

Grumble or Trust?

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[0 : 0 0] Let's start. Here we go again, by the way, lockdown number four, I'm told. More masks, more panic buying. It's incredible. Of course, for some, lockdown is not much of a trial.

My kids got an extra day off school last week. You got to all stay at home where it's nice and warm in your PJs, not freezing like it is here. Although for others, lockdown is a trial.

For those 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 wriggle room left. And so to lose another week's work is a real trial. And lockdown aside, we all face various problems or trials in life, don't we? Whether it's work or family or school or relationships or health. I know people at both St. John's and Holy Trinity who are dealing with significant health issues or significant employment issues. Both problems are pretty much life threatening. And when trials come our way, as that question said, how do you respond? Well, today the encouragement is to face them not full of grumbling against God, but full of faith in God. Like our memory verse, trust in the law with all your heart. Why? Well, because God has provided for us in the past and so we can trust him to provide for our needs in the future. And because

God uses these trials to grow our faith in him. You see, in our passage today, God leads Israel into the desert to face three life threatening trials of their own. And as they face them, God provides for them again and again to teach them they can trust him. But God also then tests them to grow that trust in him. Yet it seems Israel are very slow learners. But these trials follow a similar pattern on your screens. Each trial starts with a life threatening problem followed by Israel's forgetful grumbling and then God's gracious provision. But let me show you from the Bible so you don't take my word for it, but God's. So trial one and I'll put the Bible verses on the screens to make it easier for you to follow along. Verse 22, then Moses led Israel from the Red Sea and they went into the desert of Shur.

[2 : 5 8] For three days they traveled 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. Marah means bitter. But here you see Israel's led into the desert and their first problem is no water. And that's a life threatening problem, isn't it? We need water to live. And what's more, it's not looking good because, well, they're in the desert. So it would have been hard for them to see a solution, which is sometimes the same for us, isn't it? You know, when we face problems in life, it's sometimes hard to see a way out, you know, to find a job or a place to live that we need, or to know if the medical treatment will work, or to see a solution to our financial or family situation. And so at first glance, you can kind of understand Israel's response to this trial. Verse 24, so the people grumbled against Moses saying, what are we to drink? It says there that Moses, the people grumble against Moses, but we'll see later on it's really grumbling against God. And while I said we can kind of understand their grumbling at first glance, at second glance, they don't really have a reason. Because what has happened just three days earlier, well, God rescued them through the Red Sea. In fact, they just sung about it last week, when they praise God by the sea. And so if God can part the Red Sea, then he can certainly provide some fresh water, can't he? They've forgotten God's past provision. You see, their grumbling is forgetful grumbling. I should point out also that there is a difference between grumbling against God and lamenting to God. You see, it's okay to question God asking, why? Why is this happening?

Why are you allowing me to put me through this? It's even okay to cry out to God, how long will this last? The psalmists do both in the Bible. But grumbling against God goes one step further. It moves from questioning God to effectively accusing God of injustice or incompetence. You know, you led us into the desert. Dumb move, God. It's when we move from expressing our emotions to God, to

no longer trusting in God, that he knows what he's doing, even if we don't. And here the Israelites are grumbling against God, indirectly accusing him of incompetence and not trusting him to provide. And so God teaches them to trust by providing. So 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. You see, God doesn't punish

Israel for their grumbling. He graciously provides because he's showing they can trust him. Look, here's your water. You can trust me to provide. But second, God will also test them. And so the rest of verse 25, 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 decrees, I will not bring on you any of the diseases I brought on the Egyptians. For I am the Lord who heals you. You see, he put them to the test. He said, look, if you keep trusting me, it's going to go well. I'll keep providing. But you need to obey my commands.

