

Grumble or Trust?

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Preacher: Andrew Price

[0 : 00] Lockdown is a bit of a breather. Our children got an extra day off school on Friday and you all got to sleep in this morning, stay in the warmth of your home in your PJs while it's quite foggy and freezing cold outside.

But for others with businesses or pending medical appointments or living alone, it can be a real struggle, a real trial.

For example, I know people whose businesses only just made it through last year. They don't have much wiggle room left and so to lose another week of work is a real trial.

But lockdowns aside, we all face various problems or trials in life, don't we? Whether it's work or family or relationships or health.

I mean, I know people both at HGD and at St. John's who are facing significant health issues or significant employment issues, both of which are, quite frankly, life-threatening.

[1 : 13] And when these trials come our way, the encouragement today is not to face them full of grumbling against God, but to face them full of faith in God.

Why? Well, because God has provided for us in the past and so we can trust him to provide in the future. And because, as we just sang in that hymn, God uses these fiery trials to grow our faith in him.

You see, in our passage today, God leads Israel into the desert to face three trials of their own, life-threatening trials of their own. And as they face them, God provides for them again and again to show that they can trust him.

But God also tests them to grow that trust in him, though it seems Israel are very slow learners. But these three trials follow a similar pattern, which is on your screens.

There's a life-threatening problem, which leads to forgetful grumbling by Israel and then God's gracious provision. And often there's a theme of testing that goes through that as well.

[2 : 37] But let me show you from the Bible, so you don't take my word for it, but God's. So trial number one on your screens, chapter 15, verse 22. Then Moses led Israel from the Red Sea and they went into the desert of Shur.

For three days they travelled in the desert without finding water. When they came to Marah, they could not drink its water because it was bitter. That is why the place is called Marah.

The word Marah means bitter. Here Israel led into the desert and here is their first problem, no water. And that's a life-threatening problem, isn't it?

Because we need water to live, don't we? I mean, it's not looking good here either, is it? I mean, they're in the desert. And so it would have been hard for them to see a solution, which is sometimes the same for us, isn't it?

When we face problems in life, it's sometimes hard to find a way out, you know, to find a job we need or a place to live, or to know if the medical treatment will work, or to see a solution to our financial or family problem.

[3 : 52] So at first glance, you can kind of understand their response in verse 24. So the people grumbled against Moses, saying, what are we to drink?

Now here they grumble against Moses, but as we'll see later, they're really grumbling against God. And while we can kind of understand their grumbling at first glance, because it's, you know, they're in the desert, it's hard to see a way out, at second glance, they don't really have a reason.

Because what has just happened only three days earlier, they saw God's great rescue from Egypt, didn't they? They even praised him in song for it, like we saw last week.

So if God can part the Red Sea, then certainly he can provide some fresh water, can't he? They've forgotten, you see, God's past provision.

Their grumbling is forgetful grumbling. I should also point out there is a difference between grumbling against God and lamenting to God.

[5 : 04] You see, it's okay to question God, asking why? Why is this happening? And it's okay to cry out to God, how long? How long is this going to last?

The psalmist. The psalmist do both in the Bible. But grumbling against God goes one step further. It moves from questioning God to effectively accusing God of either injustice or incompetence. You know, leading us into a desert without water? Dumb move, God. It's when we move from expressing our emotions to God to no longer trusting in God, trusting that he knows what he's doing, even when we can't see.

And here the Israelites are grumbling against God, indirectly accusing him of incompetence and not trusting he can provide. And so he teaches them they can trust him by providing.

So look at verse 25. Then Moses cried out to the Lord, and the Lord showed him a piece of wood. He threw it into the water, and the water became fit to drink.

[6 : 20] Here God doesn't punish Israel for their grumbling, does he? But graciously provides fresh water because he's showing them, teaching them, they can trust him to provide.

But second, God will also test them. So in the rest of verse 25 to 26, we read, there the Lord issued a ruling and instruction for them and put them to the test.

He said, if you listen carefully to the Lord your God and do what is right in his eyes, if you pay attention to his commands and keep all his degrees, I will not bring on you any of the diseases I've brought on the Egyptians, for I am the Lord who heals you.

You see, God is going to use future problems to test them, to see if they will obey him. But obedience really just shows our trust.

You see, you only obey what someone says if you believe or trust them, don't you? If I said there's a bomb in the building, let's get out now, then you'd only obey if you trusted me.

