

# Sunday 7th July 2024

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[ 0 : 00 ] Thank you, Keith. Morning, everybody. Warm welcome, especially if you're a visitor with us. If you are a visitor, then you will just pick up from what Keith said that we've been! traveling through the book of Numbers. And we've been seeing there that God's goodness and God's grace is what keeps his people going as they travel through the wilderness of life towards the promised land. And we've got to Numbers chapter 11 and 12 in our series. We're going to be focusing mostly on Numbers chapter 11 this morning. And you remember from the last time that we were together that they just about got themselves ready to move. And we join the story there. So this is them taking their first steps in faith with God towards their eternal home.

Before we look at that, let's just pray, shall we? Let's pray. Father in heaven, we thank you that you speak. You speak today through your word.

And we thank you that through that spirit that's mentioned in this chapter, you change people's hearts. Lord, please would you give us open ears so we can hear what you have to say to us this morning. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Amen. I like a good moan, don't we? As a people. We even find something to moan about when we win the football. Like how we probably should have won the football, but much better than the way that we did win the football. People grumbling about the election? It's quite possible, isn't it? There's some folks doing that. Ever grumbled about your work? I've grumbled about my work. School? College? How about a little grumble about a friend to another friend? Yeah, you know, she's doing that again. Well, that's what just, it's just like that, you know.

Or how many wives, girlfriends, a little pop and their husband when they're with another girlfriend? Husbands, how many of you really are talking in terms of ball and chain when you're describing your husband or your wife, I should say? We grumble, don't we? Here's the definition of adulthood that I came across recently. Adulthood means complaining about everything and everyone until you die. It's a little bit exaggerated, isn't it? But there's something in it. If you go down that way, you end up like this, don't you? Grumpy cat.

[ 2 : 35 ] I was alive once. It was awful. But did you know that grumbling can actually shrink your brain? Don't believe me? It's the truth. Grumbling is really bad for you. Here's some facts. Our brains are actually, from the very beginning, when we're born, set up so that we tend towards negativity. It's easier to complain in the first place. I wonder why that is. And the more you complain, what happens is this. Your hippocampus, which is an area in the brain that regulates emotions and memory and intelligent thought, begins to shrink. So actually, complaining makes you stupider. And naturally, that has an effect on your ability to deal with problems because nerve connections in your brain are actually damaged, physiologically speaking, when you complain. And that then reinforces itself in a kind of vicious circle until your whole brain gets rewired and complaining is just the way that it goes. Complaining is bad for you. So what's the psychologist's answer? Well, you should cultivate a life of gratitude.

That's what you should do. Just be grateful. And do you know the question they never answer? Who am I supposed to be grateful to? It's a good question, isn't it? And it's taken a while for science to catch up because God's actually been telling us that grumbling is bad for us for thousands of years, hasn't he? And here we go one further. And God says grumbling can be fatal. Not just bad for us, but fatal. In fact, if you take all the way through numbers, the main causes of death for God's people, do you know what the biggest killer is? Grumbling.

Not war or famine or exhaustion. So what can we do about it? Because we all grumble, don't we? And life can be hard. What should we do? God gives us the answer right here in Numbers 11 and 12. Even when we grumble, his grace will win out. So there's two things to take to heart today, really. And the first is this, grumbling is dangerous. And secondly, God's grace and goodness will

prevail. So first of all, Numbers 11 shows us that grumbling can be dangerous.

Let's have a look at verses 1 to 3, if you're following in your Bibles. Now the people complained about their hardships in the hearing of the Lord, and when he heard them, his anger was aroused. And then fire from the Lord burned among them and consumed some of the outskirts of the camp. And when the people cried out to Moses, he prayed to the Lord, and the fire died down. So the place was called Taborah, because fire from the Lord had burned among them.

This is a little brief summary of basically the pattern of how Israel's complaining goes through the entire book of Numbers. It goes a little bit like this. They complain. God hears, and he calls them out on it. And he punishes them. And then the people cry to Moses for help. And Moses intercedes.

