

Grumbling Against God

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Date: 31 August 2025

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[0 : 0 0] Well, when I was little, we had these Mr. Men books. Have you ever read those Mr. Men books?! They also brought out Little Miss books, like Little Miss Chatterbox. We've got one of those at our house.

But one of these Mr. Men books was, well, take a look. Mr. Grumble by Roger Hargreaves. Mr. Grumble's name suited him well.

He would grumble every morning when his alarm clock rang. It's the start of yet another horrible day. And on it goes. I'm sure at times we've all found ourselves going, blah!

Perhaps for different reasons, but sometimes because we're being a Mr. or Mrs. Grumble. I asked my Bible study group last week, when do people grumble? And Annette very quickly said, all the time.

Another person in the group said, when it rains and when it doesn't rain. All the time. Of course, there are much more serious causes for complaining, aren't there? Like when we face hardship or suffering.

[1 : 1 3] And yet even then, we heard in our second reading from Ron that we're to do everything without grumbling and arguing. And so how are we to handle hardship without grumbling?

Are we simply to, I don't know, suck it up and internalize all the pain and just soldier on? Or is there a better way? Well, last week we saw how on the journey to the Promised Land, Israel was to remember God's salvation.

Annette reminded us of that at the start of the service by celebrating the Passover. And this was to reassure them, if God had saved them from hardship out of Egypt in the past, then he can do so again in the future.

And so at the end of chapter 10, they set out from the mountain of the Lord, Mount Sinai, and traveled for three days before they came to camp at their first site, a place of rest.

But instead of remembering God's past salvation, it seems they disregard God's salvation and complain. So point one, verse one.

[2 : 2 1] Now the people complained about their hardships in the hearing of the Lord. And when he heard them, his anger was aroused. Then fire from the Lord burned among them and consumed some of the outskirts of the camp.

Now we don't know what these hardships were, but traveling for three days makes any of us tired and grumpy, doesn't it? Especially if you're traveling with lots of people. And verse 21 tells us that they were traveling with 600,000 men on foot, plus women, plus children, plus livestock.

Can you imagine going on a tour to Israel with that bigger group? I mean, can you imagine trying to line up to get lunch or even use the bathrooms? Or simply not knowing where you're going?

And so it's understandable there were hardships. And no doubt they were real. But their response was to complain in God's hearing instead of crying out to God for help.

So it seems they've already forgotten or perhaps deliberately disregarded God's salvation. How he saved them out of hardship in Egypt and so could do so again.

[3 : 3 0] Not from all hardship. We know that this world is fallen. We all face it. But through hardship, if only they asked. Perhaps by giving them patience with each other or peace about the future or provision for their needs.

And I wonder if we can fall into the same kind of trap. We saw from Romans chapter 8 last week that God did not spare his own son for us.

And if he didn't do that, then he'll certainly give us everything we need to get to our promised land. But if we fail to remember God's salvation through Jesus, then we can fail to ask him for those things we need to keep going.

Whether it's peace or patience or provision. And what's more, we can end up grumbling like Israel. And so in verse 1, God's fire of judgment burned amongst them.

Though notice this seems to be just a warning because it only consumes the outskirts of the camp. At the end of verse 1 there. Now, how did it burn among them?

[4 : 41] Well, perhaps the scholars think maybe there was lightning strikes that caused spot fires throughout the camp. So that way it burned amongst them. But it only consumed the edges, the outskirts.

In fact, only some of the outskirts. And so this judgment, it really is softened, isn't it? In the end, it's a merciful warning to them.

Of course, if lightning is striking throughout the camp, then it is still rather alarming. And so when the people, they cry out to Moses. And he prayed to the Lord and the fire died down.

Here Moses intercedes or prays on behalf of the people, doesn't he? And so turns away God's anger from the people. Which ought to remind us of someone else who does that for us, oughtn't it? As I often say, starts with G's, ends with us. Yeah, thank you, one person, Jesus. You all said you believed in Jesus a moment ago. Yeah. Jesus died, as we heard from Romans 8 as well last week, and rose again.

[5 : 48] And at the end, is also at the right hand of God interceding for us. That is, every time we sin by grumbling or complaining, Jesus is interceding with his blood.

But he says, my blood has paid for their sin, Father, so please forgive them. Isn't it good to trust in Jesus and have this ongoing forgiveness?