[7 : 32] And we're in the building and not online, of course. The point is to test obedience is really to test their trust or faith in God.

And God does this to grow their trust in him, to refine our faith as we sung in that earlier hymn, to trust him as the one who provides or heals, as it says.

You see, when we face problems in life, we have to choose whether we will keep trusting or not. And when we choose to trust, when we exercise our faith, it strengthens it and grows it.

It's like muscles. I actually went for some bike rides when I was on leave and I discovered muscles I never knew I had. But the more I exercise them, the stronger they grew.

So, too, the more we exercise our faith, our trust, the stronger it grows. That's why God will test them. It's partly why God leads them the long way around.

[8 : 41] And so here is a map. They've come down from Goshen, which that's where they were slaves in Egypt. We saw them park on the left side of the Red Sea.

Then they crossed the Red Sea to the right side last week where they sung their song to God. Then they could have followed the blue line up to Canaan, which is the promised land.

But instead, God leads them south down the red line towards Mount Sinai. Why? Well, partly because he told Moses he'd bring Israel to Mount Sinai to worship him, but also to have opportunities to test them and grow them over time.

But before he does, God provides more water so that they can know they can trust him. So, verse 27, then they came to Elam, where there were 12 springs and 70 palm trees, and they camped there near the water.

At 12 springs and 70 trees could be the writer's way of talking about water and shade for all 12 tribes and 70 elders of Israel.

[9 : 54] Either way, God shows he can provide for all his people with all they need. And so Israel has every reason to trust him, don't they?

Trust and obey him, in fact, in the future. Like a couple of months later when they face their next trial. So, trial 2, chapter 16, verse 1, the whole Israelite community set out from Elam and came to the desert of Sin, which is between Elam and Sinai.

On the 15th day of the second month after they had come out of Egypt, in the desert, the whole community grumbled against God and Aaron.

The Israelite said to them, if only we had died by the Lord's hand in Egypt. There we sat around pots of meat and ate all the food we wanted. But you have brought us out into the desert to starve

this entire assembly to death.

So here we meet the problem. This time it's not no water, it's no food. Which is another life-threatening problem, isn't it? And it seems Israel has forgotten God's past provision again because they grumble again, don't they?

[11 : 17] What's more, they have a distorted view of history, don't they? They talk as though Egypt was a five-star resort where they had spit roast for dinner every night.

Egypt was a slave camp where they were treated harshly. And yet that's what often happens when we face problems in life, isn't it? We often forget God's past provision and distort history.

It's like a little kid who has a birthday party, they get all these presents, eat all these lollies, but at the end of their big day, they're told they cannot stay up to watch TV, but need to go to bed early. Now for children, missing out on TV is a real trial, I'm told. And so kids, this kid grumbles against their parents saying, you never give me anything good.

This is a hypothetical situation, of course. But you see, they've not only forgotten the past provisions of their parents, they've distorted history. Or more seriously, our prayers are answered about a job or a health issue that at the time was a great provision, but then we face another struggle or trial and we quickly forget such that we grumble against God, you never answer my prayers.

[12 : 45] We so quickly forget and distort history, don't we? But because God is teaching them, they can trust him to provide, he graciously tells Moses on the next slide, the Lord said to Moses, I will rain down bread from heaven for you.

Here in the first part of verse 4, God tells Moses he will provide bread from heaven. Why? Or to teach them he is their God whom they can trust.

We see this when Moses then communicates and tells the Israelites about the provision. So we'll skip the rest of 4 and 5 and go to verse 6 on the slide there.

So Moses and Aaron then said to all the Israelites, they're communicating this to them now, in the evening you will know that it was the Lord who brought you out of Egypt and in the morning you will see the glory of the Lord because he has heard your grumbling against him.

Who are we that you should grumble against us? And the next slide, Moses also said you will know that it was the Lord when he gives you meat to eat in the evening and all the bread you want in the morning because he has heard your grumbling against him.

[14 : 00] Who are we? You are not grumbling against us but against the Lord. Then Moses told Aaron say to the entire Israelite community come before the Lord for he has heard your grumbling.

While Aaron was speaking to the whole Israelite community they looked toward the desert and there was the glory of the Lord appearing in the cloud. The Lord said to Moses I have heard the grumbling of the Israelites tell them at twilight you will eat meat and in the morning you will be filled with bread then you will know that I am the Lord your God.

Did you notice how many times we're told that Israel are grumbling and not just against Moses but really against God. but did you also notice we're told three times that God is providing so that they may know he is their Lord.

