

A Parable of Two Men

For 40 years God led Israel through the barren wilderness of the Middle East. In spite of their repeated grumblings and rebellion, God continued to love, lead and provide for His people. Even when they were unfaithful to Him, He remained faithful to them. In all those years, God sustained this massive company of people by miraculously providing them with manna. Manna was a food substance that God caused to appear on the ground each morning. The people of Israel gathered manna as their staple food through all those 40 years.

In year 39 of Israel's wandering in the wilderness two men woke up one morning. One man got up, put on his outer garment, lifted the flap over the door of his tent and stepped out into the desert morning. As he ducked under the tent flap it dumped a load of sand down his neck. He cursed under his breath and angrily shook out his clothes muttering, "I am sick and tired of this infernal sand! I've got sand in my bed, sand in my hair, sand in my food! Everywhere there's sand! I hate this life of constant moving and upheaval. And guess what's for breakfast? Manna—again!"

This man's mood was no private matter but spread unmercifully like cancer to his wife and children. With his incessant bitterness, anger and complaints he poisoned the minds and attitudes of his family and friends. His poison took its toll on his relationships replacing intimacy with isolation, trust with suspicion and love with self-centeredness. This man truly lived out the miserable life he envisioned for himself. By making much of himself and his circumstances, he lived as though God were puny and others insignificant.

Across the vast camp of the Israelites that same morning another man awoke. This man's circumstances were in no wise different than the first man. But as this man stepped out of his tent that

morning shaking the sand from his clothes, he stood up and filled his lungs with the fresh, cool desert air. He looked to the east watching the glory of the sun as it began to dispel the night. He thought to himself that the sunrise was but a tiny reflection of the magnificent glory of its Creator.

He expectantly looked out over the hillsides surrounding their camp and saw the familiar blanket of manna in the receding shadows. Suddenly he was overwhelmed with a sense of God's presence, faithfulness and love for him and his family. Without inhibition he raised his hands and looked up into the sky and worshipped out loud, "Thank You, my God, my King, my Shepherd! Thank you for another 'manna-day,' a day in which You show Yourself faithful and loving toward me and Your people. Thank You for providing for us, O gracious Lord!"

This man's mood was no private matter either but spread to others like the warmth of the rising sun. His humble gratitude made him a delight to be around! His family and friends found his faith and joy contagious, so that they too gave God glory. By making much of God, he saw more of God and His greatness and love. And by experiencing God's love, he could not help but love others around him on whom God had also poured out His love.

Which man are you?

Prayer: *Lord, we desperately want to be the second man in this parable! Each day, let us turn our eyes toward You and off of ourselves and our circumstances. Let us see You in Your awesome splendor and majesty and worship You as You really are. We long to draw near to You today with the knowledge that in doing so, we cannot remain unchanged. Therefore, we invite You to change us. Make us more like You in character—more loving, more generous, more thoughtful of others. Thank You for Your abundant provision in our lives and for being so faithful. We praise You with our entire being! In Jesus' mighty name, amen!*