

Complaining about God

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- [0 : 0 0] As I was meditating and studying this text, on Thursday as I was preparing this sermon, I had a graph on my screen on my computer, a live graph of the Australian share market.
- I'm interested in such matters, and it went down a lot on that day. Just on that morning, the paper value dropped \$70 billion, and so that was a pretty impressive bad day on the Australian share market.
- I'm aware that the dead cat's bounced and it's going up and down, but it's generally headed south. I own shares, and I'm interested as a hobby, really, in the share market, but I know it's important that my soup is affected, our economy is affected by it.
- It's an important practical issue. But if I can make this one observation, and this leads into the text today, on a bigger picture level, there probably would have been many other people looking at that graph on Thursday morning, and for them at that moment, their God was dying.
- Their God was dying. A God or gods of thousands, maybe millions of people in Australia or around the world has been falling over and crashing.
- [1 : 1 8] Many have put their whole hope, all their passions, all their life, even all their worship, into a graph rising. But it hasn't, and their God has failed to provide for them.
- Their God has let them down. Their God has failed to be worthy of worship. Their God has sucked them dry and left them for dead, and there's probably worse to come. Our opportunity with the gospel is to help pick up the pieces and show people the true and living God.
- Now there's a connection with this state of affairs and with Israel in the wilderness. This newly freed nation are redeemed, but they are not yet where God wants them to be, in the promised land of milk and honey.
- They haven't even yet reached Sinai, the place of worship of God. And yet the question for them in the desert is this, which God can provide?
- In which God can people put their hope for security? And what do you do when earthly means of security disappear? Who can you depend on in times of trial for water and bread and meat?
- [2 : 3 1] We're given a description at the start of the chapter where they're at, where they're travelling. The whole congregation of the Israelites, we believe two million plus, set out from Elim, and Israel came to the wilderness of Sin, which is between Elim and Sinai on the 15th day of the second month after they had departed from the land of Egypt.
- So Israel at this stage is camping. They set up a base, stay a little bit, then pack up, and they're heading towards Sinai. And they're halfway through the three-month journey from Egypt to Sinai to worship God.
- And really at this point they should be hopeful. They should be thinking, you know, big things are about to happen. We're being rescued and we're going to meet God on the mountain as he's promised.

What does God have in store for us? What will it be like? It ought to be an exciting moment for Israel. Instead though we have in our verse 2, the whole congregation of the Israelites complained against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness.

So instead of joy and excitement and anticipation, we have complaint and bitterness and vindictiveness. And bringing it against Moses and Aaron is a very kind of veiled way of the actual complaint is really against God.

[3 : 56] And God takes it personally. We'll see later in the chapter. He says, you've complained against me. I think I've said this before in some sermons, but it's really worth saying again that if you are deeply suffering, if you are really in a personal crisis in depths that you've never been to before, there is a biblical way to complain against God.

There is a godly way to complain against God. It's called the lament. And there are many psalms which are models of that. The kind of, it's a privilege of the people of God, a prayerful despair and yet trust in God in times of darkness.

But Israel do not exercise that privilege of lament. Instead what they are nurturing is vindictiveness, bitterness against God, expressed and channeled toward Moses and Aaron.

I mean, you judge for yourself. I'll read to you the complaint. You judge the spirit of it. The Israelites said to them, if only we had died by the hand of the Lord in the land of Egypt, where we sat by the flesh pots and ate our fill of bread.

For you have brought us out into this wilderness to kill this whole assembly with hunger. In my mind, that's an incredibly bizarre and dodgy complaint.

[5 : 25] If only we had died in Egypt by the hand of the Lord. If only God had killed us in the plagues. That was their rescue. That was their protection. And they're wishing they were back there, saying, oh, at least we had pots of flesh and meat and bread, envying what they had when they were slaves.

In a minute, God is going to give them his own meat and bread in response to this. God takes this complaint very personally, and rightly so.

It's against God. And the vindictiveness, telling Moses, accusing Moses of saying, you've brought us out here to kill us with hunger. It's a real insult to God to say that we had it better when we weren't redeemed.

And the Hebrew word, there's sort of a play on words here. When we sat by our flesh pots, we rested there. We had, in effect, a kind of a Sabbath in Egypt that we don't have now.

Later in the chapter, the theme of Sabbath is really going to come out. God is going to say to them, I'm the one who gives you Sabbath. You didn't have Sabbath in Egypt. You have it with, wherever I am, you have rest and peace and Sabbath.