But Israel was to remember this event as a warning, which is why in verse 3, it's given a name. The name Tabara, which means burning. And so they're to remember this, but it seems they don't.

Because it's not long before they grumble again. And this time, it's worse. They don't just disregard God's salvation, they end up despising it. Point to verse 4.

Now, the rabble who are with Israel, notice, are likely to refer to those from the other nations that went up out of Egypt with Israel.

[6 : 59] Either way, it's not long before some of Israel start wailing too. Now, I like my meat.

I quite enjoy my meat. But to go on wailing about it seems like over the top, doesn't it? Doesn't it strike you as a toddler throwing a tantrum?

But that's what they seem to be doing. And in doing so, they end up distorting their reality. Not only about their past life in Egypt, but also their present blessings from God. And so verse 5 goes on to say, well, they say, We remember the fish we ate in Egypt at no cost.

Also the cucumbers and melons and leeks and onions and garlic. But now we have lost our appetite. We never see anything but this manner. They thought life in Egypt was like a resort. You know, food was rich, fresh and free. When in reality, they were mistreated slaves, weren't they? And their food was more likely, not fresh, but leftovers.

[8 : 09] But this grumbling doesn't just distort their past. It also distorts and actually despises the present blessing, in this case, of manna. Verse 6. You know, they've distorted this manna and they kind of despise it, don't they?

We've lost our appetite. All we've got is this jolly manna. I don't mean to use the word jolly, but you know what I mean. And so verse 7 to 9, the writer reminds us that actually this manna is a good gift from God.

In verse 7, we're told that it looked like resin. The same word is used of resin back in Genesis where it talks about the good land around Eden. And so this looked good is the point.

It looked like resin. It looked like the good stuff. Verse 8. They could use it in a variety of ways. You know, they ground it and, you know, or crush it in a mortar.

They could cook it in a pot to make some soup or made it into loaves, whether loaves of bread or cake. And it was tasty. It tasted like something made with olive oil.

[9 : 12] In fact, another Bible translation says it tasted like a pastry cooked with the finest oil. In fact, Exodus, we're told that it tasted like wafers made with honey.

In other words, it was good. You know, honey, olive oil, pastry. I mean, it kind of reminds me of baklava or something like that, right? The point is this was a good gift from God.

And unlike their prison food back in Egypt, verse 9 goes on to say that every night the manna also came down. And so it was fresh every morning and it was literally free.

But they ended up despising it. What's more, they ended up despising not just this blessing of manna, but their salvation and God himself.

Because later on in verse 20, when God will speak to them through Moses, he says, You have rejected the Lord who is among you and have wailed before him saying, Why did we ever leave Egypt?

[10:18] In other words, we don't want this salvation. We want to go back. You see, they despise their salvation and even reject God himself. And I wonder again if we can fall into a similar trap where we grumble and perhaps just distort at this stage God's blessings.

You know, we crave something we don't have and distort the blessings we do have as though they're not that great after all. If only we had this other thing.

They're kind of like kids who come home from school and they open the pantry cupboards and they see this blessing of all this food. But because they crave the one thing that's not there, usually chips, not meat.

Then they grumble and distort the reality and say there's never anything good to eat. Or more seriously, when we don't have the thing we crave, like more money or other job or better health, we can grumble and distort the blessings we do have, can't we?

Of course, part of the reason we distort these blessings we have in Christ is we're so used to hearing about them. Like Israel was so used to eating them, or the manna at least.

[11:35] And so again, we're to remember and reflect on just how good God's blessings in Christ are. We're going to take time and remember, reflect on them.

Like life eternal. I mean, when you think about it, people spend oodles of money trying to look younger and live longer, and yet God gives us life eternal for free.

Though it cost him greatly, didn't it? And yet God in his goodness willingly gave, and Jesus willingly went to the cross to pay for our sin. To save us from judgment and give us life eternal with him.

And that life eternal starts the moment we believe. Where God is our Father to help us through hardship. And comes with the guarantee of life with him later in a perfect world to come.

With complete wealth, health and happiness. I mean, it's a pretty good blessing when you stop to reflect on it. But because Israel grumbled and distorted the blessings they did have, indeed despised their salvation and God himself, then it was like a real slap in the face to God.

[12:51] As I'm sure you can imagine. And so verse 10, it's no wonder. Moses heard the people of every family wailing at the entrance of the tents. The Lord became exceedingly angry this time.

And Moses was troubled. And notice, by the way, at the start of verse 10, that this wailing, complaining has now spread to every family in Israel.

