

To God Alone Be The Glory

A song writer shaped Israel's complaints from our sermon text into this song. "So you wanna go back to Egypt where its warm and secure. Are you sorry you bought the one-way ticket when you thought you were sure? You wanted to live in the Land of Promise, but now it's getting so hard. Are you sorry you're out here in the desert instead of your own backyard?"

"Eating leeks and onions by the Nile. Ooh what breath! But dining out in style. Ooh! My life is on the skids. Give me the pyramids!"

"Well, there's nothin' do to but travel, and we sure travel a lot, 'cause it's hard to keep your feet from moving when the sand gets so hot. And in the morning it's manna hot-cakes. We snack on manna all day. And they sure had a winner last night for dinner—flaming manna soufflé.

"Well we once complained for something new to munch. The ground opened up and had some of us for lunch. Ooh! Such fire and smoke. Can't God even take a joke?" [That's how people try to cover themselves when they are called to task for something they said wrong: "I was only joking! Lighten up, will ya?"]

Have you had a good whine lately? I don't mean a merlot, burgundy, blush, or blanc. I mean the whining that comes from dissatisfaction with something in your life. Is there anyone in the world who doesn't complain? If the air conditioning

doesn't come on soon enough in the car, we're ready to shed tears of unfairness over it. If the air conditioning in church is too cold, we want to get a message to the ushers: "Please adjust the thermostat!" And that's just air conditioning! What about spending habits? "You spend too much." "Well, you save too much." Then there's: "Why can't things in life be the way I want them?" And: "Mommy, why does it take so long to grow up?" Or: "Why is youth wasted on the young?"

It isn't necessarily complaining to point out a problem, whether to the Lord in our prayers or to each other. But we cross the line into grumbling and complaining when we find fault, lay blame, or make grief for those around us.

There was grumbling in the tents of Israel as God's people marched from slavery in Egypt to freedom in the desert. They couldn't keep the big picture in mind. But the Lord knew what he was doing, as he always does. He knew the Israelites had brought only so much food. He knew they'd be running out of water along the way. But he wanted to teach them a very important lesson—one which you and I may not have learned yet if we still complain. So let's pay close attention as we join the Israelites on their journey to Mt Sinai.

They ran out of water at a place called Marah. Well actually there was plenty of water at Marah, but it was so bitter they couldn't stand to drink it. Thus the name "Marah," which is Hebrew for "bitterness."

The people complained about the bitter water, of course. So the Lord showed Moses a piece of wood to put into the water. “Plop” went the wood, and sweet ran the water. Oh, there’s the lesson. Did you catch it? No? Well, it’ll come around again real soon. Listen for it.

They got back on the road again. Before a single person died of thirst, the Lord brought them to Elim, a beautiful oasis having 12 springs to supply them with water. Then it was back on the road again in the arid desert. Provisions from Egypt ran out—it had been a month since they left. Rocks may look like loaves of bread when you’re hungry, but they won’t feed an Israelite, much less a million and a half of them. ²*In the desert the whole community grumbled against Moses and Aaron.* ³*The Israelites said to them, “If only we had died by the LORD’s hand in Egypt!”* “Ssshhh! Are you crazy? Don’t you know the Lord can give you anything you ask for? Do you have a death wish?!”

But instead of death, the good and gracious Lord provided life to his people. ⁴*The LORD said to Moses, “I will rain down bread from heaven for you.”* But the bread would come with a test attached: *“The 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.”* ⁵*On the sixth day [Friday] they are to prepare...twice as much as they gather on the other days.”* Oh, there’s the lesson again. Did you catch it this time? Israel didn’t. They couldn’t hear God’s Word over the growling of their

stomachs—couldn’t or wouldn’t. We do the same thing when we take the testimony of our feelings over the testimony of God’s promises. “Look how bad things are; I’ve gotta do something.” “Okay, do something. But slow down long enough to read a Bible passage about God’s goodness and love first. And then pray for God’s blessing. Then when you act, don’t cross the line between right and wrong. Don’t rationalize a short cut to happiness. God will work out a solution if you’ll just wait patiently for him and do the things you’re supposed to do while you wait.”

But Israel wasn’t willing to wait. So Moses told them: ⁷*The LORD...has heard your grumbling against him.* ⁸*You are not grumbling against us, but against the LORD.* When we complain, are we like the Israelites? Are we dissatisfied with the way the Lord is taking care of us? Do our complaints boil down to grumbling against the Lord or against those whom he has placed over us? Not wise. Step back. Look at the big picture. What do you see?