[ 6 : 07 ] He pleads with God as the offended party on behalf of the people. And the Lord relents. That's the pattern all the way through. Not great, is it?

Carnival yesterday, as we saw, and there were lots of these around. Binoculars. Binoculars do something to your vision, don't they? They make things that are far away seem close.

Except if you hold them the wrong way, they do the opposite. Things that are close up seem far away. Have you ever tried putting on a pair of glasses that are the wrong prescription? An old prescription, maybe you don't even wear glasses, you put them on.

What happens? Well, you can't see things properly for a start. And then eventually, your eyes start to hurt. Don't they? Grumbling's a bit like that.

God's people see, but they see everything through a filter. A bad prescription. It's the past they're looking at. Yep. That's for sure.

[ 7 : 09 ] But it's all a little bit AI. A little bit deep fake. What has God given them? Well, he's given them manna and he's given them Moses, hasn't he?

And those two things are blessings. They're not burdens. Think back to what they had before. And to before Moses led them. Where were they?

They're blessings, not burdens. Just take manna. It's a kind of a sweet pastry. Did you get that from the description that we read in chapter 11? And it's made with oil. Grind it up. Another part of the scripture says that it tastes like cakes made with honey.

They're basically doughnuts. Doughnuts from heaven. That's what it is. And the Israelites look at it and they go, ugh. That stuff again.

We've got tradition at my house. When we go for breakfast, we usually have cereals. And there's, do you guys do this? There's toppers and there's bottomers. Right. And the toppers are all the sugary fake nonsense that basically passes for cereal.

[ 8 : 15 ] And then there's the bottomers, which is the real food. You know, kind of the Weetabix and the bran flakes and that kind of stuff. And it's not uncommon in our house that our kids come down for breakfast. I can say this because they're not here.

And they complain. And their complaint is, ah, there aren't enough toppers. Well, there aren't enough toppers that I like. Why haven't we got toppers? We've just got bottomers again.

You know, guys, I kind of want to say to them, there's food on the table. Don't miss the fact that there's food on the table, guys. Israel's a little bit like that. So fixated on what they don't have that they miss the fact that there's food on the table right in front of them.

Grumbling's dangerous because it distorts our vision. That's what it does. Think back to Egypt.

Egypt, do you know what? They weren't offering gourmet menus, were they?

Back in Egypt. And culinary experiences. Egypt was offering God's people slavery and selective genocide. That's what they had back in Egypt.

[ 9 : 23 ] But Israel craved their old home. How do you explain that? I think it's a bit like an addict craving their chains. It's hard to break free, isn't it?

So for us, it's hard to break free from the life we had before. Before the Lord. And grumbling does not help because it distorts our vision. God has shaken Egypt, which is the greatest empire that that part of the world has ever known.

And he's literally moved the sea to make sure that his people are safe and free. So God is good. He does care for his people. That's the reality.

But Israel can't see it, can they? In fact, the word that they use to describe their conditions in the desert, in the old Hebrew, is literally evil.

Why have you brought us to this evil place? If we keep grumbling, the result is that our vision is distorted. We become negative and resentful.

[10:29] And we crave the chains of our old masters. Grumbling is dangerous. But it doesn't just distort our vision. It's contagious. As well.

Did you notice what happens through the course of the chapter? Starting with verse 4. Begins with the rabble. The rabble with them began to crave other food. And then it spreads. And it spreads to the Israelites.

And then by verse 10, we're from tent to tent. All of the families, they're all complaining. And then eventually Moses is complaining to God, isn't he?

And then Joshua. And then if you read on into chapter 12, Miriam and Aaron. Everybody. It's like some sort of virus. It's contagious.

And it's corrosive. Now, once again, Kez isn't here. My wife, that is. If I complained now to all of you about her, that would be pretty bad, wouldn't it?

[11:29] But if you imagine that she was standing next to me, and I then complained about her, where she could hear it to all of you, that would be a betrayal.

That would be a betrayal of our love, wouldn't it? If you do that enough, what's the result for the relationship? It gets eaten away. Destroyed.

