

EXODUS, Chapter 15 12-31-17

Grumbling

Back in the Fall of 2013, as one or two of you may remember, we did a study through the early portions of the book of Exodus. I stopped at Christmas that year and never picked it back up. Until today. Today we begin a new walk through the book of Exodus, picking up where we left off in chapter 15.

Many years ago we had a neighbor who got a dog. There is no advantage to having a neighbor with a dog. A neighbor with a pool is nice. A neighbor with a dog not so nice. Well, my neighbor got a dog. I love dogs. Let me change that -- during the daytime I love dogs. But one night my neighbor's new dog started barking very close to my bedroom window, and you know what I did? I woke up. And as sometimes happens I couldn't get back to sleep because I was annoyed and the dog kept barking. But, being a nice guy, I didn't say anything to the neighbors. It was just one night but then it happened again. The second night in a row, about midnight, this dog starts yapping right outside my window and I'm up half the night. But, being the patient dog-lover that I am, I refrained from comment to the neighbors. Surely, I figured, they knew the dog was barking, they would take care of it. Night #3 comes and this time I go to bed wondering. And sure enough, a little after midnight the dog starts in again. This time I call the neighbor because now I figure we have a pattern going that needs to be addressed. Once was bad, twice was annoying, but that third time proved we needed action. Now, you understand how that works right? Look with me now at the nation of Israel, coming out of Egypt and see if you can detect a negative pattern in their behavior. Exodus 15:**22-24** *Then Moses led Israel from the Red Sea, and they went out into the wilderness of Shur; and they went three days in the wilderness and found no water. 23 When they came to Marah, they could not drink the waters of Marah, for they were bitter; therefore it was named Marah. 24 So the people grumbled at Moses, saying, "What shall we drink?"* 16:**1-3** *Then they set out from Elim, and all the congregation of the sons of Israel came to the wilderness of Sin, which is between Elim and Sinai, on the fifteenth day of the second month after their departure from the land of Egypt. 2 The whole congregation of the sons of Israel grumbled against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness. 3 The sons of Israel said to them, "Would that we had died by the Lord's hand in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the pots of meat, when we ate bread to the full; for you have brought us out into this wilderness to kill this whole assembly with hunger."* Are you beginning to see the pattern here? Try one more story 17:**1-3** *Then all the congregation of the sons of Israel*

journeyed by stages from the wilderness of Sin, according to the command of the Lord, and camped at Rephidim, and there was no water for the people to drink. 2 Therefore the people quarreled with Moses and said, "Give us water that we may drink." And Moses said to them, "Why do you quarrel with me? Why do you test the Lord?" 3 But the people thirsted there for water; and they grumbled against Moses and said, "Why, now, have you brought us up from Egypt, to kill us and our children and our livestock with thirst?" Did you find the pattern? The nation of Israel was evidently a nation of _____. They grumbled when disappointed, grumbled when hungry, grumbled when thirsty. So bad was their grumbling problem that you could nickname them the Grumblites because they had a bad case of grumblitis which is an inflammation of the grumble gland.

Maybe you suffer with the same affliction. Be careful not to treat grumbling too lightly. God didn't treat it lightly at all. He dealt harshly with his grumbling people. Speaking of the Hebrews under Moses Paul writes in I Corinthians 10:**9-10** (NIV) *We should not test Christ, as some of them did—and were killed by snakes. 10 And do not grumble, as some of them did—and were killed by the destroying angel.* Grumbling is lumped in here with idolatry and immorality and testing God. Certain Israelites went to an early grave because of their grumbling. Listen up! **11** (NIV) *These things happened to them as examples and were written down as warnings for us, on whom the culmination of the ages has come.* These Old Testament stories are given for our instruction that we would learn from the mistakes of our forefathers. Blessed are those who learn from their own mistakes, even more blessed are those who learn from the mistakes of others. So, let's examine together today the sin of grumbling, looking first at the temptation to grumbling, then the danger of grumbling and finally at the remedy for grumbling.