The Lord who not only saved them but will provide for them. And in fact notice the last time in verse 12 on your screens there it says then you will know I am the Lord your God.

you see he provides for them so that they might know he is their God whom they can trust to provide and he does provide.

[15 : 24] And so reading verse 13 that evening quail came and covered the camp and in the morning there was a layer of dew around the camp when the dew was gone thin flakes like frost on the ground appeared on the desert floor when the Israelites saw it they said to each other what is it for they did not know Moses said to them it is the bread the Lord has given you to eat this is what the Lord has commanded everyone is to gather as much as they need take an omer for each person you have in your tent the Israelites did this as they were told some gathered much some little and when they measured it out by omer the one who gathered much did not have too much and the one who gathered little did not have too little everyone had gathered just as much as they needed you see here is ample provision isn't it everyone had what they needed in fact that night they had quail for dinner you have to pay a lot of money in restaurants to have quail don't you and for breakfast they had bread which is very

French isn't it baguettes for breakfast although this bread is a bit different in the Hebrew language the phrase what is it sounds like the word manner so later on in verse 31 we're told the people of Israel called the bread manner it was white like coriander seed and tasted like wafers made with honey it may have looked a bit like those you know those little wafers we've been using for communion lately though I'm sure the manner tasted a whole lot better than those wafers especially since this manner became their staple diet but the point is God provided as much as they needed to eat you see he's teaching them they can trust him as their God to provide but then God also tests them to grow that trust and so if we come back to verse four and five which we skipped over the second paragraph there the first sentence he's talking about he's going to provide for them but then the next one he's going to test them that people are to go out each day and gather enough for that day in this way

I will test them and see whether they will follow my instructions on the sixth day they are to prepare what they bring in and that is to be twice as much as they gather on the other days so that on the seventh day the Sabbath they don't have to gather anything you see God will test them to see if they will choose to trust and obey or not to whether he will trust and obey his instructions about picking up enough for just one day and then twice as much before the Sabbath day so they could rest on that seventh Sabbath day but he tests them so that they might exercise their trust exercise their faith and grow it though it seems some choose not to exercise it so if we pick up the story again in verse 19 we read then Moses said to them no one is to keep any of the manna until morning however some of them paid no attention to

Moses they kept part of it until morning but it was full of maggots and began to smell so Moses was angry with them you see it seems some choose not to trust in God and so they stored manna themselves they didn't exercise their faith did they and so God forces them to he makes the manna go off and it grows maggots it kind of reminds me of an apple I found in one of my kids desk drawers on the next slide the black bit is mold charming isn't it but by doing so God is forcing Israel to trust him each day to provide new manner rather than trusting in themselves and their stockpile well the rest of chapter 16 talks about God's provision not of food but of the

Sabbath for the Sabbath day was a day of rest to teach them that God created them for rest that is relationship with him and one another enjoying life in the world he created rest is life to the full if you like and the Sabbath day was meant to give them a pale glimpse of that a glimpse of what life was supposed to be like in their promised land where they would enjoy rest more fully well had they obeyed we don't have time to unpack that now instead we'll jump towards the end of chapter 16 to verse 32 here we read Moses said this is what the Lord has commanded take an omer of manna and keep it for the generations to come so they can see the bread I gave you to eat in the wilderness when I brought you out of Egypt so Moses said to Aaron take a jar and put an omer of manna in it then place it before the Lord to be kept for the generations to come as the

[20 : 54] Lord commanded Moses Aaron put the manna with the tablets of the covenant Lord so that it might be preserved and omer is about two kilos but did you notice we're told three times that they keep this manna for the future preserve it for the generations to come why so that people would remember God's provision that he can be trusted because it's so easy to forget and grumble isn't it which is what sadly Israel does again point three because of time when we come to this trial third trial let me just summarize so in verse one on your screens God leads them from place to place and then to Rephidim where there's no water to drink again so here's the next problem but instead of

God to test God is to not to grow God's faith in himself but to demand he prove himself put him to proof as we heard earlier in from Psalm 95 prove that he's really among them that's why we read in verse 7 that Moses called the place Massah and Meribah and Massah means testing and Meribah means quarreling because the Israelites quarreled and because they tested the Lord saying is the Lord among us or not you see that's how they tested to prove God that you're really among us by providing for us which given all they've seen is a pretty poor response isn't it especially since the pillar of cloud is right in front of them especially since their stomachs are still digesting the morning manner and yet despite their testing God again graciously provides and proves he's with them in verse five and six he tells

