

"Lord, I'm Tired of Grumbling!"

Numbers 11

As you know we just got back from a week in Barbados, and it was an awful trip. It started the moment we got off the plane. The sun was too bright, the temperature too hot and the people were too friendly. When we got to our villa we found we had to turn the air conditioning on ourselves. We had to walk three blocks to the grocery store and to the beach. The sand was way too soft and the beaches had hardly anyone on them. And the waves were so big that they would rudely splash you. And my tan makes my hair look too white!!

Now we're in the mood to talk about complaining in Numbers 11 where we see three examples of complaining and three ways God responds to His people's complaints. God had miraculously saved the people of Israel, with whom He graciously made a covenant with through Abraham promising to give His descendants a land for their own. Through miraculous plagues against the false gods of Egypt, He rescued them from their life of slavery. He brought them into the wilderness where He has taught them His laws through Moses and explained what they should expect and do to honor God who saved them. In Ch.'s 1-10 God has organized them into marching and fighting units. They agreed to follow His words wholeheartedly, to love God with all their heart, souls and minds.

Similarly, we the body of Christ, have been miraculously rescued from the slavery of sin when we placed our faith in the work of Jesus on the cross, being assured of God's presence every day and promise to take us to be with Himself for all eternity. We also have promised to love Him with all our hearts, souls and minds, yet we too quickly complain about the way God works in our lives. We're all guilty of it. And our grumbling too can spread it's negative tentacles to all of us, empowering us to do the same since, your doing it and I'm doing it.

Are you tired of grumbling? Let's begin our time with confession and use the words of David in Psalm 139:23-24 for God to give us direction this morning to reduce our grumbling about Him. As we'll see when we grumble about our circum-stances we're really grumbling about the One who is responsible for all the circumstances in our life.

Father, forgive us for our grumbling. As David prayed in Ps. 139:23-24,

Search me, O God, and know my heart! Try me and know my thoughts ![because sometimes we're good at keeping our grumbling to our-selves but you still hear it] ²⁴ And see if there be any grievous way in me, [since our grumbling grieves your Spirit who dwells in us] and lead me in the way everlasting! [Your life-giving way]. In Jesus' name.

After repeated agreeing to obey God's laws in Num. 1-10, the people change their tune the moment things get harder.

Now the people complained about their hardships in the hearing of the Lord...

They have only been gone for 3 days according to 10:33. Which echoes the beginning of their journey back in Ex. 15:27 when after only 3 days journey out of Egypt the people complained because the water they came to was undrinkable. They complained to Moses, Moses cried out to God, God provided. A pattern that will repeat itself numerous times on Israel's wilderness journey. Here in Num. 11 the people don't grumble because of a lack of God's provision but because the

journey has some difficulties and hardships in it. As if they thought a trek through the wilderness was going to be easy.

Likewise, we grumble at life's challenges. We grumble because raising kids is hard. We grumble because our spouse doesn't always love us the way we think they should. We grumble because our work is difficult or an unsaved friend or colleague doesn't treat us very well. And the list goes on and on. Israel was grumbling because life wasn't going the way they wanted it. As do we. Here's one question we should ask ourselves when we're grumbling:

Are My Expectations of God Unrealistic? **(11:1-3)**

If our attitude becomes negative we need to turn to God's Word and see who's the problem: us or God. And it's always us and not God. We too sometimes expect life not to be difficult. But Scripture reminds us that ...

Wilderness type experiences come before future blessing

When Jesus needed to confront the Pharisees with their negative attitudes, He often began 'Have you not read ...?' In other words, have you forgotten or ignored that ...

... In this world you will have trouble. But take heart I have overcome the world (John 16:33)

I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us (Rom. 8:18)

Consider it pure joy my brothers whenever you face trials of many kinds (James 1:2).

Dear friends, do not be surprised at the painful trial you are suffering as though something strange were happening to you. (1 Pet. 4:12)

Yet we do act surprised when we're mistreated for our faith or when our marriages/families aren't perfect or the economy sours or when we have difficulties in this life. The Bible reminds us perfect is in the future when our time here is over. The next time we complain (later today already?) because we're frustrated by our circumstances, stop and ask yourself, 'Am I unrealistically expecting heaven's experiences now, when I should be trusting God's purpose in the trials?' And what is the purpose in these trials?

God uses trials to mature us spiritually

We mature by applying the Word of God to our life. When we're frustrated or disappointed by our inconsistent walk with God then we turn to Scripture and see what it says about the trials we face. Like,

Rom. 5:1 Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, ² through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. And we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God. ³ Not only so, but we also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; ⁴ perseverance, character; and character, hope. ⁵ And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us.

James 1:2 Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, ³ because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. ⁴ Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.