Philippians 2:**14-15** *Do all things without grumbling or disputing; 15 so that you will prove yourselves to be blameless and innocent, children of God above reproach in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you appear as lights in the world.* The apostle calls the race of men a "crooked and perverse generation." There are numerous things that attest to that but I'm sure you'll agree that one of the most prevalent and widespread bad habits of humans is to grumble and to complain. Young students in school complain don't they? Constant grumbling about this policy and that teacher and this exam. The #1 extra curricular activity in American schools is grumbling. It's a sport at which all excel. And if anything it is only worse on the job. If you work with people maybe you can testify that from 8-5 all over the office or the factory you hear gripe, gripe, gripe - all day, everyday and pretty much from everybody. Your place of business may be

one where seldom is heard an encouraging word and the boss is a villain all day. And then when the day is done Americans run home or run to the bar to do what? To grumble about work, about family, about the government. Baseball step aside, grumbling is our true national pastime. It is a habit that we have perfected with practice, but the talent also comes quite naturally. We come out of the womb grumbling and complaining. I once heard the story of the seven year old boy who had never spoken a word and his parents just knew he was dumb and unable to speak and then one day the boy's mother served him some brussel sprouts for supper. Well, the boy took one bite and said, "Yuck, that stuff is awful!" And his mother was astonished. She was so surprised and so pleased. She said, "OH, son your father and I thought you couldn't talk. Why haven't you said anything before now?" The kid says, "Well, up until now everything had been okay." Can you believe it? His first words a complaint. But we all come out of the womb crying and complaining, don't we? I've never met a parent yet who had to teach their child to grumble. On the other hand it is a major chore to train them not to. Probably the #1 reason for discipline in the history of our household was the sin of grumbling. Fussing. Kids will do it all day if you let them. They fuss about what clothes you put on em, they fuss about what you feed them and about being bored and about doing their jobs. Fuss, fuss, fuss. And it will drive you parents nuts if you don't stop it. But that's not easy. Right after you teach John 3:16, maybe you should teach Philippians 2:14 about not grumbling because it's a constant battle to secure a cheerful disposition. And I have noticed that this lifestyle pattern of grumbling does not immediately disappear when someone becomes a Christian. The chosen and redeemed people of God in the Old Testament had a grumbling problem and maybe, possibly, could it be that you do too? The word of God says, "Stop it" and do all things without grumbling.

Now I say all this to alert you to the fact that the temptation to grumble is all around you. You are part of a grumbling society and if that's not problem enough you also are a natural born grumbler! Temptation will hit you from within and without. Beware! Beware of this temptation and be ready. Some of you still aren't taking me seriously. Maybe you don't see the danger of this. So, having looked at the temptation to grumbling I'm going to present the remedy for grumbling but I know that a sin this deeply ingrained in you will not come out until you hate it enough to stop. So, listen and consider how serious this sin it. In Numbers 17 there is another story about the children of Israel. After some time under the leadership of Moses and Aaron a complaint arose from three men named Korah, Dathan and Abiram who proposed that they were just as fit to lead and serve as

priest as Moses and Aaron were. Well, guess what happened to these guys? 16:**31-33** *As he finished speaking all these words, the ground that was under them split open; 32 and the earth opened its mouth and swallowed them up, and their households, and all the men who belonged to Korah with their possessions. 33 So they and all that belonged to them went down alive to Sheol; and the earth closed over them, and they perished from the midst of the assembly.* Now you would think this was enough to stop the grumbling in Israel, at least for a while. But no, now they grumbled about the judgment on the grumblers. **41** *But on the next day all the congregation of the sons of Israel grumbled against Moses and Aaron, saying, "You are the ones who have caused the death of the Lord's people."* Then they had a test, to prove that God had called the tribe of Levi only to be his priests they had a representative from each tribe put his rod in the tabernacle. Then God said, 17:**5** *It will come about that the rod of the man whom I choose will sprout. Thus I will lessen from upon Myself the grumblings of the sons of Israel, who are grumbling against you.* You see how God speaks about this sin of grumbling, as if your grumbling heaped weights upon him. Then as it happened the rod of Aaron miraculously sprouted with buds and blossoms and almonds. **10** *But the LORD said to Moses, "Put back the rod of Aaron before the testimony to be kept as a sign against the rebels, that you may put an end to their grumblings against Me, so that they will not die"* You see how serious God is about this sin of grumbling? He says it is rebellion. It is rebellion! It is rebellion against authoritative orders, if not in action, in word and spirit. It is rebellion against God's authority or against the God-ordained authority of human leaders whether political, church, family or business leaders. And it is a serious, even dangerous sin. Besides being rebellion against the God who says, "do not grumble," I list four dangers of this sin.

