
Heart and Soul ... A Weekly Meditation

November 1, 2015

Our Compulsion to Complain

“The whole Israelite community complained against Moses and Aaron in the desert. ‘Who are we? Your complaints aren’t against us but against the Lord.’”

Exodus 16:2, 8b (Common English Bible)

“Instead, we are God’s accomplishment, created in Christ Jesus to do good things. God planned for these good things to be the way that we live our lives.”

Ephesians 2:10 (Common English Bible)

Among my natural gifts is the compulsion to complain. I am not alone. Each church I have served has included similarly endowed people. The compulsion to complain is a very familiar tendency that appears on the stage of life. It may seem to have a relatively small role in the unfolding drama of our life but it has the capacity to derail the whole play. Complaining can empty our reserves of energy and diminish the ability to see how God may be moving and directing our lives.

Moses had something to say about complaining. Through Moses’ obedience to God, he led the people of Israel from the bondage of slavery in Egypt into the wilderness – a journey that would culminate in receiving God’s “promised land” that they would call home. But the time in the wilderness would be difficult. Difficulty resulted in complaint. They grumbled that there wasn’t enough food. They complained that there wasn’t enough water. The days were hot and the nights too cold. After Moses had heard enough he declared, “Your complaints aren’t against us but against the Lord.” That is because it is God that is calling the people forward into a different future. And sometimes our future requires the preparation of a wilderness.

Because of their complaining their promised future was at risk. Their great vision of freedom and joy was slipping away. More, their memory of slavery was not correctly remembered. They would mumble among themselves how much better it was in Egypt. Nothing was in focus – their future or their past. Now that is insight for a complainer to consider! Complain about the weather if you must. Whine about the rising cost of medical care if you need to vent. But complain about obstacles before you, difficulties and challenges that confront you and problems and sorrows that trouble your heart and Moses tells us that your complaint is against the Lord.

How does one change? Paul’s letter to the Ephesians is helpful: change your focus! Rather than dwelling on what is wrong in our world consider how God might use you to better it. We were “created in Christ Jesus to do good things.” We were created not to belittle the world with all its difficulties, we were created to better it. Take Paul’s word and make it a great experiment for your life. Each morning pledge that you will not complain. Rather, ask how I might make this a better world for others. When you are confronted with personal hurts and difficulties ask, how might I learn and grow from this; how might God be using this to prepare me for a future I cannot now see? Then review yourself at the day’s close. How did you do? Obedience to Paul’s words here in Ephesians, consistently applied each day, will have the effect of diminishing the compulsion to complain.

Doug Hood