But obedience really shows trust. You see, you only obey what someone says if you believe or trust the person. Yeah, if I said there's a bomb in the building, we need to get out now. You'd only obey me if you trusted me and were in the building and not at home, of course. The point is to test their obedience is really to test their trust or faith in God. And God does this not to be mean, but to grow their trust in him as the one who provides and heals. You see, when we face a problem in life, we have to choose whether we will keep trusting God or not. And when we choose to trust, we are exercising our faith in him. And the more we exercise it, the stronger it grows. Just like physical exercise and muscles. When I was on holidays, I went for a few bike rides myself and I discovered some muscles that I never knew I had. But the more I kept exercising them, the stronger they grew. It's the same with our faith, you see. The more we exercise our faith, the more we exercise our faith, the more we exercise our faith, the more we exercise our faith.

[8 : 34] That's why God tests them. And it's why God leads them the long way around to the promised land. On your screens is a map. And so that's where they crossed the Red Sea, where that red line is.

And then they traveled down to Elam, which is where we are today. Now, God could have, though, followed the blue line east up to Canaan, the promised land. But instead, he takes them south down the red line to Mount Sinai. Partly because he told Moses he would bring Israel to Mount Sinai to worship him. But also because he wants opportunities to test them, to grow their faith in him over time. But before he does, God provides even more water, again, to show 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. Here's more water. The 12 springs and 70 palm trees could be the writer's way of talking about, you know, enough water and shade for the 12 tribes of Israel and the 70 elders of Israel. But either way, it shows that God provides for all his people with all they need. And so Israel has every reason to trust and obey him in the future, don't they?

I like a couple of months later when they face another trial, trial number two. So 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 come out of Egypt. In the desert, the whole community grumbled against Moses and Aaron. The Israelites 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 this desert to starve this entire assembly to death. Here, the trial is not having no water, but it's having no food, which is another life-threatening problem, isn't it? You know, we need food to live. And it seems Israel has forgotten already God's past provision, because they grumble again, don't they? What's more, they have this distorted view of history. They talk as though Egypt was a five-star resort, you know, where they sat around a spit roast and ate all they wanted. When actually, Egypt was a slave camp, where they were treated harshly.

Yeah, that's often what happens when we face problems and trials in life, isn't it? We forget God's past provision, and we distort history. It's like a little kid who has a birthday party. They get all these presents and eat all these lollies, and at the end of their big day, their parents say, can't watch TV tonight, you need to go to bed early. And no TV, well, that's a real trial for kids. And so they grumble against their parents, saying, you never give me anything good.

[12 : 06] Now, this is a hypothetical situation, of course. But you see, they've forgotten their past provisions, and they distort history, don't they? Or more seriously, our prayers are answered about

a job or a health issue, which at the time was a great provision from God. But then we face another issue or struggle and quickly forget, such that we then grumble against God, saying, you never answer my prayers. We so quickly forget and distort history, don't we? But because God is teaching, then they can trust Him to provide, He graciously then tells Moses, I will rain down bread from heaven for you. The first part of verse 4 there, God tells Moses He will provide bread from heaven.

Why? Well, to teach them He is their God. They can trust Him. And we see this when Moses then tells the Israelites more fully what's going to happen. So we'll skip the rest of 4 or 5 and go to verse 6.

In verse 6 we read, So Moses and Aaron said to all the Israelites, Moses also said, Then Moses told Aaron, Now we certainly get the point that they grumble.

I think the word grumbling was mentioned like six times or something there. But did you also notice we're told three times that God is providing that they may know. That God not only saved them, but will provide for them. In fact, that last line that was underlined on the screen there says, Then you'll know that I am the Lord your God. This is why God is providing so that they might remember He's their God. They can trust Him to provide.

And God does. So verse 13 on your screens. That evening quail came and covered the camp. And in the morning there was a layer of dew around the camp.

[15:11] 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 what it was. 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 the tent. The Israelites did this as they were told. Some gathered much, some little.

And when they measured it by the 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.

Here is God's ample provision. Everyone had what they needed. That night they ate quail for dinner. You pay lots of money in restaurants to eat quail these days.

But God provides it free of charge. And for bread for breakfast, which is very French by the way. You know, they eat baguettes for breakfast. Though this bread is a bit different.

[16:16] In the Hebrew language, the phrase, What is it? Sounds like the word manna. Which is why it's called manna. So later on in verse 31, we're told, The people of Israel called the bread manna.