Moses to go in front of all the people with some elders and to strike a rock and from the rock water comes God is saying here I am I am actually with you you can trust me but throughout the whole passage God leads them in the desert where they encounter these three trials and God uses them

to teach them trust firstly he provides for them teaching them they can trust him and second he tests them to try and force them to exercise and grow that trust but sadly it seems this generation of Israel is determined not to trust but to grumble yet there was one Israelite who was led into the desert without food and to be tested by God and tempted by the devil Jesus and Jesus did trust God what's more Jesus through Jesus

God provided for our eternal life threatening problem didn't he you see our sin meant we were facing eternal death but Jesus himself said on your screens I am the bread of life my father's will is that everyone who looks to the son and believes in him shall have eternal life and I will raise them up at the last day sadly you can see on your screens there that the Jews grumble again because Jesus claims to be the bread from heaven and despite the miracles they'd seen they can only see Jesus as the boy from down the road not who he truly is but Jesus is God's provision for our eternal life threatening situation for Jesus paid for our sins at the cross so that we might be saved from eternal death and given eternal life eternal life with

God now spiritually where God is our heavenly father and eternal life later physically on that last day when Jesus said he will raise us up to enjoy rest in our promised land the new creation if we believe or trust in him and so do you or do you grumble and disbelieve like the Jews perhaps seeing him only as a historical teacher and not who he truly is for us who do believe when we face trials in life the question is will we grumble against God forgetting his past provisions or will we continue to trust in God to provide God provided for Israel to teach them they can trust him and God has provided for us to not only things we need in this life but most of all with his son for eternal life and so if he's provided like this in the past we can trust him to provide for what we need in the future one of the guys in my

[26 : 23] Bible study group is one whose business only just made it through last year in fact he's been working long hours this year to try and catch up and he will feel the lack of work this week but instead of grumbling about it he said last week that he's grateful to get a break from the long hours and that he's just got to keep trusting God to provide because he's done it in the past isn't that good he's a guy who doesn't grumble forgetting God's past provision but continues to trust in God to provide what he needs not our wants of course like a Ferrari even though he sometimes does provide them to I mentioned wanting a Ferrari one time before and someone took pity on me and actually bought me one true story it was a matchbox Ferrari but it was still a Ferrari but God will provide for our needs our needs as he sees them because sometimes we get confused over what our needs really are don't we like my kids who said the other summer we need a swimming pool or who of us would have said that we needed someone to pay for our sins

I don't think we would have said that unless we were told it we don't always know what we need but God does and since he's already provided for us in the past most of all through his son we can trust him to provide for our needs in the future as he sees them I was visiting someone in hospital recently and the doctors didn't really know what was wrong with the wife and as I walked out of the hospital with the he takes her he'll provide what's best what a response here is another person he didn't exactly know what was best but he didn't grumble for getting God's past provision but continued to trust in God to provide what's best we face trials in life will we grumble against God or we continue to trust in God and will we continue to trust remembering he uses such testing to grow our faith in him as

James writes on your screens he says consider it pure joy my brothers and sisters whenever you face trials of many kinds because you know the testing of your faith produces perseverance let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete not lacking anything now don't miss here James he's not a masochist he's not saying we rejoice at the pain trials produce and Mark Chu didn't rejoice when he came off his bike and broke his wrist rather James is saying to rejoice at the perseverance trials produce the growth and maturity they produce because they force us to exercise our faith to strengthen it and grow it you see just like when we exercise our muscles in fact sometimes God will lead us like Israel to a place where we have no choice but to exercise our faith to grow it and that's because our faith is really important and our last slide

Peter says that from our second reading that our faith is of greater worth than gold which perishes even though refined by fire and it will result in praise glory and honor both for us and God on that last day that's how important faith is that's why the Bible talks so much about having faith and trusting of course trials by their nature are not easy are they they are painful and so by all means lament you know cry out to God how long question God why express our emotions to God but don't

then grumble against God accusing him of incompetence or injustice you know distrusting that he knows what he's doing don't grumble but do continue to trust let's pray our gracious heavenly father we do thank you for this reminder this morning that we are not to grumble against you when we face trials of various kinds but to continue to trust in you remembering your past provisions for us that we can trust you to continue to provide and remembering that you use these trials to grow our precious faith help us we pray not to grumble but to trust we ask in Jesus name amen ch