

## Mumbling for MORE

Portions adapted from, Are We Never Satisfied? by The Rev Deniray Mueller @ SermonCentral.Com

Let's set the scene: When the Israelites first left Egypt, you would think they should be overjoyed because their prayers for deliverance were finally answered, but instead we find a fearful and cynical nation. Even after witnessing God's miraculous power to protect them through all the plagues He rained down on Pharaoh, they were still unwilling to trust Him. A couple of weeks into their journey, finding themselves trapped between Pharaoh's army and the Red Sea, they complain bitterly to Moses: "*was it because there were no graves in Egypt that you brought us to the desert to die?*" (Exodus 14:11). God hears their fear and like a protecting parent He splits the Red Sea, delivering them from the Egyptians to begin their journey to the Promised land.

But are they happy yet? NO!

One month into their journey, you would think that the Israelites would still be thrilled with their new-found freedom. They were leaving bitter bondage behind and were traveling toward a personal meeting with the God of their fore fathers. But instead of rejoicing, we read that the Israelites were complaining. Their unleavened bread having run out, they had begun to grumble, "*if only we had died by the LORD's hand in Egypt! There we sat around pots of meat and ate all the food we wanted, but you have brought us out into this desert to starve this entire assembly to death*". (Exodus 16:3-4)

Their complaints were understandable, they were hungry, still young in their faith and a desert is a hard place for over 600,000 people to find enough food. So again God hears their cries and like a **loving Father**, He miraculously provides for their needs. *The Lord said to Moses, 'I have heard the grumbling of the Israelites. Tell them at twilight you will eat meat, and in the morning you will be filled with bread. **Then you will know that I am the Lord your God.**' In the evening quails came up and covered the camp; and in the morning there was a layer of manna laying on the ground.* (Exodus 16:11-13).

Though this was a new food for them – the name literally means "what is it" - this God provided manna was delicious; it tasted like *cakes baked in oil*, like home baked bread (Num.11:8), and it was given to them fresh every morning, six days a week for over forty years, until they reached the Promised Land. You also need to know that quail is some of the sweetest, tastiest meats one can eat. My point being that God was not only providing their basic necessities, He was giving them delicious food.

Two months into their journey, it was getting hard to find water, *so the people complained against Moses and said, 'Why did you bring us out of Egypt, to kill us and our children and livestock with thirst?*' (Exodus 17:3). God again heard their complaint, and like the **generous Father** He is, provided fresh drinking water, not once, but twice miraculously springing it right out of the rocky soil (Exodus 17:1-7).

Scripture records four times in their four month journey to meet God at Mt Sinai, the Israelites reverted to reminiscing about Egypt, as if it had been Paradise. How soon they forgot the brick

pits, the task masters whip, the blood, sweat and tears they shed slaving for Pharaoh. Like Lot's wife looking back toward Sodom, **they looked back toward Egypt, as if it had held something good for them to miss.** The more God miraculously provided for them, the more ridiculous their complaints became. With children as disrespectful and ungrateful as these, perhaps God should have rained down fire and brimstone, but instead, each time, He treats them gently like a parent raising young children.

**Why?** Because this was just the start of their faith journey with God. So, like a mother with her baby, God was gently carrying them along until they learned to walk for themselves.

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Now let's fast forward in time just a bit. Having arrived at and camped around Mt. Sinai for over a year, the people have seen God's presence on the Mountain and heard God's voice. They had learned a hard lesson against idolatry with the Golden Calf. They have built the Tabernacle and Tent of Meeting with all its furniture along with the priestly robes for Aaron and sons. And now they are following "the Angel of the Lord," who as a pillar of cloud by day and fire by night, was personally leading them to the Promised Land.

You would think that both their faith and their gratitude towards God would have grown quite a bit in fourteen months. But what do we read is happening again, not once but twice in Numbers, chapter 11: **they complain** *in the hearing of the Lord about their misfortunes* (vs. 1)

*Now when the people **complained in the hearing of the Lord about their misfortunes**, the Lord heard it and his anger was kindled. Then the fire of the Lord burned against them, and consumed some outlying parts of the camp. But **the people cried out to Moses; and Moses prayed to the Lord, and the fire abated.***  
(Numbers 11:1-3)

What misfortunes could Israel possibly be having? They are being personally led and provided for by God through the wilderness; no one would even dare to attack them. They also have bread to eat and water to drink, the pillar of cloud to shade them in the daytime and the pillar fire to light their camp at night; perhaps they have not yet noticed, but neither are their clothes or shoes wearing out.