What is it? It was like coriander seed and tasted like wafers made with honey. It may have actually looked a bit like these communion wafers that we are sometimes using at church.

Though I'm pretty sure it tasted a whole lot better than these communion wafers because these don't taste good at all. Especially because manna became their staple diet. But the point is God provided as much as they needed to eat.

Why? To teach them they can trust him to provide in the future. But then God also tests them to grow that trust.

So we go back to verse 4 and 5. The first part of verse 4 was God's provision. But then notice the rest is about testing. The people are to go out each day and gather enough for that day.

[17:23] 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.

Because the seventh day was to be a Sabbath where they didn't have to go out and gather. But do you see here God will test them to see if they will choose to trust and obey his instructions or not. His instructions about picking up enough for one day and twice as much before the Sabbath day. So they could rest on the Sabbath day. And he tests them so that they might exercise their faith in order to strengthen and grow it.

Though it seems some choose not to. So back in verse 19 we pick up the story. 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.

[18 : 36] So Moses was angry with them. You see, it seems that some didn't trust God to provide. And so they stored manna for themselves.

They didn't exercise their faith. And so now God forces them to exercise it. Because he makes the manna go off, doesn't he?

He grows maggots. It kind of reminds me of an apple I found in one of my kids' desk drawers on your screens. That black stuff is mold. Charming, isn't it?

But in doing so, God is forcing Israel to trust him each day to provide. To exercise their faith each day.

Rather than to trust in themselves and their stockpile. Well, the rest of chapter 16 talks about God's provision. Not of food, but of the Sabbath.

[19 : 33] A day of rest. Which was to remind them that God had created them for rest. To enjoy relationship with him and one another. And to enjoy life in all its fullness.

It was meant to be a little pale glimpse of what life was supposed to be like in the promised land. We don't have time to unpack all that now.

Instead, we'll jump towards the end of the chapter 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 Lord commanded Moses, Aaron put the manna with the tablets of the covenant law so that it might be preserved. Now, an omer is about two kilos.

[20 : 35] But did you notice we're told three times about keeping this manna for the future? For future generations. For future generations. So it's preserved. Why?

Well, so that people might remember God's provision that God provides. Because it's so easy to forget and grumble, isn't it?

Which is what Israel sadly does again. Which brings us to the third trial. But because of time, let me just summarize. In verse 1 on your screens, God leads them from place to place.

Notice. And then to Rephidim, where again, there's no water to drink. But instead of trusting God to provide, which is what he's trying to get them to do, as he's done in the past, well, verse 2 and 3, they quarreled with Moses.

And they test God. And they grumbled again. You see, it's actually worse this time. They don't just grumble, but they also quarrel and test God.

[21 : 45] To test God is not to grow God's faith in himself. That's what he does for us. But rather, it's to demand God prove himself that he's really among them.

That's what verse 7 says on your screens now. At the end of this little trial episode, Moses called the place Massa and Meribah. Massa 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, they tested God by asking God to prove himself.

Is he really here or not? Well, then provide. Which is actually a pretty poor response to this trial, isn't it? Particularly since the pillar of cloud is already in front of them.

Particularly since God has already provided water and food before. In fact, their stomachs are still digesting the mourning manna that God provided.

[22 : 49] And yet they still test God and grumble. And yet, despite that, God again graciously provides. Verse 5 and 6.

Gets Moses to stand in front of people so they can all see for themselves God's provision of water. But you see, throughout this whole passage, these three trials, God leads them in the desert to face these trials.

And he uses them to teach them to trust him. First, he provides for them again and again to teach them they can trust him. And then second, he tests them to force them to exercise that trust and grow it in him.

But sadly, it seems this generation of Israel is determined not to trust in the Lord with all their heart, but to grumble against him. And yet there was one Israelite who was led into the desert without food, to be tested by God and tempted by the devil.

God doesn't tempt. And that's Jesus. And yet Jesus did trust God, didn't he? What's more, through Jesus, God provided for our eternal life-threatening situation.

[24 : 10] You see, our sin meant we are facing eternal death. But Jesus himself said on your screens, I am the bread of life who's come down from heaven.

