. He's already done the greatest thing that He possibly can. We're nothing compared to Christ, and when you consider the value of *that* Life, whatever else the Father does for us is *nothing* by comparison. That's His guarantee.

Brethren, we have a tendency to think of God as having limits to His grace. That's what Israel did—they limited God—and we're capable of the same kind of feeling. That might be a reasonable thought if Paul hadn't already shown us that God the Father has already given the Son. He can't give anything else that is greater.

What the Father has done is why the unpardonable sin is to "trample underfoot the Son of God and to count the blood of the covenant wherewith we have been sanctified as common":

Hebrews 10:29 Of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden under foot the Son of God, and hath counted the blood of the covenant, wherewith he was sanctified, an unholy thing, and hath done despite unto the Spirit of grace?

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The unpardonable sin is contempt for and rejection of the greatest gift that has ever been given to anybody at any time. I might add, anywhere under any circumstance. God cannot give anything greater than He already has. Thus, to reject that gift is fatal and that brings on that person the second death. There is no grace to pay for that.

However, in Romans 8:32, sin is not really within the subject because these people to whom Paul was writing were not challenging God in rebellion. Instead, what Paul is doing is challenging them to look to God to provide their need, encouraging them to understand the immensity of the one gift that God already gave in Jesus. How can it possibly be imagined that He will withhold anything—any lesser gift—for our salvation? He won't. This verse is a blank check to whatever it is we truly need. It's a blank check.

Notice another piece of confirmation included in this verse. It said that God delivered Him up. "He that spared not his own son, but delivered him up for us." That's an interesting thing to think of. He not only gave the gift, He made sure it happened. The word "delivered" here implies something that we *well* know if we would stop to think it through.

Remember where it says that Jesus is "the Lamb slain before the foundation of the world"? God has the power and He could have stopped things short of Christ's crucifixion at any moment in time. However, God made sure that it occurred. He turned His back...and He did this, Paul was saying, for *our* sake.

We are in that verse; we are the aim of that verse. He turned His back for our sakes so that there would be a means of justification. He delivered Christ up, subjecting Him to the spitting, being pummeled by fists, stripped naked, verbal abuse, suffocation (because death was by suffocation), being stabbed as well. The previous verses make it clear who the "us" is beginning in verse 28. It was done for those predestinated according to God's calling to be conformed to the image of the Son.

God did this freely, meaning unreservedly and ungrudgingly for all of us who need mercy, and He did this without waiting for us to deserve it. He made it available to us while we were yet sinners according to Romans 5:8. He sacrificed for us even before we asked for it to be applied to our sins. Doesn't it follow then that once we are free through the forgiveness of sins and have received His spirit and are sons—His own beloved—that He will provide *whatever* it is we ask for if we indeed truly need it?

Why is it, brethren, that it is so easy for us to dwell on what we do not have and then grumble, rather than dwell on what we already have? I'm talking about what Christ did for us. ***That***, we have.

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Notice the verse says, "How shall he not with him [meaning Christ] freely give us all things?" Paul is strongly stating in the form of a question that God doesn't have to be coaxed—that He is more than willing to give.

Isaiah 55:1 Ho, every one that thirsteth, come you to the waters, and he that hath no money; come you, buy, and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price.

We know God is under no obligation to give His gifts and if He were, He would bestow His gifts out of necessity instead of giving freely. God does as He pleases and He is free to give to whomever He wills. Of those gifts, there is no price on them.

God is not a retailer of mercy or a barterer of good things. If He were, justice would require Him to charge exactly what each blessing was worth, and where would any of us find the resources to pay for the forgiveness of even one sin? Every gift that God gives is unmerited and unearned. Every gift—that's what it says here—**is free**. "By grace we are saved through faith and even that faith is a gift of God."

Romans 8:31-32 What shall we then say to these things? If God be for us, who can be against us? He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?

It is good to notice something that is not here, something that he doesn't say as he attempts to encourage us to be faithful to our commitment and to be uncomplaining. A person might answer our doubts (as Paul was doing here) by instructing us not to worry because God loves us. But did you notice that Paul doesn't say that, even though that response would be technically correct?

