

Grumbling at God

Exodus 15:22-16:36 Pastor Bland Mason 5.7.2017

BIG Idea: God wants us to learn to look to him as our provider.

INTRODUCTION

- What would it be like for tomorrow morning to get up and to know you could not drink a drop of water in the city of Boston? It actually happened in Flint, Michigan. It was not safe to drink the city water. EVERYONE had to use bottled water. The water supply had unsafe levels of lead and were contaminated so badly that an entire overhaul of the system needed to happen. It was a terrible situation.
- Now imagine that same situation but you aren't in a city in the U.S. but in a desert in the Arabian peninsula. This was the situation in our text today except it wasn't just some random problems with infrastructure but God himself who led his people 3 days into the desert wilderness. Far from God being cruel or somehow not planning well, this trip was meant to be a learning experience for his people. The wilderness was a kind of field trip where God's people would be tested and learn to trust God.
- Charles Spurgeon is known as the Prince of Preachers and is one of the greatest in church history. He pastored in London a little over 100 years ago. He had a gift for using metaphors or turning a phrase. He called the wilderness experience "the Oxford and Cambridge for God's students."
- As a people the church today is like the Israelites. We are sojourners, standing between deliverance and entering into our eternal promised land. We struggle with the pull of the world we live in and God is seeking to root out that evil. We also struggle to make sense of our current situations and in trusting God when it seems like everything is falling apart.
- In the midst of this tension between slavery and the promised land, after deliverance and before reaching our final home, God is forming a people by calling them to exercise daily faith. He is forming us not just individually but together, day-by-day, moment-by-moment. We are no less a people than the Israelites were. The church is a community where people walk TOGETHER with God. I know we emphasize your personal faith, your personal walk but there is massive, significant, foundational dimension to our walk that involves the community we are a part of. God is doing a million things across this church and the mistake we make is that most of those are just between us and God as individuals.
- No, God is forming us together as a people who learn to look to God as our provider. It was what he was doing among the Israelites in the wilderness and it is what he is doing in our midst today.
- Our BIG IDEA for today is: **God wants us to learn to look to him as our provider.**
- To catch you up to where our text picks up today, God had delivered the Israelites out of Egypt and through the Red Sea. Now, they are entering into the wilderness and facing their first challenges. I invite you to follow along in your bible. I'm going to read section by section to walk us through the story. Our first section will be Exodus 15:22-27
- READ – 15:22-24
Then Moses made Israel set out from the Red Sea, and they went into the wilderness of Shur. They went three days in the wilderness and found no water. When they came to Marah, they could not drink the water of Marah because it was bitter; therefore it was named Marah. And the people grumbled against Moses, saying, "What shall we drink?"
- Let's not be super judgy on the Israelites for complaining. This was a legitimate need for water. They aren't griping that their wifi is down, or the T is experiencing delays, or that Boston has somehow turned into Seattle and we will never see the sun again for more than 2 hours. They NEEDED water and the only water around was bitter.
- With one to two days of no fluids, we stop urinating altogether, have trouble swallowing, suffer from muscle spasms, and are more likely to experience nausea.

- ILL – I was in Haiti in 2015 and there was water everywhere but you couldn't drink it without getting sick. We had to constantly make plans to buy 5 gallon jugs of clean water so we could avoid getting dehydrated.
- The sin of the Israelites is NOT that they were concerned about water and it wasn't that they grumbled against their leader... it is that they doubted the God who had delivered them.
- Functional Atheism... We say we trust in God and we would say that we are following Christ but when we are tested and circumstances get really hard, we end up looking to everything BUT God to deliver us.
- READ – 15:25-28
And he cried to the Lord, and the Lord showed him a log, and he threw it into the water, and the water became sweet.
- The Israelites grumbled and complained but Moses CRIED out to God. This is an important difference. The Israelites complained. Moses cried out to God. One is based on unbelief – “God is letting us die!” and the other is based on faith – “God please provide for us!”
- God responded to the Israelites complaining with GRACE and COMPASSION. After all God had done for the Israelites you would expect him to get angry at their doubt and their grumbling but he doesn't. This is a picture of the lovingkindness of God.
- Picking back up...
There the Lord made for them a statute and a rule, and there he tested them, saying, “If you will diligently listen to the voice of the Lord your God, and do that which is right in his eyes, and give ear to his commandments and keep all his statutes, I will put none of the diseases on you that I put on the Egyptians, for I am the Lord, your healer.” Then they came to Elim, where there were twelve springs of water and seventy palm trees, and they encamped there by the water.
- When God calls us into the wilderness, it is never to punish us, but to lead us into walking closer with him. That's why he gives the commandment afterward.
- And to demonstrate the continued provision of God, he leads them to Elim, which is an oasis in the desert. A land with tons of good water and shade where they could rest and replenish.

