

David and the Showbread

1 Samuel 21:6

So the priest gave him holy *bread*; for there was no bread there but the showbread which had been taken from before the LORD, in order to put hot bread *in its place* on the day when it was taken away.

Sunday, January 24, 2021 at The First Congregational Church of Marshalltown, Iowa

Introduction

There's a lot of literature about presence, and that just being present and paying attention to someone who is struggling can help and change a person. Edwin Friedman a brilliant rabbi and family therapist, wrote the following about presence. "The notion that an entity can modify surrounding relationships through its presence rather than its forcefulness, moreover, is not unknown to science. Catalysts function that way, for example, and we use the term to catalyze to mean a reaction that occurs without forcibly rearranging the parts. Enzymes in the body function in a similar way. Although it is possible to imagine the work of enzymes as snipping off strands of DNA and putting them in another place, they actually do not function in that manner. In fact, it is not really known how their presence causes DNA to rearrange itself. But perhaps a transformer in an electrical circuit is the best metaphor for the workings of presence. Transformers can activate or deactivate a circuit that runs through them, depending on the ratio of coils they contain."*

There is something about the power of someone near and paying attention. Far more powerful is the Presence of God, and in this simple verse in the Old Testament we find that the Presence of God is intrinsic to the purpose of God, and the most important thing we can do when it comes to fulfilling our part in the purpose of God is the pray about the Presence.

Set the stage

In the passage we are considering today, David is on the run from King Saul, and he and his men are hungry. They come to the location of the Tabernacle and inquire of the head priest about food. He replied that the only food available at the time was the "showbread", fresh bread baked and replaced periodically as part of the worship of God in the tabernacle. They had just replaced the bread, but it was to be eaten only by the priests. The head priest however, choose to give the bread to David and his men because they were hungry. Centuries later, Jesus would invoke this case to show that mercy and human need were more important than the technicalities of the Law. But for today, I want to focus on why God instructed His people to have fresh bread available in the Tabernacle, this place of worship.

We need the Presence for our Purpose in life

Purpose-Paul and Romans 8

The Bread of the Purpose

Like almost everything in the Tabernacle (and later the Temple) is symbolic and thus teaches a lesson. The bread, which reminded the worshipper that people do not live on bread alone, but on every word of the living God. It also had a dual symbolism that is powerful. The bread represented the purpose of God. In fact the New Testament word for the "showbread" is used in Romans 8:28-"And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose." One could translate the last phrase as "who are the called according to His bread of showing forth" or "His bread of purpose." The bread reminded the people that their God had a plan, and each of them played a role. But the very same bread also was called "the Bread of the Presence"

Presence-Moses and Exodus 33

The Bread of the Presence

It was a continual reminder to the worshippers of the truth that man does not live by bread alone, emphasized by the fact that these most holy offerings were afterward eaten. It was the Old Testament version of the prayer, "Give us this day our daily bread"; and in the fact that the holy table was never for a moment left without some loaves lying on it, we have the symbol of man's continued and unbroken dependence upon God.

The bread that symbolized the Purpose of God also symbolized the Presence of God, as if the two much go together. Moses demonstrated the importance of the Presence of God in Exodus 33, when God offered to bless Moses and the children of Israel, but from a distance because the people were so unruly. Moses would have none of it. "If Your Presence does not go with us," he said, "I will not go." As hard as it is to define, without the Presence of the Holy Spirit in our lives and on our church we can do nothing, especially nothing regarding the purpose of God.

Application

Pray for the presence, the purpose will come

And this leads us to the application; pray for the Presence before bothering with the purpose. As always, the application of a part of Scripture often is not "do this" but rather "know this about God" or "pray this way." This would be an example of the last type of application. We are to pray for the Presence of God; in our worship, in our prayer life both corporately and individually, in our fellowship and ministry. The Presence of God reveals the purpose of God in our lives and in our church.

Conclusion

The priest of the Tabernacle, showing that mercy is more important than legal technicality, gave some of the showbread to David and his hungry men. There is so much to be found in the symbolism of that bread. Symbolism that shows the importance of the purpose of God, and that the purpose of God is found when the Presence of God is near.

*<https://gatheringinlight.com/2020/03/12/the-power-of-presence/>