And that's what's happening here. That grumbling eats away at the bonds between people. Eats away at Moses. See the effect it has on him? Sounds like a deeply depressed man in the middle of the chapter, doesn't he?

Most importantly, eats away at the bond between God and his people, unless God does something about that. Grumbling's dangerous. Grumbling denies God's goodness, and so it risks his anger. There was an incident this week with one of my kids. I was picking them up from school to go do something that we normally do together. It's probably by way of a treat, really. But before we could go this week, we had a job that needed to be done.

[12:40] Not very difficult, just needed to be done. But my child didn't want to do it. So she gave me a mouthful, and then she did this with her phone.

You know what she was doing? Can you guess? Texting her friends about how rotten her parents were. How do you think the parent feels?

It's what's going on here. Denying our father's goodness. He spent ten chapters helping them to be ready to move.

And then they haven't taken ten steps. And here they are. Grumbling about him. And that he's no good. Verse 20 tells us that it amounts to a rejection of God.

Grumbling denies God's goodness or his power, doesn't it? One of the two. Either he doesn't care. Or he cares but he can't do anything about it. And either way, I know better.

[13:47] I know better than him, because I know what he should be doing. But God isn't uncaring or unaware. We know that. We've seen that. And grumbling is betraying that love, that costly love that he has for us.

So is it any wonder that he is angry? There's all sorts of things we can grumble about on there. Some of the things we mentioned at the beginning.

Maybe grumbling about the fact that my agenda got interrupted today. Grumbling about the fact that things weren't put back at church the way they should have been. Grumbling when you get home about the service at church in the morning.

That happens. And then we're surprised that our kids don't want to come. Grumbling that things are changing so slowly. Or grumbling that they're not changing quickly enough.

All of those things. There's a warning for us here, isn't there? From God. You'll remember from the last couple of times that we went to 1 Corinthians chapter 10 in the New Testament to help us understand numbers.

[14:54] Here's the next section. Do not grumble as some of them did. That's God's people in the wilderness. And were killed by the destroying angel. These things happened to them as examples when written down as warnings for us.

So if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don't fall. Be careful that you don't fall. Don't grumble.

Don't grumble. Trust God. His grumbling is dangerous. Let's not miss the very important second part of this. No temptation has overtaken you.

Accept what is common to mankind. And God is faithful. He will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, He will also provide a way out so that you can endure it.

We'll come back to that. So grumbling is dangerous. Here's the big question that this raises. Israel's grumbling.

[ 15 : 58 ] And God's anger at it. Here's the big question. Look at verse 23 with me. The Lord answered Moses, Is the Lord's arm too short? That's the big question.

Is his arm long enough? Is he trustworthy? Is he good? Or will he compromise on that nuclear goodness and let his people just get away with destructive and disloyal complaining?

Because then he's just like one of us, isn't he? Or is he able to do what he says and keep his promises? Is he able to provide for his people? Can he restore people like the Israelites who were caught in a cycle of negativity and grumbling?

Is his arm long enough? Can his grace cover even that? And Numbers 11 gives the answer. God's arm is not too short. God's grace and his goodness will prevail.

First we need to see that God will not compromise his goodness. For the sake of everybody who hears about him, God cannot allow his name to be discredited.

[ 17 : 13 ] Why? Because his rescue plan rests on his goodness. See, if God is not perfectly good and known to be perfectly good, then how is he different from any of us?

Then he's just a slob like one of us. See, if God is not completely holy and willing to defend that holiness, then is Jesus Christ qualified to die for us?

If God is not completely good, then Jesus cannot die for us. He cannot take our sins so that we can be forgiven. We cannot trust on his sacrifice and so be restored and reconciled to God.

But if he is, then he can. And so the people come under God's burning anger because God must be seen to be good and known to be good.

Hebrews 12, chapter 29, tells us that we still have to do with the same God now. There it says, Our God is a consuming fire.

[ 18 : 24 ] I love quoting C.S. Lewis. It's a fantastic one that you've probably all heard. Lewis is describing Aslan, the great lion, who stands for Jesus in his stories. And somebody asks, Is he safe?

