

In his book Exodus for You, Tim Chester writes:

“People who moan really annoy me. People who go on about their petty problems or the failings of the government or the state of the roads or the behaviour of young people, or old people, don't they realise how privileged they are? It really annoys me. The worst are those people who moan about people who moan.”

Let me make my irony explicit as I grumble about grumblers, I turn out to be the biggest grumbler of all.

He goes on by saying:

We think of grumbling as something other people do. What we do is make justified complaints or offer constructive criticism, but we don't grumble. We make ourselves the exception, but the reality is that most of us grumble, and some of us grumble most of the time.

And he's not wrong is he.

So, for example, nationally around 100 million complaints are made every year: ranging from unreliable trains, bad customer service, and ineffective local councils

And that's without the all the moaning we do about the weather, the cost of living and, the Corona Virus.

Well in that reading from Exodus earlier we see that the people of Israel are also gifted in the art grumbling.

Verse 1 it says:

“After they had departed from the land of Egypt, the whole congregation of the people of Israel grumbled against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness; and the people 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.”

And it seems like a legitimate complaint doesn't it.

You see the context is that up until this point Israel have been enslaved, oppressed, and beaten down by a tyrannical regime in Egypt.

But then after seeing their suffering, God rescue's them in dramatic fashion as he sends plagues, parts the Red Sea, and defeats the Egyptians.

God then reminds them of the promise he made to Abraham of a land flowing with milk and honey that that they'll inherit as their own.

And it's a wonderful promise isn't it, for an enslaved people.

But as they wander around the desert without any food they start to grumble about Moses and Aarons leadership.

After all its Moses who's got them into this mess; it's only right that he should get them out of it before everyone starves to death.

And so, they start looking back to Egypt with rose tinted glasses, and quickly forget God's promises and everything he's done for them.

You know the other day I read that in the West we generally live in peace with each other, but apparently, we're only ever 3 days away from civil unrest.

You see if anything went wrong with the food supplies, and supermarket shelves became empty, it would only take 3 days for looting and rioting to break out.

And we saw a bit of that at the beginning of lockdown didn't we when people started to panic buy loo roll.

Well that's sort of unrest that's bubbling under the surface here as the people of Israel start to moan and complain that they were better off in Egypt.

And it's a terrible complaint.

Because they've forgotten just how horrible their lives were.

Well as a result Moses says in verse 8:

“What are we? Your grumbling's not against us but against the Lord.”

In other words, it's not Moses and Aaron looking after the people of Israel as they journey towards the promised land, Its God.

And in spite of everything he's already done for them, they *accuse God* of leaving them to starve to death in the desert.

They even say in chapter 17: “Is the Lord with us or not?”

And it's a terrible complaint; because they show a complete lack of trust, as they question God's goodness; doubt his wisdom; and ignore everything he's done for them up to this point.

And it's awful.

But you know I wonder if that's what we're like sometimes.

So, listen to Tim Chester again, he says:

Think about your own life. Perhaps you sing of God's unfailing love on a Sunday morning, but then three days later, or maybe 3 hours later you're grumbling.

But think of all things that God's done for you. Think how easily you lose a sense of perspective. And think how better you are at seeing what you don't have, rather than what you do have.

You see like Israel in the Old Testament; Christians are people travelling through the wilderness of this life as they journey towards the promised land of a new heaven and new earth.

But until they get there it's a journey fraught with danger, challenges, and disappointments, that no one's immune from.

As a result, it's easy to fall into the trap of being dissatisfied, ungrateful, or unhappy with our lives now.

And so, we start to grumble

But you know when we do that; it's a complaint against God; and highlights a lack of trust in his promises, provision, and care for us.

In fact, Billy Graham once said this:

Grumbling and gratitude are in conflict for the child of God. Be grateful and you won't grumble. Grumble and you won't be grateful.

And you know even in our darkest moments we can be grateful because God is always faithful.

So, for example you'll remember the story of Joseph, who after being beaten up and left for dead by his brothers, is then sold into slavery, falsely accused of sexual assault, and imprisoned.

But listen to what he says to those same brothers years later about how his life panned out.

He says:

“You meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today.”

You see even through all those terrible events in Joseph's life; he knows that God is working his purposes out; and even though Joseph spends years languishing in a dark, dank prison he never complains; he simply trusts God to keep his promises.

Or to put it another way Joseph knows that God is in complete control over every situation and circumstance of his life; and can even bring good out of evil.

And we know the end of the story don't we.

Joseph becomes one of the most important men in Pharaoh's government, and averts disaster from his family; who's descendants, are now the ones wandering through the desert towards a land flowing with milk and honey.

But of course, the greatest example of God bringing good out of evil is the cross.

And so when we're tempted to doubt or complain about our lives, let's remember that even when we can't make sense of things now; for Christian's God is working his purposes out for our good; and that includes in a world full of Covid 19.

Well we then read in verses 4 to 12 that because Israel have dared to complain and question God's faithfulness; he simply abandons them in the desert to die of starvation.

Well actually we don't read that do we; instead, we're told that God responds with grace and provides for his rebellious and ungrateful people just as he always has.

So, in verse 4 he says:

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 do my law or not.

So, listen to this:

Manna requires you to trust that God will provide today and then again tomorrow, and then again, the day after. You have to trust God one day at a time.

And it's the same for us isn't it.

You see in all our sin, weakness, and complaining, God provides bread for us in the person of Lord Jesus Christ, who says this in John 6:

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.

You see it's by trusting Jesus Christ, that our all our complaining, ungratefulness, and doubt in God's goodness are forgiven.

But it's also in him that all of God's Old Testament promises are fulfilled and point forward too.

As a result, even in the uncertainties of life we can praise and thank God without grumbling; because of what he's provided for us in his Son who again says in John's Gospel:

"I've told you all this so that you may have peace in me. Here on earth you will have many trials and sorrows. But take heart, I have overcome the world."

You see Jesus doesn't always give us what we want, but he does meet our deepest needs by giving himself; and a life that goes beyond death to an eternal future with him.

And so, in every situation, good or bad, we know that Jesus has gone before us and is working his purposes out for our good; even when it doesn't seem to make any sense.

And so let's not be like the 100 million people who complain every year; but instead lets trust God to provide for our every need, one day at a time; as we travel through the wilderness of this life to the promised land of Heaven. Amen