¹ Pet. 4:12 Dear friends, do not be surprised at the painful trial you are suffering, as though something strange were happening to you. ¹³ But rejoice that you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed. ¹⁴ If you are insulted because of the name of Christ, you are blessed, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you.

Whether it's us, the church, or Israel back then, God's way of maturing us is the same. God told Moses in Deut. 8

Deut.8:1 Be careful to follow every command I am giving you today, so that you may live and increase and may enter and possess the land that the LORD promised on oath to your forefathers. ² Remember how the LORD your God led you all the way in the desert these forty years, to humble you and to test you in order to know what was in your heart, whether or not you would keep his commands. ³ He humbled you, causing you to hunger and then feeding you with manna, which neither you nor your fathers had known, to teach you that man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD. ⁴ Your clothes did not wear out and your feet did not swell during these forty years. ⁵ Know then in your heart that as a man disciplines his son, so the LORD your God disciplines you.

Let's have realistic expectations about this life, not expecting heavens blessings to be the norm here - we do get tastes of them every now and then, praise Him - but let's remember we live in an imperfect, sin-filled world, that we married a fellow sinner who struggles daily to love Jesus with all their heart, that we work for, live beside and rub shoulders everyday with fellow sinners, a few forgiven but most not.

Now, more grumbling in vv.4-15. The rabble complain about God's provision of manna - they want meat – they want variety like they had in Egypt. Their complaining affects Moses who uncharacteristically complains to God that he's tired of babysitting these whiners! If you've never noticed this before, grumbling is contagious. Once we get going, so do others chime in. We need to ask ourselves another soul-searching question:

Are My Selfish [Which is why we grumble] Desires Negatively Affecting God's People (11:4-9, 18-23, 31-35)

Who were the 'rabble'? Most scholars agree that the rabble were mostly Egyptians who left Egypt out of fear of God's judgements. Did they really believe in God? Maybe a few, but others saw the writing on the wall and got out knowing they could die if they stayed in Egypt.

Ex. 12:37 The Israelites journeyed from Rameses to Succoth. There were about six hundred thousand men on foot, besides women and children. ³⁸ Many other people went up with them, as well as large droves of livestock, both flocks and herds

These other people fondly remember the available produce that the Nile River valley produced plentifully. Some Israelites joined in, glorifying the past and forgetting a life of slavery. Then it affects Moses, who also complains to God that His expectations of Moses are unfair.

It's easy to do isn't it? To join in with the grumblers who complain about the weather, the government, the Leaf's last loss, or that person you all know. It's difficult to resist the work chatter or school gossip that throws others under the bus because all of us could do a better job. And like here, it's hard to distinguish the believers from the unbelievers when grumbling starts. So, let's

Watch our words (v.4)

That's how it always starts. Let's keep our words from coming out. We convince ourselves though that, we're not complaining, just expressing our opinion or sharing a prayer request. We all know what we're doing.

James 3:6 The tongue also is a fire, a world of evil among the parts of the body. It corrupts the whole person, sets the whole course of his life on fire, and is itself set on fire by hell. ⁷ All kinds of animals, birds, reptiles and creatures of the sea are being tamed and have been tamed by man, ⁸ but no man can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison. ⁹ With the tongue we praise our Lord and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in God's likeness. ¹⁰ Out of the same mouth come praise and cursing. My brothers, this should not be.

When we let our inside voice come out, grumbling happens. It's not enough to just say 'I won't grumble, we've got to start with our minds. So,

Examine our thoughts biblically (vv.5-6)

The rabble fondly remember the great variety of food they had. Fair enough. However, they despise 'this manna!' Then we're told how miraculous manna was and the various ways people could make it. It looked good, tasted good, and was extremely versatile. Manna stew, manna casserole, manna cakes, manna pudding ... It was from God and it provided all the nutrients one needed. So did they have variety? Yes they did. Their thoughts were selfish and unbiblical.

When we're tempted to think about someone or a situation only from our selfish assessment, we need to change the way we think. And if those words do come out, then we need to repent.

The main reason the people complained about the manna, however, was because they failed to

Appreciate the present blessings in life (vv.8-9)

Every day God provided the manna from heaven - except for the Sabbath. For that He doubled up Friday's grocery carts. And it was the only time it lasted more than 24 hours. You didn't even have to work for it, God provided it for you every day.

When we're tempted to grumble about what we don't have, let's first thank God for what we do have. Homes, families, friends, food, many extras we enjoy. A lot of our complaining are first world problems. Grumping because the drive-through is taking too long. Thank God you have a car that works and money to buy that overpriced coffee or donut you don't need anyway. Grumping because grocery prices are a little high. Thank God you can go to a grocery store in your own vehicle and can afford to put gas in it because you or both of you have an income where you don't worry about your needs.