'Nothing but Manna to look at!' Numbers 11:6



But as this chapter records,

*The rabble among them had a strong craving; and the Israelites also wept again, and said, **'If only we had meat to eat!** We remember the fish we used to eat in Egypt for nothing, the cucumbers, the melons, the leeks, the onions, and the garlic; but now our strength is dried up, and **there is nothing at all but this manna to look at.**'* (Numbers 11:4-6)

How foolhardy it was to look at the gifts from God with contempt. Manna was free. They didn't have to work for it. It wasn't hard to gather. It was sweet. It was versatile and could be used in a multitude of ways. **Nothing at all but this manna.**

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Let's stop here for a moment in order to separate out the two completely different stories that are occurring in this chapter

1. The people are complaining to Moses about the lack of variety of food
  - God's response is to become "very angry" and to punish the people.
2. But also Moses is complaining to God about the lack of assistance in leading these people
  - God's response is first to comfort and assure Moses, then to raise up 70 leaders to assist him.

### **What is the difference between these two complaints?**

Simply: The different relationship that the people and Moses had with God.

Let's deal with Moses first.

*Moses said to the Lord, 'Why have you treated your servant so badly? Why have I not found favor in your sight, that you lay the burden of all this people on me? Did I conceive all this people? Did I give birth to them, that you should say to me, "Carry them in your bosom, as a nurse carries a sucking child", to the land that you promised on oath to their ancestors? Where am I to get meat to give to all this people? For they come weeping to me and say, "Give us meat to eat!"'* Numbers 11:10-13

Multiple times Moses had stood between God and these ungrateful people, even offering his own life in their behalf. You can sense that Moses is now getting tired and depressed, feeling very much alone in his leadership. **Each time the people are in a complaining mood, they attack Moses, then Moses pleads with God in their behalf and God responds to Moses' request.**

So while Moses faith in God remains strong, his complaint is legitimate, so God provides an additional 70 elders from the tribes to help Moses lead. God even gives them some of Moses' Spirit and they prophesy! Moses now has 70 prophets working as his assistants.

Then in an event that pre-echoes Jesus' feeding the 5,000, God assures Moses that He is quite up to the task of providing MEAT even for over 600,000 hungry people.

*Moses said, 'The people I am with number six hundred thousand on foot; and you say, "I will give them meat, that they may eat for a whole month"! Are there enough flocks and herds to slaughter for them? Are there enough fish in the sea to catch for them?' The Lord said to Moses, '**Is the Lord's power limited? Now you shall see whether my word will come true for you or not.**'* Numbers 11:21-23

And true to His word, God provides such an overabundance of quail that the people eat meat a whole month, but this is an act of discipline not grace.

How can providing an abundance of food become a discipline?

### **What happens when you get too much of a good thing?**

So let's now turn to God's response to the people....

The Israelites continue to act the same, but God's response is beginning to change; no longer like a gentle parent offering GRACE and comfort in response to their complaints, God is now becoming a disciplinary parent. In the hearing of the Lord they cried....

***If only we had meat to eat!*** *We remember the fish we used to eat in Egypt for nothing, the cucumbers, the melons, the leeks, the onions, and the garlic; but now our strength is dried up, and **there is nothing at all but this manna to look at.** ... Moses heard the people weeping throughout their families, all at the entrances of their tents. Then the Lord became very angry, and Moses was displeased*

And so God had Moses reply to the complainers....

*tomorrow, you shall eat meat; for you have wailed in the hearing of the Lord, saying, "If only we had meat to eat! Surely it was better for us in Egypt." Therefore the Lord will give you meat, and you shall eat. You shall eat not only one day, or two days, or five days, or ten days, or twenty days, but for a whole month—until it comes out of your nostrils and becomes loathsome to you—**because you have rejected the Lord who is among you, and have wailed before him, saying, "Why did we ever leave Egypt?"**"* Numbers 11:18-20

And that is exactly what happened, the next day a wind blew in from the ocean bringing a staggeringly huge flock of quail over the camp. Now the Hebrew is unclear whether all these birds just dropped dead at the peoples feet, or whether they flew close enough to the ground to be easily netted, but scripture records that each man was able to harvest approximately 35 bushels of birds apiece, a total of 105,000,000 quail, which they then skinned and laid out all around the camp to dry. Then for the next month they ate meat until they could no longer stand it, "until it came out their noses" (*we say until it came out their ears*). And near the end of that month as the meat began to spoil, a plague spread through the camp and all those people who had a "strong craving" died. The cemetery they left at that place was appropriately named, "The Graves of the Craving."