¹⁰*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.* If I had been an Israelite, I might have thought I’d uttered my last complaint ever. Here comes the Lord! He ought to bring punishment. But that’s not our gracious God’s way. And I, for one, am mighty glad about it. Aren’t you? When the glory of the Lord appears in the Old Testament, the Lord is showing his burning desire to carry out his promises, especially the one about sending

a Messiah to take away all sin.

Isn't it just amazing that God would save us? We've blamed God for our problems rather than owning all that we've done wrong. We've chucked his Word aside because we wanted something else more. But our faithful Savior keeps calling us back to himself again and again.

Do we learn not to fly in the face of God? Well, not really. We just get more sophisticated. If we don't like how God is running our life, we ignore the problem instead of taking care of our responsibilities. "Maybe the problem will just go away." But it doesn't. And because we don't take care of our part of the problem, things get even worse. Soon it's so overwhelming, we think we need a quick fix. Not all, but some addictions, some depressions, some bankruptcies, some divorces, some of our other troubles come as a result of us trying to replace God or to push God aside for the way he's running things.

Even if our life is going great, we daily face a test similar to the one God gave Israel with the manna. He gives us blessings like food and body and health and sex inside marriage and sight and friends and businesses, and he attaches certain responsibilities to each blessing to see if we will remember that the Giver is more important than the gift, that 'how we use his gifts' is just as important as having them. There's the lesson again! Man

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¹³*In the morning there was a layer of dew around the camp.* ¹⁴*When the dew was gone, thin flakes like frost on the ground appeared on the desert floor.* ¹⁵*When the Israelites saw it, they said to each other, "What is it?"* Want to learn some Hebrew? "Mah nu?" Roughly translated it means: "What's this stuff?" *Moses said to them, "It is the bread the LORD has given you to eat."* Since they didn't have a word for it, they called it "mah na," the "what's-it-stuff." We say "manna."

Israel ate manna seven days a week for 40 years. Every morning they could look out the windows of their tents and see a miracle of God's providence. What did God want them to learn? ¹²*In the morning you will be filled with bread. Then you will know that I am the LORD your God.* When they looked out the window at another day's worth of blessing, it wasn't the bread the Lord wanted his people to see. It was his love. He had promised to sustain them. The manna was only the fulfillment of the promise. "Only the fulfillment?!" Yes, only. The promise was more important than the fulfillment. The promise that God would provide was more important than the manna he provided. Why? Because bread can sustain only your body. But the promises of the Lord—they sustain your soul and your faith. Man

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But the people missed the point. They filled up their bellies with manna, and that was the end of it for them. It's just like when we turn on the air conditioning in our cars and we cool down, and that's the end of it. We get a little problem solved in a relationship at home or at school or at work, and that's the end of it. Life gets better after an illness or an injury or a setback, and that's the end of it. People of God, take three steps back so you can better see the big picture. The manna was only a vehicle to keep the people alive until they could reach the promised land of Canaan, and the land of Canaan was only a vehicle to sustain the people for 14 centuries until the Savior Jesus could be born. The manna wasn't about just their bellies. Their eternal salvation was tied to this bread from heaven. The bread wasn't the point because it meant temporary life. Moses and the other Israelites would eat the manna and then die long before the promise of a Savior would be fulfilled. But the promise would be fulfilled and by it the people would have eternal life. So the promise was more important than the manna. God's love for you is more important than the temporary air conditioning he provides, or the temporary problems he solves, or the temporary healing he grants. Man Does not Live by temporary Bread Alone but by Every eternal Word that Comes from the Mouth of God.

What if Jesus delays his second return for another hundred years? What then will become of all the earthly things we ever complained about? On the other hand, what will become of all the devotions or the chapters of the Bible we currently read at home? What will become of the church services we attend, and the Baptism and the Lord's Supper we receive? The Holy Spirit will work through them to keep us in faith and bring us safely into God's eternal home along with everyone else who believes in Jesus as their Savior from sin. What about the joy and gratitude and thanksgiving and praise we express to our Lord daily because of his rich generosity? They become our dress-rehearsals for the eternal praises we will utter around God's throne. Man Does not Live by Bread Alone but by Every Word that Comes from the Mouth of God.

When we compare ourselves to rebellious Israel, we don't look any more deserving of God's mercies than they. But the glory of the Lord appeared in our sermon text to reassure us: God was determined to carry out his plan of salvation. He would bring his people into the promised land so that his Son could be born from them. His Son would die to pay the penalty for all sin and then rise again to show his victory over Satan. This is why we can be so certain eternal life is ours through faith in Jesus. God wants this truth in the front of our minds whenever we enjoy any blessing of this temporary life: Man Does

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