[6 : 36] Even here in the wilderness, I'll give it to you. And that happens in the unfolding of the way the food from heaven falls down. It falls down every day, double on the sixth day and none on the seventh day.

That's our God's signature. He's a Sabbath God. You see, friends, Israel are extremely short-sighted. Just because they're currently in a time of wilderness, they're in a place of wilderness where there's not much provision, it seems.

They want to go back. Don't they know what God has planned for them? Can't they trust that God will provide for them? So one of the big themes of this chapter is who provides?

Who gives rest? And so toward the end of the chapter, I read to you from verse 28. It wasn't in our reading, but you hear God's kind of pride in the way.

He's proud of how he provides. He says, How long will you refuse to keep my commandments and instructions? See, the Lord has given you the Sabbath. See, therefore on the sixth day he gives you food for two days.

- [7 : 43] Each of you stay where you are. Do not leave your place on the seventh day. So the people rested on the seventh day. God owns the fact that he provides and he provides carefully and well and miraculously in the quail and the manna.
- He provides them every day and then he provides them enough on the sixth day to have a rest day. God says to them, You did not have Sabbath in Egypt.
- I am the one who gives you rest. I am the one who provides for you. What I think is happening in this whole chapter, friends, is something very real and very real today and that is that the human heart is incredibly complex and incredibly complicated to the point of our hearts are good at twisting reality and distorting the goodness of God.
- Our hearts are skilled at twisting reality and distorting the goodness of God. So much so that Israel distort their view of God's goodness such that they wish they were back in Egypt.
- It's a terrible thing when the redeemed envy what the unredeemed have. It's a terrible thing to be freed from the burdens of idolatry and then want to go back.
- [9 : 04] Friends, we must not envy what the world has. We must not envy the possessions that the world has. Many people have worshipped wealth creation and that is coming back to bite and hurt thousands.
- Many people have sacrificed relationships, marriages, families for the God of wealth creation and now it's coming tumbling down. If wealth creation was your hope, your God, your passion, well, some God that turned out to be turned out to be a hopeless God.
- Friends, who are we? We are people who in the name of Jesus are builders of a heavenly treasure that can never spoil or fade or rust.
- We are workers in a kingdom that is eternal, that lasts forever, that doesn't sort of go up and down and crash.
- We are investing in something that is an eternal kingdom, an unshakable kingdom. We are members of a cause, a movement, toward which the gates of hell cannot prevail, though they try.
- [10 : 15] we have a great saviour in the Lord Jesus Christ. We have a great God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Don't let the complexities of your heart twist your interpretation of your situation such that you doubt the goodness of God toward you.
- Don't let your heart let you envy what the wicked have and distort the goodness of God. God. Well, how will God respond to the complaint?
- He takes it very, very personally. He takes it as an insult and he responds in this way in verse 4. The Lord said to Moses, I'm going to rain bread from heaven for you and each day the people shall go out and gather enough for that day.
- In that way, I will test them whether they will follow my instructions or not. So God is going to provide for his people. He's not going to let them die of starvation in the desert.
- He's going to provide for them miraculously but it's going to come with a test. The test is going to be to see whether they truly trust him or not or whether they want to continue in kind of self-reliance and distorting God's goodness and envying what they had in Egypt.
- [11 : 33] And there's sort of two parts of the test. I think one is will they obey God day by day and just enjoy that day's food and not try and stockpile it. And the other test is especially on the sixth day they are meant to stockpile it on that one day and then not work on the seventh day.
- This is what he says in our verse 5. On the sixth day when they prepare what they bring in it will be twice as much as they gather on the other days. So that's the test.

So what will happen? Well first God brings a rebuke via Moses. So Moses and Aaron said to all the Israelites in the evening you shall know it was the Lord who brought you out of the land of Egypt and in the morning you shall see the glory of the Lord because he has heard your complaining against the Lord.

Moses makes it crystal clear that it's not an issue within the body it's an issue that they have with God as a people. For what are we that you complain against us?

And Moses said when the Lord gives you meat in the evening and you're full of bread in the morning because the Lord has heard your complaining that you utter against him what are we? Your complaining is not against us but against the Lord.

[12 : 46] So God is going to come and even the feeding itself is going to be a kind of rebuke because the food will be so good and so miraculous that they couldn't not eat it and concede that they were wrong to complain against God.