My Father's will is that everyone who looks to the Son and believes in him shall have eternal life. And I'll raise them up at the last day.

Of course, you see there that the Jews, like their ancestors, grumble again. They don't trust Jesus. Despite Jesus' miracles, they can only see the boy from down the road.

They can't see 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 life.

That's from eternal death, rather. For eternal life. Eternal life with God now, spiritually, where God is our Heavenly Father.

[25 : 16] And eternal life later, physically, on the last day, as we saw Jesus will raise our bodies up to enjoy rest in our promised land, the new creation.

If, though, we believe or trust in him. And so do you. Do you trust in Jesus? Or do you grumble and disbelieve like those Jews?

Perhaps only seeing Jesus as a good teacher in history and not who he truly is. For us who do believe, then when we face trials in life, will we grumble or trust?

That's the question for us today. Will we grumble against God, forgetting his past provisions? Or will we continue to trust in God, remembering he provides?

God provided for Israel to teach them they can trust him. And God has already provided so much for us. Not only the things we need in this life, but most of all, his son for eternal life.

[26 : 23] And so if he's provided like this in the past, we have every reason to trust him to provide in the future, don't we? One of the guys in my Bible study group is the one whose business only just made it through last year.

In fact, he's been working long hours to try and catch up. And he will feel the lack of work this week. But instead of grumbling about it, he said at Bible study that he's grateful to get a break from the long hours.

And that he's just got to trust God to provide as God's provided in the past. Isn't that a great response to this trial? Here is a guy who doesn't grumble for getting God's past provisions, but continues to trust God to provide what he needs.

Not our wants, by the way, like a Ferrari, even though God sometimes does provide them too. I mentioned wanting a Ferrari one other time before and someone actually took pity on me and bought me a Ferrari.

It's a true story. The only problem was it was a matchbox car. I mean, it's still a Ferrari. But God will provide for our needs.

[27 : 35] And 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 a couple of summers ago, we need a swimming pool.

Or what about us? Who of us would have said we needed someone to die and pay for our sins? I don't think any of us would have said we needed that unless we were told.

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 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 I was walking out of hospital with the husband. And he didn't grumble, but he said, if God takes her, he takes her.

He'll provide what's best. What a response to this trial. He didn't know exactly what was best, but he trusted God to provide it.

[28 : 44] Here is someone else who didn't grumble for getting God's past provisions, but continued to trust that God will provide our needs as he sees them.

And will we continue to trust remembering God uses these trials to grow our faith in him? As James writes on the slide there, Consider it pure joys, my brothers and sisters, when you face trials of many kinds.

Why? Well, 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, James was not a masochist. He's not saying we're to rejoice about the pain our trials produce. Mark Chu isn't jumping for joy at his bike accident and the pain of his wrist.

Rather, James is saying to rejoice at the perseverance the trial produces, the growth and maturity. For when we exercise our faith, it's strengthened and grows.

[29 : 54] In fact, sometimes God will lead us, like Israel, to a place where we have no choice but to exercise our faith and grow it. And that's because our faith is really important.

In fact, Peter tells us on our last slide that our faith is of greater worth than gold. Why? Well, because our faith helps us to obey God, to live his way for our good, and because it determines our eternity.

In Peter's words, it will result in praise, honor and glory, both for us and for God. That's how important our faith is.

That's why the Bible talks about it so much. Of course, trials by their nature are not easy, are they? They're painful. And so, by all means, lament.

Question God why. Cry out to God how long. Express our emotions to God. But we're not then to grumble against God. You know, accusing him of incompetence, distrusting that he knows what he's doing.

[31 : 09] No, don't grumble, but do trust in God. Let's pray we would. Our gracious Heavenly Father, we thank you for this reminder this morning that when we face trials of various kinds, that we're not to grumble forgetting your past provision, but we're to continue to trust, knowing that you will provide, and that indeed you use these trials to grow our precious faith that is of greater worth than gold.

So help us, we pray, not to grumble, but to trust. We ask in Jesus' name. Amen.