1. God allows a lack in our lives so we will learn to trust God, our Healer.

- Sometimes God gives you more than enough, but sometimes he gives you just enough, just in time. For some of you today, God has you in the wilderness and you are feeling that weight. Your job, your family, your health, or something else is being tested and you don't know what you are going to do.
- It is not about the question we ask of God – the Psalms are full of passages where people who are suffering ask questions aimed at God. It's not the questions we ask, but the posture of our heart.
- Grumbling flows from an anxiety that rises up in our hearts and that anxiety is based on fear... fear that we are out of control. Fear that we will not be able to make things work out. Fear that something is going to fall apart or not come together.
- Fear shapes us on a deep level and God doesn't want that for us. He didn't want it for the Israelites in the wilderness, and he doesn't want it for the church of Jesus today. He wants us to learn to TRUST him.
- We see that in this first situation where they were thirsty and the only water available was bitter. But we also see it in the next instance in chapter 16.

READ 16:1-36 - look for some key words – “grumbling”

Exodus 16:1-3

They set out from Elim, and all the congregation of the people of Israel came to the wilderness of Sin, which is between Elim and Sinai, on the fifteenth day of the second month after they had departed from the land of Egypt. And the whole congregation of the people of Israel grumbled against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness, and the people of Israel said to them, “Would that we had died by the hand of the LORD in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the meat pots and ate bread to the full, for you have brought us out into this wilderness to kill this whole assembly with hunger.”

2. When we are tested, whatever we are trusting in comes out.

- In their case... they trusted in what they were familiar with. What were they familiar with? Slavery in Egypt. So they are hungry and they grumbled against Moses and Aaron and let me paraphrase what they said: “Why did you bring us out??? Didn’t we have it so good back then? SOOO much better than now.”
- When we face testing in our circumstances, often the things we trust in the most will come out and we will often idealize them. The Israelites minds went back to a place of bondage and they said it was a good place RATHER than looking to God and seeing what he was up to.
- Sometimes we do that. I’ll give you an example. I’ve seen a Christian young woman break up with a non-Christian guy that was not interested in Jesus and was not having a good influence on her. She saw that and with some help ended the relationship because she couldn’t grow in Jesus and continue to date this guy. But a few weeks later as loneliness set in and she missed his companionship she begins to rationalize: “He was a good guy. I was really happy with him. I think things were pretty good.” And she glosses over all the problems she saw in him and the fact that she knew there was no future with him.
- The Israelites were idealizing Egypt: We really miss it! It was sooo great! At this point, you would think Moses would respond with something like, “Oh, you mean the place where you were enslaved? The place where Pharaoh was murdering your little boys and oppressing you and abusing you and making you work endless hours while he lived in luxury? You mean that place???”
- Again, God doesn’t respond anything like we would and instead shows how amazing, faithful, and compassionate he really is. He does this because he’s not interested in rebuking them for their sinful grumbling or looking backward to Egypt but because he is wanting them to look to him as their provider.

Vv4-12

⁴Then the Lord said to Moses, “Behold, I am about to rain bread from heaven for you, and the people shall go out and gather a day’s portion every day, that I may test them, whether they will walk in my law or not. ⁵On the sixth day, when they prepare what they bring in, it will be twice as much as they gather daily.” ⁶So Moses and Aaron said to all the people of Israel, “At evening you shall know that it was the Lord who brought you out of the land of Egypt, ⁷and in the morning you shall see the glory of the Lord, because he has heard your grumbling against the Lord. For what are we, that you grumble against us?” ⁸And Moses said, “When the Lord gives you in the evening meat to eat and in the morning bread to the full, because the Lord has heard your grumbling that you grumble against him—what are we? Your grumbling is not against us but against the Lord.”

⁹Then Moses said to Aaron, “Say to the whole congregation of the people of Israel, ‘Come near before the Lord, for he has heard your grumbling.’” ¹⁰And as soon as Aaron spoke to the whole congregation of the people of Israel, they looked toward the wilderness, and behold, the glory of the Lord appeared in the cloud. ¹¹And the Lord said to Moses, ¹²“I have heard the grumbling of the people of Israel. Say to them, ‘At twilight you shall eat meat, and in the morning you shall be filled with bread. Then you shall know that I am the Lord your God.’”

3. God tests us to reveal his glory and character to us.

- v.6 – you shall know that I am the Lord. V.7 – you shall see the glory of the Lord. V.9 –tells the whole congregation to “come near to the Lord.” V.10 –they saw the glory of the Lord in a cloud in the distance. V.12 – God says, “Then you shall know that I am the LORD your God.”
- If you are a Christian, whatever circumstances you are facing, one thing is absolutely clear: God wants to reveal his glory and character to you. While it can happen from time to time while things are good, more often it is when the things we trust in have been stripped away and we are left looking to God. In those moments he wants you to not just know him FAR OFF as the holy God of the universe but the glory of his love and presence with you.