The non-Israelites grumbled, which caused the Israelites to grumble which affected even Moses, who grumbled. This was uncharacteristic of Moses. Not that he was perfect. But usually when

the people complained to Moses about God or life, Moses prayed for the grumblers. But not here. Moses expresses how stressed he is and overwhelmed by all these grumblers around him. But he didn't pray to God for the people, he complained to God about the people. So here's one more question we can ask ourselves when we're guilty of grumbling:

Am I Stressed About Something Because of My Failure to Pray? **(11:10-17, 24-30)**

I'm going to come back to this section when we get into Ch. 12 next week but for now, Moses feels the stress of being the shepherd over all these people. And he says some things to God which he probably asked forgiveness for later. God put him there. God knew he could lead these people if Moses was trusting God. Here he was having a pity party for himself and saying this is too much God. He even goes so far as to say, take my life now Lord, this is too hard:

¹⁴ I cannot carry all these people by myself; the burden is too heavy for me. ¹⁵ If this is how you are going to treat me, put me to death right now—if I have found favor in your eyes—and do not let me face my own ruin."

In Moses' little meltdown in vv.12-16, he refers to himself 16 times. That's always at the center of our grumbling isn't it? Ourselves. This isn't happening for me. This isn't going my way. People don't see how this affects me. I don't like this. I can't wait any longer. It doesn't sound very mature because it isn't.

So how did God respond to these three groups of people who grumbled against Him? Differently & for different reasons. To those who so quickly complained after only 3 days into the wilderness that this was hard He sent a fire that was meant to be a severe warning to all. Sometimes

God Rebukes Us Sharply So We'll Never Forget (v.1)

Fire came down from the Lord and struck some on the outskirts of the camp. God was clearly displeased. Should have reminded them of Aaron's first two sons who, in Lev. 10, approached the altar of God with 'strange fire' and God's fire consumed Nadab and Abihu. In both cases God's goodness had been clearly shown, followed by clear disregard for Him. Sometimes He responds with sharp rebuke sent to shock us into repentance. And when it happens to others and it could have been us too, we remember. So they named this place The Burning of Yahweh. So if they found themselves similarly grumbling against God, someone wise would just say one word, 'Taberah' and that should quiet everyone down.

I imagine most of us have been rebuked sharply when we clearly deserve it. You don't forget those moments. They sting. But we learn from it and move on. This message was for the survivors. Learn this valuable lesson early in life.

With those who despised God's gift of manna and wanted meat to eat, God rebuked them differently.

God Gives us over to our selfishness (vv.33-35)

You want meat God says, I'll let you have it. God sent a ruach/wind that brought so many quail that were flying so low that you could just grab them. But God didn't let them enjoy it.

³³ But while the meat was still between their teeth and before it could be consumed, the anger of the LORD burned against the people, and he struck them with a severe plague. ³⁴ Therefore the place was named Kibroth Hattaavah, because there they buried the people who had craved other food.

Same result but a different method. Sometimes God gives us what we want only to find out the hard way that what we wanted was selfish. We reap what we sow. He lets us find out for ourselves the consequences of our selfish desires.

What about Moses though? He complained that it was too much for God to expect him to lead all these people. How did God respond to his grumbling?

He graciously humbles us by answering our prayer (vv.25-30)

Sometimes God responds mercifully to our complaining and we don't get what we deserve. God told Moses to set apart 70 elders to assist him in leading. God sends His ruach/ wind/ Spirit on them as a sign that these are the ones you can count on to help you lead all these people. I am with you Moses. I will provide. Please ask and don't whine next time okay. And I believe this humbled Moses which I will talk about next week.

Sometimes we complain about our situation. We selfishly ask God to change our circumstances and He does, graciously. And if we're wise, we ask God's forgiveness for our failure to trust Him. I believe Moses tasted the humble pie of God's gracious provision and hopefully we too have for when we have grumbled against God's goodness or thought God was holding out on us. His plan usually involves our waiting patiently for Him to provide or direct us, yet in our impatience we grumble. And in our temporary trial we fail to spiritually mature through this temporal wilderness season.

Moses, like us sometimes, lost his focus on God and allowed the grumblers around him to negatively affect him. He jumped on the grump wagon. It's easy to do. God told Moses in v. 23

²³ And the LORD said to Moses, "Is the LORD's hand shortened? Now you shall see whether my word will come true for you or not." (Num. 11:23)

God's Word always comes true, but the "now" is for God to choose not us.

Father, we believe, but help our unbelief. Forgive us for grumbling and complaining about anything because ultimately we are complaining about how or when you provide or about the people You have purposely put into our lives. Thank you for Your many gracious and gentle rebukes and also for the sharp ones we legitimately deserved. Lord, the people marked these bad moments in their walk with you as a way to say, let's not do this again. Maybe we should mark Valentine's day as a reminder of Your eternal love for us so that we thank you more and grumble less. In the name of our Saviour and Your Son, who without complaining about us grumblers, went to die for us.