You see, grumbling doesn't just affect us. It often infects others, doesn't it? And so this rabble and those Israelites who crave meat in verse 4 have now infected all Israel here in verse 10.

Which gives God even more reason to be exceedingly angry. And Moses is troubled, which sounds a bit soft, but literally, and in the eyes of Moses, it was evil.

So Moses thinks strongly about this too. So much so, Moses is at his wit's end, and so he cries out to God in despair. In verses 11 to 15, which we heard in our Bible reading.

[14:01] Verse 13, at the top of the screen there, is really at the centre of the prayer. Where he asks where he will get meat for the people to eat. And so in this way, he is kind of interceding for them again.

But it's a very different tone, this prayer, isn't it? And scholars are divided over whether this is a complaint or a lament.

But I think it's a lament for three quick reasons. First, Israel complains to each other, and Moses behind God's back, as it were.

They don't cry out to God. But Moses does cry out to God here, doesn't he? Which is an expression of faith. He's still relating to God. Second, the language that Moses uses, even though it sounds like complaint, is actually consistent with the language the psalmists use when they lament.

I don't have time to show you all that now, but you can ask me later. And thirdly, unlike Israel, God does not judge Moses, but answers his prayer for help.

[15:10] And so we'll skip the psalms and go on to verse 16 to 17, where we see God's response. The Lord said to Moses, Bring me 70 of the Israel's elders who are known to you as leaders and officials among the people.

Make them come to the tent of meeting that they may stand there with you. I will come down and speak with you there, and I will take some of the power of the Spirit that is on you and put it on them. They will share the burden of the people with you so that you will not have to carry it alone. Now, some people think that taking some power of the Spirit from Moses and putting it on others is like a form of judgment, you know, taking away from Moses because he complained. But the Spirit doesn't work like that.

The Spirit is not a piece of pie where God takes a slice from Moses and then gives it to others and leaves Moses less. The Spirit is a bit more like fire, where you can take a bit of it and then give it to someone else without diminishing the fire that it started with, you see.

Is anyone's birthday today? Do you want to blow out the camera? No? Okay. Think Pentecost, if you like. What's more, we'll see later and next week that God affirms Moses' leadership.

[16:28] So it's not a judgment. You see, Moses' prayer about leadership actually stands in contrast with Israel's grumbling about food. It kind of intertwines throughout the whole chapter.

Moses laments to God while Israel grumbles against God. And I think this difference is good for us to learn because it's not as though God wants us to simply suck it up and internalize all our pain when we face hardship.

A far better way is to express it in lament. And so when we face hardship, we're to cry out to God. We're to express our emotions to God. He's big enough to handle it.

Where to, as the Bible says, cast or hurl all our anxiety on him or present our requests to him that we might find peace or patience or provision.

Whereas to grumble against him is to talk about him, not to him. And it can quickly infect others, as we've seen, and distort and despise God's good blessings as though they're not good enough, like the manna, and even cause us to despise God's salvation and walk away from God himself.

[17:47] The first generation of Israel never recovers from this grumbling in chapter 11. And you may know people who are like this too. I do.

I know of people who've experienced incredible hardship, like the loss of a sibling at a young age. And instead of lamenting to God, they grumbled against God.

How could he do this? Which quickly distorted their reality. He's no good God. He does nothing good. And then led to despising their salvation.

I no longer want to be a Christian. Whereas the parents of those same children that I know of lamented to God. They cried out to God, often literally with tears.

Why has this happened? How long must we be in pain for? They wrestled with God and expressed their despair to God.

[18:44] And in time, we're able to resolve to trust God. As the psalmists do. And found peace from God. You see the difference?

Grumbling against him. Lamenting to him. We're to lament like Moses, not grumble like Israel. But because they did, because they despised God's blessings, indeed their very salvation, God himself, they'll face judgment.

Verse 18. Tell the people, consecrate yourselves in preparation for tomorrow when you will eat meat. The Lord heard you when you wailed. If only we had meat to eat, we were better off in Egypt. Now the Lord will give you meat and you will eat. You will not eat it for just one day or two days or five, 10 or 20 days, but for a whole month until it comes out your nostrils and you loathe it.

Because you have rejected the Lord who is among you and have wailed before him saying, why did we ever leave Egypt? You want meat? I'll give you meat, says God.