- ILL – Three months after we got married, Teresa and I moved to Louisville, KY for me to start my masters degree. We had no jobs and we spent ALL of our money paying for the move, the security deposit and first month’s rent. On top of that I had gone up about 3 weeks before without Teresa and had picked an apartment for us to live in for our first year of marriage. No texting pictures, no digital camera to snap a few shots to show her. All I could do was tell her what it was like. I remember the move and the first few weeks God graciously revealed his character as Teresa was able to find a job with a temp agency and I was able to get a part-time job on campus. Now, if you ask my wife in our 22 years of marriage when do you remember God being faithful while we felt powerless, this was definitely one of them.
- And we were blessed for that to happen early on in our marriage just like Israel went through this experience early in their journey with God. God was trying to reveal early on to the Israelites... “I’m a glorious God. I am the Great I AM. I am faithful. I am trustworthy. I am the Lord your provider.”
- He needed to establish that early on with his people so they would be able to follow him in what was coming. Whatever you are going through today, God is seeking to show you his glory and his character and it may be for what is coming in the future.
- This is why in the New Testament, Christians are constantly and relentlessly focusing on the cross and the resurrection. This God’s glory. This is God’s character revealed. And when you see Christians suffering in the world today, they look to Jesus to see God’s glory and character.
- If you are suffering today, look to Jesus to see God’s glory and character. This is the God who loves you. The God who will never leave you nor forsake you. The God who is with you in the midst of your circumstances.

4. The level of our trust in God is seen in our level of obedience to God.

- Pick up in v.13

vv.13-30 *In the evening quail came up and covered the camp, and in the morning dew lay around the camp. ¹⁴ And when the dew had gone up, there was on the face of the wilderness a fine, flake-like thing, fine as frost on the ground. ¹⁵ When the people of Israel saw it, they said to one another, “**What is it?**” For they did not know what it was. And Moses said to them, “It is the bread that the Lord has given you to eat. ¹⁶ This is what the Lord has commanded: ‘Gather of it, each one of you, as much as he can eat. You shall each take an omer, according to the number of the persons that each of you has in his tent.’” ¹⁷ And the people of Israel did so. They gathered, some more, some less. ¹⁸ But when they measured it with an omer, whoever gathered much had nothing left over, and whoever gathered little had no lack. Each of them gathered as much as he could eat. ¹⁹ And Moses said to them, “Let no one leave any of it over till the morning.” ²⁰ But **they did not listen to Moses**. Some left part of it till the morning, and it bred worms and stank. And Moses was angry with them. ²¹ Morning by morning they gathered it, each as much as he could eat; but when the sun grew hot, it melted.*

²² On the sixth day they gathered twice as much bread, two omers each. And when all the leaders of the congregation came and told Moses, ²³ he said to them, “This is what the Lord has commanded: ‘Tomorrow is a day of solemn rest, a holy Sabbath to the Lord; bake what you will bake and boil what you will boil, and all that is left over lay aside to be kept till the morning.’” ²⁴ So they laid it aside till the morning, as Moses commanded them, and it did not stink, and there were no worms in it. ²⁵ Moses said, “Eat it today, for today is a Sabbath to the Lord; today you will not find it in the field. ²⁶ Six days you shall gather it, but on the seventh day, which is a Sabbath, there will be none.”

²⁷ On the seventh day some of the people went out to gather, but they found none. ²⁸ And the Lord said to Moses, “How long will you refuse to keep my commandments and my laws? ²⁹ See! The Lord has given you the Sabbath; therefore on the sixth day he gives you bread for two days. Remain each of you in his place; let no one go out of his place on the seventh day.” ³⁰ So the people rested on the seventh day.

