

Discontent and Dissatisfied

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[0 : 00] In Hebrews chapter 10, believers are warned that it is a fearful thing, or they're warned about deliberately continuing to sin and going back to their old life after experiencing God's truth.

And the only thing which is really left for us if we do that is to expect God's judgment. And in very strong language he says, How much more severely do you think a person deserves to be punished who has trampled the Son of God underfoot, who has treated as an unholy thing the blood of the covenant that made him holy, and who has insulted the spirit of grace?

And he concludes chapter 10 of Hebrews by saying, It is a dreadful thing to fall into the hands of the living God. To deliberately reject the grace of God is to put yourself in a place where there is nothing else but to expect judgment.

God is no fool. He knows our hearts. He knows the deep attitudes that we have towards him and towards his purposes. We have been shown immense grace in Christ.

He has powerfully overcome our sin. He has graciously brought us to faith. He has saved us. And God has done all that is required to make us safe from his judgment.

[1 : 23] So one of the messages of the Bible is very clear. If you reject salvation in Christ, you must expect his judgment. And in the words of Hebrews, It is a dreadful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.

When you come to Numbers chapter 11, you read about trouble for the first time. And God is very angry. The first 10 chapters flow really smoothly.

Israel's life is built around God. His presence is in their midst physically, in the center of their camp. God is with them. Life revolves around the Lord.

It revolves around his purposes. The nation moved when the pillar of cloud moved. The nation camped when the pillar of cloud stopped. Their desert journey was a journey which was led by God. And last week, if you were here, you would have seen that his presence was with them. He led them. He protected them. The Israelites were actually set free from having to run their own lives and figure out their careers.

[2 : 33] Their lives, present and future, were caught up in the life of God and of his people. Life was very straightforward. But in Numbers 11, the problems begin.

And the people of God begin to learn that it is a dreadful thing to fall into the hands of the living God. And there's three complaints.

And two of these complaints come from the people and one of the complaints comes from Moses himself. So verses 1 and 2, if you're following with me, Numbers 11, where Leslie's just read to us from.

The people complained about their hardships in the hearing of the Lord. And when he heard them, his anger was aroused. And then fire from the Lord burned among them and consumed some of the outskirts of the camp.

And when the people cried out to Moses, he prayed to the Lord and the fire died down. So they're having a whinge. They've just gone the first three days of their 40-year journey.

[3 : 40] And they're already complaining about it. We're not told the details. We know that they haven't got homes. They're living in tents.

They have to walk a lot. They eat the same food all the time. It's almost like, you know, you take the kids on holidays to Queensland. And they're already asking, how much longer?

Is there anything else to eat? Haven't you got something else except tiny teddies? I don't like tiny teddies. And it's all happened before you've crossed the Hawkesbury River. Very human.

It happens with adults as well. I've been in small groups. Not in this church, of course. People top one another with stories of difficulty.

So the first dad in his small group, being Father's Day, because we couldn't pick on mums, you wouldn't believe what last night was like.

[4 : 46] Up for two hours with a crying baby. Second dad, he tops that. Three hours and a couple of changes of wet bedding and then off to work with the insufferable boss.

So we're really good at whinging and complaining and it gets us going and we relate to one another through it. But the problem is in verse 1, it says, The Lord heard and his anger was aroused.

And do you know why? Because in the end, they are complaining about the circumstances that he is leading them through. And their perspectives skewed and as they enjoy their little grumble, God gets very angry.

And in three days, they've had 400 years of suffering erased from their memory as though it never happened. And discontent and dissatisfaction reign supreme.

And God's judgment flares. Fire from the Lord burned among them and consumed some of the outskirts of the camp. And again, not a lot of detail, But fire on the outskirts of a tense city with a million people is a threat to the whole camp.

[6 : 15] They thought their problems were bad. They now know that God's judgment is even worse. And there's a really interesting response to God's judgment.

Verse 2, People speak to Moses. Moses speaks to the Lord.

The judgment passes. And you see this pattern. The pattern is the people complain. They sinned. God judged. Moses intercedes.

God saves. God saves. And so the people are saved from God's judgment by the intercessor that God appoints. And you see something similar throughout the Bible, But especially perhaps in the book of Judges.

The people forget God. They sin. God sends an enemy who oppresses them for a time. And when the people have suffered enough, God sends a judge to rescue them and to make them safe. When believers sin, When people like us sin, Sometimes we have to experience a level of pain before we humble ourselves And ask for our Heavenly Father's mercy.

[7 : 30] We try to tough it out. We persevere in disobedience before yielding to the Lord And doing what he invites us to do, Like if we confess our sins.

God is faithful. And God is just. And he will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness. Or Hebrews chapter 8, Which reminds us that we do have such a high priest Who sat down at the right hand of the throne of the majesty in heaven.