[19:49] Now it doesn't sound very pleasant, you know, coming out of nostrils, but it doesn't sound quite as bad as exceeding anger in verse 10, does it?

And so, as we'll soon see, this loathing will be not just because they'll become sick of it, but they'll also become sick from it.

But first, Moses fails to do what the psalmists do and trust God. Because in verse 21, Moses said, you know, here I am among 600,000 men on foot and you say, I'll give them meat to eat for a whole month.

Would they have enough if flocks and herds were slaughtered for them? Of course not. Would they have enough if all the fish of the sea were caught for them? In other words, he doesn't believe God can do this and so God rebukes him.

The Lord answered Moses, is the Lord's arm too short? Now you will see whether or not what I say will come true for you. And so in verses 24 to 30, the first part that comes true is God anointing the other elders with the spirit to assist Moses in his leadership.

[20 : 59] But we'll skip down to verse 31 and 32 where we then find out what will happen with the people. So verse 31. Now a wind went out from the Lord and drove quail in from the sea.

It scattered them up to two cubits deep all around the camp as far as a day's walk in any direction. All that day and night and all the next day the people went out and gathered quail.

No one gathered less than 10 homers. Then they spread them out all around the camp. Now two cubits is about 90 centimetres. So about that high.

And someone from Bible study who's into running and walking said a day's walk is about 20 kilometres. So can you imagine almost a metre deep 20 kilometres in every direction just quail. I mean that's a lot. And if you don't think so then 10 homers in verse 32 is more than 1.5 tonnes! And no one gathered less than 1.5 tonnes each.

[22 : 06] It's a lot of meat right? And so no wonder they'll become sick of it but they also become sick from it.

Verse 33 But while the meat was still between their teeth and before it could be consumed the anger of the Lord burned against them against the people and he struck them with a severe plague. Perhaps this is the first recorded case of salmonella but the point is before their month of meat was over it seems as though God allowed it to turn bad and struck them with a plague which affected the people.

And some of them not all of them clearly because they kept walking on some of them died. Verse 34 Therefore the place was named Kibroth Hattifah because there they buried the people who craved other food.

Who were those people? Well back in verse 4 the rabble and the other Israelites who first craved that other food. And the name Kibroth Hattifah means graves of craving.

[23 : 13] And so those who rabble and those in Israel back in verse 4 for those who distorted and despised God's blessings and salvation infecting the whole nation will God cut them off from his salvation.

After all if you despise God's salvation and don't want a part of it if you want to go back to Egypt then well God will give you what you want in a sense he will cut you off. And so if you're here today or you're listening online and don't yet believe in Jesus then you don't have God's salvation.

And that means eternal death rather than eternal life. And so do believe in Jesus won't you? And for us who do then when hardship comes the first application is don't grumble against God for it can infect others distort God's gifts and even despise them as though they're not good enough.

it can even lead us to despise our very salvation and walk away from God himself. But that doesn't mean then we just have to suck it up and internalize our pain and soldier on or make light of our hardship.

No no rather secondly do lament to God. Do share our despair with God. Cast our anxiety upon God. Cry out to God for help during our hardship that we might find patience or peace or provision that we might receive his grace which as Paul says is or as God says to Paul is sufficient for us.

[24 : 58] And third do remember God's goodness and how good our blessings in Christ really are. Like how he gave his son to die for us to save us from the judgment our sins deserve.

I mean that's an incredibly good thing to do for someone isn't it? And so he'll continue to give us all we need to get us to our promised land that's another good thing.

And how Jesus intercedes for us when we have grumbled that we might have forgiveness that's another good thing. And how he's always with us to hear us when we lament and help us in life.

How we belong to a family where we can care for one another. They're all good things. We're to remember the goodness of God. We're to count our blessings named one by one as the old hymn goes.

That we might remember all that God has done. For then we can be grateful even in hardship rather than grumble because of it. I was visiting someone who was being told just last week they have terminal cancer.

[26 : 05] and to say this is a hardship is an understatement. And while they naturally like to live longer and care for their loved ones they said to me God has given me a good life and I know where I'm going I'm okay.

And so despite their understandable sorrow they did not grumble. Now that's an example to follow isn't it? Let's pray.

Father we thank you for Jesus whose blood intercedes for us for all the times we've grumbled. Help us we pray that when we face hardship we might not grumble against you but lament to you and remember how good your blessings in Christ really are not least of which is eternal life.

We ask this in Jesus name Amen. Amen.