What God is going to teach them is that he rescues he protects he feeds he wants their full dependence day by day. He wants them to learn and remember that Egypt enslaved them Egypt hurt them Egypt didn't feed them He wants them to learn for the future that idols enslave them idols hurt them idols don't help them idols don't feed them He wants them and us to learn that false hopes enslave us false hopes hurt us false hopes don't feed us So who will Israel trust?

Will they repent of complaining when God appears to them and feeds them? Verse 9 and 10 Moses said to Aaron say to the whole congregation of the Israelites draw near to the Lord for he has heard your complaining and draw near to the Lord means not what we mean we would say draw near to the Lord means have a prayer time but actually draw near to the Lord here means go to the cloud and bring your complaint because God is coming in his cloud of presence and as Aaron spoke to the congregation of the Israelites they looked toward the wilderness and here comes God the glory of the Lord appeared in the cloud and the Lord spoke to Moses and said I have heard the complaining of the Israelites so say to them at twilight you shall eat meat in the morning you shall have your fill of bread and then you shall know that I am the Lord your God then you shall know that it was wrong to not trust me then you know it was wrong to not trust that I would provide for you you know it was wrong to complain against me they are given a demonstration of the presence of

God and it's funny that they are silent here they don't it seems they don't bring any complaint to the cloud to God's presence and God gives them this opportunity to repent you think wouldn't you that when the cloud came and they heard that voice or Moses relayed God's words they would immediately say we're sorry God we're so sorry we look forward to what you'll give us God feed us give us rest give us Sabbath but they don't say that do they and then well in the evening and morning God provides he sends his food of rebuke in the evening quails came up and covered the camp in the morning there was a layer of dew around the camp when the layer of dew lifted on the surface of the wilderness there was a fine flaky substance as fine as the frost on the ground God has provided a miracle he's provided food now Israel should say

God is good the Lord has provided as he promised we're sorry for complaining against the Lord we should not have distorted his character in our heart we repent it's what they should have said but what do they say listen to how stupid they sound verse 15 when the Israelites saw it they said to one another what is it what is it for they did not know what it was what is it that that's that's why it's called manna because of their stupid question manna is the Hebrew word for what is it they should know what it is God told them what he would do how can they act like they don't know what's going on Moses said to them and here's a rebuke this is this is the bread that the Lord has given you to eat this is what he told you he would give you what is it and Moses brings the instructions about how to how to receive his gift gather as much of it as each of you needs an omer to a person according to the number of persons all providing for those in their own tents so sort of house by house will be provided for exactly the right amount they need to eat the Israelites did so some gathering more some less but when they measured it with an omer those who had gathered much had nothing over and those who had gathered little had no shortage they gathered as much as each of them needed you see God provides exactly what they need God knows their needs and he cares for them and he gives them as much as they need you know it's as if the measuring it's as if it's to set them up so they can't grumble in the future and forget and say oh we really didn't get enough that day that week there were some days we didn't have enough to eat you know

[17 : 52] Moses say well you you had an omer to eat God gave you enough every day God provided for you it's on the record you had an omer to eat per household and Moses said to them let no one leave any of it over until morning that is you are going to learn to depend on God day by day by day morning by morning by morning you're going to learn to give up the independence and to trust him and his goodness day by day so don't stockpile it but trusting God but of course have they learned their lesson no they did not listen to Moses that is God some left part of it until morning and it bred worms and became foul and Moses was angry with them morning by morning they gathered it as much as each needed but when the sun grew hot it melted so instead of enjoying God's provision they try and stockpile it so they don't have to depend on God on the next day and if you go on to read the rest of the chapter 16 on the one day they are allowed to stockpile it which is the sixth day they don't keep enough and they go and try and work for it and find it on the seventh day and God says why are you working on the Sabbath so whatever the day they disobey God and don't trust him friends what are we learning about God what is Israel learning about God

Israel should have learned that God is the all powerful God to redeem the all powerful God to rescue and here they should learn God is the all powerful God to provide he's the all powerful God to care for his people day by day he's a good God the great puzzle or question that I ask from this chapter is how could these people forget you ever wonder that how could they forget the plagues how could they forget their rescue out of Egypt how could they want to go back how could they not trust that God would provide for them given that he parted the waters of the Red Sea he can clearly do whatever he wants with his creation how could they not think that God would provide what would you have done if you were there would you have been counted among well it was everyone who grumbled actually it was the whole assembly the whole congregation would you have done the same friends the human heart has a profound ability to distort the goodness of God and every one of us has one of those hearts we are skilled at twisting reality and distorting the goodness and trustworthiness of