Paul assumes the fact that God loves us and will supply our needs. He does this because there is something more that is needed because a person may ask, "How do I know that God loves *me*?" "How can I be sure that God loves me when I lose my job because of the Sabbath, or I can't get a job because of the Sabbath, or when I get involved in a terrible accident, or come down with a painful and possibly fatal disease, or barely have enough money to get by, or lose a loved one because of death?"

Assurances that God loves us are needful, but they're not always effective, just like it wasn't effective with the Israelites there in Exodus 6. They could understand it intellectually, but it wasn't effective when translated into daily life. We frequently deal

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only on an emotional level, and that will be effective only so far. So what Paul does in order that we might know that God loves us is by providing us with the fact that He has given His son for each of us individually.

Isaiah 53:4 Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows: yet we did esteem him stricken [notice the next three words], smitten of God, and afflicted.

Much of the common thinking in Christian churchianity is that God stands ready to condemn us and that God is imagined to be angry with us—but then Jesus enters the picture to change God's mind and Jesus pleads, "*I love these people, look I'm dying for them in their place. Spare them for My sake.*" So God, perceived to be reluctant, even hostile, eventually agrees, saying something like, "*Well, I'll do it because you seem to care so much.*"

What we have to do is to change our minds from this way of thinking because this is not the way the Bible presents the sacrifice of Jesus Christ and the forgiveness that follows those who repent. From beginning to end, Christ's sacrifice was the Father's idea. It says, in that verse, that He was smitten of God. Do you understand that? He was stricken by God and smitten and afflicted by Him.

Isaiah 53:6 All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned everyone to his own way and the Lord [notice who did it] laid on him the iniquity of all. [The Lord laid it on him.]

This is one of the clearest statements of the substitutionary death of Christ for us, but it is also a statement of the fact that God the Father conceived and God the Father carried out this plan. He was not made to love us by Christ's sacrifice. He loved us from the beginning, and it is because He loved us that Jesus died for us, and He has proved that love through that sacrifice.

I want to give you another proof that Christ's sacrifice was the Father's idea. We're going back to the book of Acts again.

Acts 2:23 Him [meaning Christ] being delivered by the determinant council and foreknowledge of God, you have taken and by wicked hands have crucified and slain.

Modern translations will translate that first phrase, "This man [meaning Christ] was handed over to you by God's set purpose and foreknowledge." Yes, men were involved in the conspiracy to kill Christ and men were guilty of what they did, but God had planned His death and He made sure that it was accomplished. So the words "spare not" in Romans 8:32 are interesting in light of the Abraham/Isaac episode in Genesis 22:16-17:

Genesis 22:16-17 And said, By myself have I sworn, saith the LOORD, for because thou hast done this thing, and hast not withheld thy son, thine only son: That in blessing I will bless thee, and in multiplying I will multiply thy seed as the stars of the heaven, and as the sand which is upon the sea shore; and thy seed shall possess the gate of his enemies;

The King James and the *New King James* both say, "withheld." However the Septuagint says in those verses, "spared." God spared Isaac. And thus when Paul wrote this he paralleled the Septuagint to more forcefully enforce the instruction that he is giving here. It was in Abraham's mind to actually sacrifice Isaac; however, God intervened and spared Isaac.

This episode foreshadowed the sacrifice of His Son; however, when the reality occurred—that is the sacrifice of Christ—He didn't spare His own Son like He spared Isaac. He made sure it happened because He loves us. It was the only way to have our sins wiped out without killing us to pay for them, because there was only one Life that was worthwhile enough to do that. He did this despite the fact that Jesus was the only human being who ever lived that deserved to be spared. God taught Abraham, through this episode, of the Savior to come. That's why Abraham named that place "Jehovah-jireh" meaning "the Lord will provide," and God provided by *not* sparing Jesus.

Philippians 4:19 But my God shall supply all your need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus.

This is the thought behind this entire sermon. Israel had a major problem with murmuring because of their discontent and a lack of faith. At the base of the discontent was pride because they felt that they deserved better treatment. They were discontented because of their doubt that God would be able to meet their needs.

I've shown you today that we need not be filled with fretful anxiety and envy that promotes grumbling because God has already demonstrated His love for us in His

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willingness to provide our real needs all along the way. He has already gone the maximum distance by not sparing His own Son. There is no greater basis for His grace and providence. So having already done that, we can have firm conviction that He will also provide the necessary gifts of lesser importance to our sanctification and ultimate salvation into His Kingdom.