But did you catch the reason for God's changed response to the people's complaints, shifting from GRACE to punishment? God said it was ***because you have rejected the Lord who is among you.***

They have literally been walking with God for over 14 months; you would think that by now they would have grown some faith.... apparently not. What will it take for these people to learn to trust God? It will be another three months before they first reach the Promised Land with that next crisis of faith, which will condemn their children to 38 more years of wilderness wanderings. You can rest assured that when their children next arrive back at the borders of the Promised Land, they will be ready to trust God and take the land.... but that is a story for another day.

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**So what can we take home from today's story?** Conveniently, the Apostle Paul gave us this answer in his Letter to the Corinthian Christians. Paul writes that this story of quail in the wilderness was included in our Bibles intentionally, for us to learn not to be idolaters, not to be sexually immoral, not to put Christ to the test, *and not complain as some of them did, and were destroyed by the destroyer.*

1 Corinthians 10:10. Paul's advice continues...

*So if you think you are standing, watch out that you do not fall. No testing has overtaken you that is not common to everyone. **God is faithful, and he will not let you be tested beyond your strength, but with the testing he will also provide the way out so that you may be able to endure it.*** 1 Corinthians 10:12-14

You know, it seems we can always find something to complain about, even when there isn't. We can find a grievance if we want to, no matter how unreasonable it is. We grumble and complain when it's too hot, when it's too cold, we grumble when it rains, we complain when it snows... and that is just about the weather!

I guess it has been that way since the creation of Adam and Eve and will be that way until the end of time. People who look to find fault will always find something to complain about. **But have you ever thought that after having placed ourselves under God's care, not only does complaining display our lack of gratitude for all that we have been blessed with, but it is also a rejection of God,** who has told us that He knows what we need and longs to give such to us if we only *seek first His kingdom and to live out His righteousness* Matthew 6:33.

In a different, but very real way, with Jesus as our guide and companion, we are also marching through the wilderness of this world headed to God's heavenly home – our Promised Land.

### **How did we get to be numbered among "God's people?"**

Simply by Grace. As God told the people of Israel that they had been chosen, not because they were better than anyone else, but because of promises He had made Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. So we also were chosen not because we have been good – if you think otherwise, read the book of Romans – but because of a promise that God had made to our first-mother Eve, that one day her seed would crush the serpent's head; the serpent being Satan, our ancient enemy and the crushing being the world of sin and death which he would be the ruler over.

Remember, that **Grace** is defined as '*unmerited favor, an unearned gift or blessing given, regardless of our worthiness*'. It is God's unconditional love that we don't deserve, that adds strength to our daily lives that provides forgiveness for our sins and shortcomings and gives us assurance of eternal life.

God has no reason to be accepting and forgiving of us other than as love incarnate, He loves us deeply despite all our rebellions. We have no reason to expect, much less demand that grace, except that He promised it to us. If we were to receive what we deserved, if we lived by our idea of fairness, condemned by our actions. *The wages of sin is always death.* But

God does not treat us as we deserve. He gives us His unconditional love. He extends to us the grace to do something worthwhile with our lives. He voluntarily promises us life with Him.

*The wages of sin is always death. But the free gift of God is eternal life, in Christ Jesus our Lord. Romans 6:23.*

So how can we whine or quarrel when He has given us, all of us, so much more than what is fair?

If they got what was fair, none of the Israelites would ever have reached the Promised Land and if we got what was fair, none of us would get to heaven.

Let me repeat that: If we got what was fair, none of us would get to heaven.

Thank God that He doesn't give us what is fair, but instead He gives us His love and grace, in spite of what we deserve! **The test for us now is how will we respond that love?**

What kind of people will we be? Will we think of ourselves as deserving of God's grace and favor and complaining about everything God hasn't given us, or **will we see ourselves realistically as those who are blessed undeservingly?**

The grumblers among the Israelites who could only see obstacles on the way to the Promised Land did not even see the blessing of God's sweet manna. Today, I remind us to accept a new type of manna, a new type of heavenly bread.



Jesus declared "I am the Bread of Life. Whoever comes to me will never go hungry, and Whoever believes in me will never be thirsty." (John 6:35)

Christ is the ever living, everlasting bread; bread that nourishes us physically, mentally, emotionally and spiritually, by His example and love, by His mercy and forgiveness, by His life given in exchange for ours and by His Holy Spirit that surrounds us every moment of our lives if we will be open to it.

This bread will sustain our soul forever!

So the next time you find yourself cynically complaining and dissatisfied with life or the world around you, remember this quote from the Rolling Stones:

*You can't always get what you want,*

*But if you try some time, you just might find, you get what you need.*

And what we need that Bread of Life, the love of Jesus that will sustain us as we travel to the Promised Land.

Let's pray about this.