And Lewis pens the words, No. He's not a tame lion. He's not safe. But he's good. And that goodness will win out.

His goodness will prevail. Notice as well when we were reading through that God does send them quail, doesn't he? He gives them meat. The meat that they were asking for.

But he gives it to them to show them their danger. And God works like that sometimes, doesn't he? He gives people exactly what they want, as much as they want, and in the end it ruins them.

But he also gives grace. Hopefully if you were paying attention, you would have seen the focus on Moses in these two chapters. There's a lot about Moses, isn't there?

[ 19 : 32 ] Absolutely loads. Through Moses, there is a way for God to be with his people in the wilderness. Because when Moses prays, God listens, doesn't he?

And then the people are invited to prepare themselves to be with God again. Verse 18, Consecrate yourselves. That's God saying, Okay, make yourselves holy once more. Come to me again.

And the fire and the plague stop when Moses prays. Then the journey towards home continues when Moses prays. You can see that at the end of both chapters. Then Miriam's made clean again, end of chapter 12.

And Moses gets leaders to help him carry his burden. All because of Moses. Moses has the ear of God and remains humble. Now who does that remind you of?

Moses has his limits as well. We see that here too, don't we? Comes absolutely exhausted. Mentally. Physically. And he moans.

[ 20 : 37 ] And he turns in on himself. His speech towards God, I think it has the word I in it something like 25 times. He loses his focus on God. And he doesn't take away God's anger, does he?

Completely. He prays for it to stop, but he can't take it away. He can't take the punishment on himself. So we need someone like Moses who God listens to, who is humble, but someone who doesn't grumble.

Somebody who doesn't turn in on himself. Someone better. And that's Jesus. The New Testament tells us. The leader who understands everything that we have to grumble about, but doesn't grumble himself.

who knows our weakness. Jesus is God's gift of grace to overcome grumbling. See what Moses says in the end when he reaches kind of the climax of his speech.

He says, God, if this is how it's going to be, I'd rather die than carry all these people. And what does Jesus say? Jesus chooses to die so that he can carry his people home.

[ 21 : 53 ] He's the better Moses. He's the one who can take the full punishment that Moses can't. Moses prays in verse 29, doesn't he? When Joshua questions him and says, should these guys be prophesying?

You know, the ones who didn't turn up? You know what Moses says? He says, I wish all God's people could have God's spirit. And that prayer is answered through Jesus. Isn't it? He sends his spirit to all who believe to remind us of what God is really like. That he is good. That he does care. To comfort us in our hardship in the wilderness.

To break our addictions to our past. so that we bear up under temptation. So that we get home despite our grumbling. As a nation, we're very good at complaining, aren't we?

But grumbling's dangerous, as we've seen. And our God is a consuming fire. Now, does that mean we never discuss it when things are not going well? No. Of course we talk about problems.

[ 23 : 04 ] Of course we can be honest with God about how we feel. But what we don't do is forget his goodness. And we keep a check on our words when we talk about him.

Because after all, doesn't Hebrews tell us that those temptations that come our way are common to humanity? We are experiencing what everyone experiences. joy. And we need to remember that joy doesn't come from having all the things that I used to have back in Egypt.

Or having all the things that I want to have in the future. Joy comes from being loved by the person who knows us best and who has promised to take us home. And that's the Lord Jesus.

Jesus. Jesus, who's determined to save us by his grace. We have that love. Then we can plunge into a messy life that we know won't give us everything we want.

Can't we? If we have that love. Some of you might have seen on the slides that it says there's tea and coffee and next to it there's a picture of donuts.

[ 24 : 13 ] And you might be thinking false advertising. We never get donuts. In fact, we only just got the biscuits back. So don't know about that. Friends, we're going to have donuts this morning.

Speak to you later. I want you, as you eat that sweet pastry made with oil to remember that we have tasted and seen that the Lord is good.

Put your trust in the Lord Jesus, the one who will lead you through the wilderness and ask him for grace not to grumble. Will you do that? Amen.