The one that we pray to. The one who intercedes for our sins in heaven. Is Jesus himself. And so I think when you look at this first grumble and how God deals with it, It's more like parental discipline. He's a father. He brings punishment which doesn't harm their persons. But it does frighten them back to repentance and faith.

The second complaint is much more serious and it's about food. If you can believe it. If only we had meat to eat. Verse 5.

[8 : 48] We remember the fish that we ate in Egypt. No cost. And also the cucumbers, the melons, the leeks, the onions, the garlic. Now we've lost our appetite and we never see anything but this manna.

They've been watching MasterChef on the Arabian Peninsula. We're sick of this manna. We want meat. We want meat. And it's a grumble against God's miraculous provision of manna.

And worse, this is the worst part. They remember Egypt. Their hearts are turned to Egypt and not to God. They're focused on what they haven't got rather than grateful for what they do have.

And it's a really skewed remembrance. We had great food and it didn't cost us anything, they say. It's almost like, you know, you're in the middle of an election campaign where a whole lot of facts are suddenly erased from collective memory.

They were slaves for 400 years. They were terribly oppressed. They were crying out for deliverance. And verse 10. Just awful.

[10 : 08] This grumble has spread. Every family is wailing. And God this time, not just is his anger aroused, he is hot with anger.

And Moses is troubled. He's discouraged. He's leading a nation where everybody's attention's on their stomach and what they're not getting for dinner.

They are totally discontent. And Moses is standing there and he's feeling the pressure as though this problem is his to fix and it's not. And God fixes it with this ironic judgment.

You want meat? I'll give you meat. Verse 19. You will eat it not just for one day or two days or five or ten or twenty, 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?

They're hankering back into their old life with all its agonies and distortions. We do that.

[11 : 25] God brings us to new life in Christ and we look back and we see the fun that everybody else seems to be having and we make a grab for it. I remember the drug addict on the northern beaches wonderfully converted to Christ and came into our church and into our small group.

And he had a background in using women and it was quite thrilling to see the changes God was working in his life until he began using women again in our church.

He loved Egypt too much and he turned his back on the grace and mercy that he had come to know in Christ.

And as far as I know, he has never come back. It is a dreadful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.

You jump to verse 32. All that day and night and all the next day the people went out and gathered quail. No one gathered less than ten homers.

[12 : 35] That's donkey loads. And they spread them out all around the camp. But while the meat was still between their teeth and before it could be consumed, the anger of the Lord burned against the people and he struck them with a severe plague.

And therefore the place was named Kibroth Hatava. Leslie did that much better than me. Because they buried the people who had craved other food.

This time people die for their sin. They reject the Lord and they experience his judgment. It is a dreadful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.

Third complaint from Moses. And most of the passage is about God's response to it. Verse 11, he asks the Lord, Why have you brought this trouble on your servant?

What have I done to displease you that you put the burden of all these people on me? Did I conceive all these people? Did I give them birth?

[13 : 49] Why do you tell me to carry them in my arms as a nurse carries an infant to the land that you promised on oath to our forefathers? Where can I get meat for all these people? They keep wailing to me, Give us meat to eat.

I can't carry all these people by myself. The burden is too heavy for me. If this is how you're going to treat me, put me to death right now. If I have found favour in your eyes, do not let me face my own ruin.

Let me die. It's pathetic. I'm not saying I would have done any better, but it's pathetic. He has a sort of a meltdown or even burnout.

Verse 11, he is right to say that God has brought the trouble on him. God has called him, he's appointed him to lead, and leadership does mean bearing the sinful responses of people who think they know better.

And you get a huge insight into what it's like to be in Moses' shoes when he says, in verse 11, what have I done to displease you that you put the burden of these people on me?

[15 : 13] He's very quick to presume that his difficulties are some sort of divine chastisement or punishment, like his heavenly father is dishing out on him in some way.

It's like in John 9, when the Pharisees asked Jesus about the man who had been born blind and their presumption, you know, who sinned? This man or his parents that he was born blind?

And in John 9, Jesus shows that it's a completely wrong assumption. It's got nothing to do with their weakness or sin.

His blindness is part of the purpose of God that he will be glorified. It is always a very cruel thing and a wrong thing to be quick to link poverty or sickness or difficulties in families to sin.

You see, it's in how we respond to difficulty that we can glorify Christ. Glad we've got the Fitzroys with us this morning because the Fitzroys family has been on an exceedingly difficult journey the last few months.

[16 : 33] And watching them respond in faith in very testing circumstances is an enormous encouragement to see their God-given joy even as they grapple with difficulty that is immense as they journey in faith.

We saw last week that God is in the midst of his people. God is with his people. It's why we can be confident with Romans 8 that in every circumstance God is working his purposes out for good in the lives of his people.