Number One – As it says in Philippians 2:15 grumbling ruins your Christian testimony to the world. The text says, **14-15** *Do all things without grumbling or disputing; 15 so that you will prove yourselves to be blameless and innocent, children of God above reproach in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you appear as lights in the world,* and the clear implication is that to grumble and dispute proves otherwise; proves that you are not blameless and innocent children of God; and it brings dishonor to the religion which you profess. At its root, the Greek word for "grumbling" means "to be dissatisfied." When you grumble, you reflect dissatisfaction and what does that say to a watching world, hungry for something that will satisfy their anxious hearts? It's a dramatic way of saying, "My Christianity, or my Jesus can do it. He

didn't bring peace to my heart." And when we join in all the griping or grumbling that is just what the unbeliever hears. Thus, grumbling becomes the dimmer switch on the light of the world.

Second danger of this sin, is that it is habit-forming, if not downright addictive. We've all known grumbaholics, compulsive grumblers, and grumblers on steroids. Maybe you have one in your family. These are people who just grumble non-stop to the annoyance of everyone around them. And my observations have inclined me to think that this problem, among adults, grows greater with age. Now maybe it is that as one gets older one has more to gripe about. I know my list gets longer year by year. Someone noted that we are born naked, wet and hungry and then things get worse. But I say this as a warning. Beware not to grow into an old grump! And you younger friends – some of you are just social grumblers now. You know how it is. You take part in the office griping just to be sociable and feel a part of the gang. But I warn you – grumbling is habit forming. The next thing you know you'll be grumbling at home and grumbling in the morning and grumbling with meals. And before you know it you will be an old grump – a grumbling addict. Beware! This sin can be habit-forming.

Our third danger is that grumbling destroys your spirit. Griping and complaining just seems to sap all your strength. It makes you less effective at whatever you do, which is why the wheels of progress are not turned by cranks. When you are cranky you are not productive. And hey, grumbling can even lead to illness. Someone has noted that the early bird gets the worm, but the surly bird gets the germ. It is possible that people grumble because they feel bad, but it is also possible that people feel bad because they grumble. Yes. Wisdom tells you to whistle while you work, but you don't heed wisdom and your job has become drudgery. Grumbling saps energy. It can destroy your spirit.

The fourth danger of grumbling is that it not only can destroy your spirit but the spirit of others as well. Grumbling is a highly contagious disease. I have found that one committed griper can ruin a whole group. Churches and youth groups and school and teams and offices and even families can be dragged down into ineffectiveness by one prominent grump. There is hardly anything more devastating to morale than such an individual. Think about that right now. Who, in your spheres of involvement, is dragging down the group by their sour attitude and complaining? Is it you? And if not, are you opposing the negative influence of the other? You see, the devil likes to plant one grumbler in the church and watch a griping jungle develop and destroy the life of the

church. So, if you are a fervent grumbler, do your church a favor – change or leave. Change or leave and when you come to be with God’s people park your grouch outside.

Grumbling: it ruins your Christian testimony, it is habit-forming, it can destroy your spirit and it can destroy the spirit of others. Beware!!

Now let’s get to the remedy for grumbling. And it comes in one word. Remember, develop a habit -- think before you grumble. If you are tired of the chains of grumble I have good news for you. Jesus Christ says, “The truth shall set you free.” Only one problem – you have to remember the truth. So, next time you are hit by the temptation to grumble, before you grumble count to 10 – no just four – and remember these four truths.