- The manna story represents yet another testing story. Because the schedule for gathering the manna seemed counterintuitive to ancient agrarians, it provided a way of testing Israel to see if they would obey not only those commandments that made perfect sense to them but also those that did not.
- The same sort of challenge exists today. If people think God demands a behavior that runs against their intuitive sense of what is right, or pleasurable, or reasonable, or just “not so bad” (for example God’s teaching on sex outside of marriage, e.g.), it is easy for them not to take a commandment seriously, which most of us don’t stop and realize is the same as not taking God seriously. This correspondence of not respecting commandments and not respecting God explains the severity of God’s reaction when his people do not do what he tells them to do (16:28).
- Steve Timmis, the Executive Director of the Acts29 church planting network once said all of the message of God’s Word can be encapsulated in two words: “Trust Me.” Everything points to a God who longs for his people to trust him and then ACT on that trust.
- God was teaching the Israelites to trust AND obey. He knew what was in their hearts after centuries of living among the pagan Egyptians. Clement of Rome, a first century convert who was likely taught about Jesus by Peter or Paul. If you look in your New Testament at Philippians 4:3 you will see a Clement referred to who very well could be him. He dies in around 100 AD but he left some writings. He wrote about our text for today and said this...
 “After this [Red Sea crossing], Moses, by the command of God, whose providence is over all, led out the people of the Hebrews into the wilderness ... that [He] might root out the evils which had clung to them by a long-continued familiarity with the customs of the Egyptians.”
- The Egyptian gods were pagan gods and the Israelites had been surrounded by them and had become conditioned to life with them. God wanted them to learn to trust and obey him so he allowed them to go through this testing.
- What if the very reason God has allowed you to be in the moment you are in is not so he can get you out of it but so you can learn to trust him in it? What he is looking for is your trust in him displayed in your obedience to him. Will you act in trust in God or will you still do things “your way” like the Israelites did.
- The level of our trust in God is seen in our level of obedience to God. Finally...

5. God wants us to look to him for our daily bread so we will walk with him in relationship.

•vv.31-36

³¹Now the house of Israel called its name manna. It was like coriander seed, white, and the taste of it was like wafers made with honey. ³²Moses said, “This is what the Lord has commanded: ‘Let an omer of it be kept throughout your generations, so that they may see the bread with which I fed you in the wilderness, when I brought you out of the land of Egypt.’ ” ³³And Moses said to Aaron, “Take a jar, and put an omer of manna in it, and place it before the Lord to be kept throughout your generations.” ³⁴As the Lord commanded Moses, so Aaron placed it before the testimony to be kept. ³⁵The people of Israel ate the manna forty years, till they came to a habitable land. They ate the manna till they came to the border of the land of Canaan. ³⁶(An omer is the tenth part of an ephah.)

- So God didn’t just provide bread, he provided Kings Hawaiian bread to his people. At least I’m pretty sure this where King’s Hawaiian fell down from heaven. God wanted them to remember this by keeping a sample of it. This was to remind them. Every morning they would get up and there was the manna. The question might come up in their mind... “will it be here tomorrow?” Yes, it will.
- God could have dropped bread once a week or once a month but he did it every single morning and ONLY enough for that morning. Why? Because God wanted his people to not just trust God but walk in a relationship with him.

- You don't have to have a relationship with someone who comes through for you only periodically but you do with someone who you look to everyday to give you food. You know your parents better than you know the server at your favorite restaurant, right? Or at least I hope you do...
- God provides daily bread and this idea of bread shows up throughout the bible...
 - Bread is mentioned in the judgment on Adam in the Garden. From that day on he would sweat to bring forth bread to eat. The world is broken because of sin.
 - In this passage, God doesn't have the Israelites work for their bread, does he? He is getting them to see he was doing something new. Sin had separated us from God so we had to work for our own bread but now God is picturing that HE will supply our bread.
 - Jesus was highlighting this when he taught his disciples to pray: "Give us this day our daily bread." Just like the manna came daily.
 - Then, an incident in Jesus life actually connects him and his ministry with this Exodus passage. In the gospels there is an account of Jesus feeding 5000 men plus women and children. They were out in the wilderness and had no food. Jesus provided bread for them. And this symbolism was NOT lost on the people. The God who had supplied manna in the wilderness was now standing in human form providing bread in the wilderness.
 - It all comes into final focus when Jesus says in the gospel of John, "I am the bread of life."

John 6:31-35

Our fathers ate the manna in the wilderness; as it is written, 'He gave them bread from heaven to eat.' Jesus then said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, it was not Moses who gave you the bread from heaven, but my Father gives you the true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is he who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world." They said to him, "Sir, give us this bread always." Jesus said to them, "I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst.
- Jesus is the ultimate manna and it is not that we simply take him once and then move on. Yes, he brings us into the family through one act of changing our hearts but from that day on, he is our daily bread, he is our guide in the wilderness of this life. This is a relationship...
- Are you looking to Jesus as your true bread? Are you looking to him daily? I can promise you that if you are a Christian, this is what God IS doing in your life right now. He is constantly teaching us to trust him.
- ILL – Remember also that it wasn't about one individual walking with God. God was forming a people and today he is still forming a people. God is forming us as a people together to walk by faith in him. We have seen this since City on a Hill started in 2010. We lose around 20% of our church every year.

Questions for Reflection and Confession...

1. What are you tempted to trust in more than God?
2. How is God trying to teach you to trust him in your life right now?
3. What steps do you need to take to trust God more in this area?

COMMUNION

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