Moses feels like it is all too hard. The whole nation is bleeding. He's feeling the pressure. The pressure is almost unbearable unbearable and the future seems very dim.

I ran ahead of God on Thursday. I was in a low hole wondering why I had ever said yes to the trip to South Africa in five weeks time with all the problems that have arisen.

And last week God encouraged me with perfect timing and I was on top of the world feeling like he's in control. and this week it was quiet and I didn't hear anything and I went low and I began to pray for God's timing and God's working things out and I rang Darian in South Africa and I said I'm feeling low what's happening and he was a great comfort and he told me lots of good things that are happening in the background.

[18:21] But I was disappointed in myself. I wished I had waited patiently a little longer. I put it in God's hands in the morning and I was taking it back into my own hands in the afternoon.

There is joy in faith. There is great joy and peace to be found in trusting God and being patient in difficulty. It is hugely reassuring to later see that God is in control.

Moses is wrong to think that God is punishing him and you see that by the way that God treats him over the other part of this complaint.

It's a two-fold complaint. What have I done? Verse 11. What have I done to displease you that you have put the burden of all these people on me?

Second part. You have put the burden of all these people on me. Did I conceive them? Where can I get meat?

[19:34] I can't carry this burden by myself. Again, it's echoes of the New Testament. Jesus feeding the 5,000. He turned to his disciples. 5,000 people out there and not a McDonald's in sight and he turns to his disciples and said, you guys give them something to eat.

And their response is incredulous. Where can we get food for all these people? They express their own limitation. They can't do it and Moses can't do it either and God knows that he can't do it.

But Moses can't imagine how God could do such a thing. Here I am, I'm among 600,000 men on foot and you say I will give them meat to eat for a whole month.

Verse 22, would they have enough if flocks and herds were slaughtered for them? Would they have enough if all the fish in the sea were caught for them? And verse 23, the Lord answered Moses, is the Lord's arm too short?

You will see now whether or not what I say will come true for you. This is a great statement question. Is the Lord's arm too short?

[20:47] Ever felt like you're standing in an impossible situation with no way out? Huge problems surrounding you every way you look? thinking God is asking you to do something which is beyond your means or your capacity and God speaks very gently to Moses and says is the Lord's arm too short?

See Moses is learning about himself, what God expects of him. He's not the saviour, God is. There are limits to his ability to lead God's people.

Moses has an incredibly important role. He speaks to the people on behalf of God and he also speaks to God on behalf of the people but he isn't God.

Only God can do what God will do and God makes provision for Moses in a very practical way.

Verse 16, the Lord said to Moses, bring me 70 of Israel's leaders who are known to you as leaders and officials among the people.

Have them come to the tent of meeting that they may stand there with you and I will come down and speak with you there and I will take the spirit that is on you and put the spirit on them and they will help you to carry the burden of the people so that you will not have to carry it alone.

[22:14] And then in verse 25, he took of the spirit that was on him and put the spirit on the 70 elders and when the spirit rested on them they prophesied but they did not do it again.

See God raises up people to help him, men with God's spirit chosen by God. Huge parallels to the early chapters of Acts of the Apostles in the New Testament when Christ was building his church. In Acts chapter 2, the spirit of God poured out on all believers at Pentecost and they prophesied. They preached the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ in the languages of the nations who were present.

In Acts chapter 6, the believers appointed seven men from among you who are known to be full of the spirit and of wisdom. The load of ministry leadership was authenticated by God. And it was expanded and it was shared. God was very kind to Moses. He provided others to help him. So the work of ministry is shared by a body of believers united in submission to God and empowered by God.

[23 : 36] It's a brilliant picture of what a well-functioning growing church might look like. For Moses and for us it is quite a wonderful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.

So Numbers 11 is an amazing chapter. There's a lot more that could be said and especially about the operation of the spirit in this chapter and you can tackle me at morning tea if you want to go there. But there are three complaints and God deals with them in three ways.

He's angry with their grumbling. He disciplines them as children. He leads them back in repentance and faith when they cry out to Moses who intercedes on their behalf.

God is exceedingly angry when they turn their backs on God's salvation. They turn their backs on the one way of salvation that God gives them and they experience judgment and death.

And when Moses complains he is wrong to think that God is punishing him. And he was also wrong to think that the burden of ministry was his to bear alone.

[24 : 57] God provided tenderly for him. So friends there are safe ways and there are unsafe ways to fall into the hands of the living God.

Safe ways see us disciplined, corrected, cared for as children by a loving heavenly father. Unsafe ways lead to judgment and death at the hands of the sovereign king over all creation.

Life versus death. death. Jesus says in John 3 36 whoever believes in the son has eternal life.

But whoever rejects the son will not see life for God's wrath remains on him. Amen.