God we constantly consistently turn to other means and hope in them instead of God when we get the chance the Bible elsewhere reflects on this incident in the book of numbers in Psalm 95 Psalm 78 in Stephen's speech in Acts 7 and every time the reflection is God's people are hard of heart and God is good and God provides every time it makes the same conclusion about the distorting power of the human heart this is in fact friends the distorting power of sin what sin does is it makes you short sighted sin makes you myopic toward the goodness of God and his track record of provision Israel quickly forget what God has done for them and we similarly are myopic we quickly forget what

God has done for us how he has blessed us over past years we quickly forget what he has done for us in the cross of Christ in the salvation that was wrought on that cross painfully we quickly forget and lose our first love for the Lord we quickly forget and grumble and lose the joy of the forgiveness of our sins friends most Christians today are just like this I am like this you are like this we we become myopic and we we become pragmatic toward our Christian life instead of trusting God for a long time we seek what gets quick results today this is the myopic nature of our sinful hearts so someone will say oh Wayne I tried to be a more overt Christian in my workplace but I got insulted so now I'm laying low again I've gone undercover they say oh Wayne I tried prayer but prayer doesn't work I tried praying but my loved one wasn't healed so I decided just prayers not worth it in my day to day life God doesn't care someone will say I tried preaching the gospel as it's described in the Bible as described in the New

Testament but it didn't feel powerful so next time I'll change the message to impress more people will say you know we're so myopic they'll say I tried giving money generously toward the kingdom of God but God didn't bless me with more financial security so I gave up when things got tight do you see how myopic we are someone will say I tried praying and praying and praying for something to happen for the promotion at work but God didn't provide it so I just schemed and and worked my way up the the politics at work to get that job someone will say I tried waiting for a Christian husband or wife but you know God didn't do it quick enough so I just picked up a non-Christian many people said you know this this testimony of they become a Christian and life gets harder they become a Christian and lose their job or they become a Christian and bad things happen to them and unfortunately you know many give up at that point and give up going to church and being a Christian because sin makes them myopic short sighted you know sin makes us pragmatic as parents we fail in this you know we we say you know I tried parenting according to the

[24 : 15] Bible according to the book of Proverbs but I didn't see immediate results so I gave up or some will say I tried marriage according to the Bible for five minutes and I tried Ephesians 5 I tried laying down my life as head of head of the marriage as a husband but didn't work so I just gave it up put on the shelf people of God will say we tried following God out of Egypt but we didn't have any food so we asked to go back the spirit of short-sightedness is alive and well today we are a people of myopic pragmatists we quickly distort the goodness of God and don't trust him through hard times we quickly envy the wicked and what the what the world has friends in short despite the blessings of God to us in Christ we are insensitive indifferent and disobedient to our good God

I mean ultimately in light of Jesus Christ in him we have every spiritual blessing Romans 8 says if God has given us his one and only son will he not give us all things in light of in light of Christ our lack of trust in God's goodness is an insult to him just as it was in the wilderness it is a rebellion to him against him friends the irony is God calls us to live day by day God actually calls us to live for the day in a sort of short-sighted way but you cannot live trusting God for the day if you forget about the his blessing of the past and his promises given in Jesus you cannot live day by day under God's provision if you are obsessed with worry about the future Jesus said strive first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness that's a command strive first for the kingdom and his righteousness and it comes with this wonderful promise of grace and all the things we worry about will be given to you as well so a command and a promise strive first for the kingdom and the promises all these things will be given to you as well we as a church are called to be trusting God in in new ways taking new risks for him in in deeper ways striving together in prayer for the kingdom of Jesus Christ the test of our work as a church will not come in three weeks at the AGM you cannot test really our church ultimately by what's in our AGM reports as important as they may be the test of our work as a church will come on the day of judgment when Jesus returns it will come in the future in the meantime we are called to be faithful and trust God's words and to follow God's words and to obey God's words so friends put your dependence in God believe in his word in times of suffering and testing and trial don't doubt the goodness of God to provide don't give up serving him be a morning by morning depender on fresh provision from God amen puntoen to always for thereof be a living in service both any time everyone

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