#1 – remember God’s goodness to you. The root of grumbling is dissatisfaction. But the psalmist has said “*The Lord is my shepherd, I have no lack. My cup runneth over.*” Has God not so blessed you, Christian? You know He has! So why do you grumble? Is it because you let the minor distresses of this life eclipse the glories of the gospel – in your thinking? By the provocation of the enemy you determine that the bad weather or the bad economy, or the slow traffic light, is greater than, more significant than the saving love of Christ. You hold the momentary trial so close in your sight that you block out the eternal bliss of glory. In Deuteronomy chapter 1 Moses is speaking to the people of Israel on behalf of God. He is reminding them of their history, of how God lead them out of Egypt and brought them to the Promised Land, instructing them to go up and take possession. Deuteronomy 1:**26-27** *Yet you were not willing to go up, but rebelled against the command of the LORD your God; 27 and you grumbled in your tents and said, 'Because the LORD hates us, He has brought us out of the land of Egypt to deliver us into the hand of the Amorites to destroy us.* Do you see that? Their grumbling was based on a lack of faith in God’s love. They actually accused the Lord of hating them. That is what grumbling implies. Our grumbling says that we have a rough load to bear, even that we have not been treated fairly. People groan and say, “Life is hard.” And I want to ask, “Compared to what?” As a Christian, our testimony is that life is abundant, and rich, even when we are enduring trials – if we remember the gospel.

The second thing to remember is God’s wisdom. Remember that what He tells you to do is best. He is the wise one. I once heard a football player who played under the great coach Vince Lombardi, say, “*I’d do anything for that man.*” Why? He respected his wisdom and trusted it more than his own. What Lombardi said, he did. No argument. Are you like that with God? Or are you like the girl I talked to who described her fiancée in the most glowing terms imaginable. He was a

spiritual Prince Charming, the closest thing to perfect she had ever known. But then she tells me how they argue constantly. So, I ask: “How can you argue with someone you respect so much?” But I thought after I said it, “That’s precisely what we do with God.” We sing, “Immortal, Invisible, God only wise.” And then turn around and grumble at His wise orders. Remember, fellow-grumbler, God is wise.

Thirdly, let’s remember that God is sovereign. He is in control of His universe and does as He pleases in the heavens and on the earth. If this is so, then we are not to grumble about our circumstances because the Bible says God put you where you are. So, when you grumble, you grumble at Him, your loving and wise father. The hymnwriter put it well: *Lord, I would clasp Thy hand in mine, nor ever murmur, nor repine, content whatever lot I see, since tis my God that leadeth me.* Remember, He is sovereign.

The last thing to remember is this – your calling as a Christian. It is a call to follow Christ, and, like Him, to give up your “rights.” The eternal Lord stepped down from His glory so we could step out of our shame? Remember Him. What do you grumble about? Inconveniences, lack of appreciation? Did Jesus know anything about those? Jesus went to His death, and like a lamb led to the slaughter, He did not open His mouth. You see, Jesus had relinquished His rights for your sake. And if you think about it, you may see that your grumbling and complaining is due to the fact that you are clinging to supposed rights which must be laid down in order to follow the Christ.

What does John Piper say about what it means to glorify God? He says, “God is most glorified in us, when we are most satisfied in Him.” You know why it bothered me as a young dad when our kids grumbled and complained? It hurt me because it implied that we had not met their needs. But when kids are happy and full of joy it reflects well on their parents. The parents are glorified in their satisfaction. It works that way with God. We call Him our Father, our Shepherd, our Provider and the best way to say *He is great* is to be a joyful Christian, whereas the best way to say *He’s not much* is to grumble. Learn from the negative example of Israel. Learn from the positive example of Christ. Jesus would go for days without food and when others worried about Him He flashed a sly grin and said, “I have bread that you know not of.” Sweet contentment in the Father. May God grant it to us and fill our hearts with peace this day and throughout 2018.