

The Old-Time Evangelistic News

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What Are You Complaining About? (Part 1)

Exodus 16:7-12; Philippians 2:14

We are using two texts as the foundation of this message. The first is in Exodus 16:7-12. The children of Israel have crossed the Red Sea in chapter 14 and given God praise for that in chapter 15. Also, in chapter 15, they have seen God provide water in two different instances. In the first provision of water, the water that was found was bitter. It could not be drunk. God miraculously purified that water when Moses obediently cast a tree into the bitter water. Later, they came to Elim which had twelve wells of water. In considering these provisions of water, we must remember that there were between 2 and 3 million Israelites. Often, I think that we see them as just a handful of people, but in reality, it was a vast multitude.

Having seen God judge Egypt with the plagues, having seen God open up the Red Sea and allow them to walk through it on dry ground, and having seen God supply water, you would think that the Israelites would never complain or worry about anything. But in the second month after leaving Egypt (Exodus 16:1), you read this: *“And in the morning, then ye shall see the glory of the LORD; for that he heareth your murmurings against the LORD: and what are we, that ye murmur against us? And Moses said, This shall be, when the LORD shall give you in the evening flesh to eat, and in the morning bread to the full; for that the LORD heareth your murmurings which ye murmur against him: and what are we? your murmurings are not against us, but against the LORD. And Moses spake unto Aaron, Say unto all the congregation of the children of Israel, Come near before the LORD: for he hath heard your murmurings. And it came to pass, as Aaron spake unto the whole congregation of the children of Israel, that they looked toward the wilderness, and, behold, the glory of the*

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LORD appeared in the cloud. And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying, I have heard the murmurings of the children of Israel: speak unto them, saying, At even ye shall eat flesh, and in the morning ye shall be filled with bread; and ye shall know that I am the LORD your God.” The people were not satisfied with the way that God was running things and it was displayed in their murmuring against Moses, the man of God, and against God Himself.

But it is not just in the Old Testament that we find accounts of, or admonitions against, murmuring or complaining. In Philippians 2:14, the Bible says, *“Do all things without murmurings and disputings.”* As with so many verses, one word makes this impossible to obey in the flesh. It is the word all. Notice that the verse does not say, “Do some things,” or “Do most things,” or “Do the easy things,” without murmurings and disputings. If it were only some of the time, or when everything was going well, we might be able to obey the command in our flesh. But every action and every circumstance must be faced without any complaint or murmur. But you might say, “That is impossible!” As I mentioned earlier, that is impossible in the flesh. It can only be obeyed, as we will see in the course of the message, when we are controlled by the Spirit.

This message had its development over a period of time as I saw the attitudes and actions of many people. I do not have any particular person in mind. In fact, it is probably a compilation of many people—preachers, family members, and myself. People have always complained. We can see that in the passage in Exodus. But it seems that people in our generation complain more than others. That issue may be debated, but the fact that people complain cannot be. Nowadays, we complain about everything. Some preachers will complain about the area that they are in. They will say, “It is so hard. People are not receptive like they used to be.” One who says that has never read much in the Bible or church history. As we will see in the message, there has always been opposition to the Gospel, sometimes by religious adversaries, sometimes by the government. It has never been “easy” to preach the truth. The world has never loved being

told that they are sinners, and they never will. We must never complain about any supposed difficulty in preaching the Gospel.

To go outside the realm of Bible teaching for a minute, think about how much we complain in our generation. Some complain about how much they work, but statistics bear out the fact that we work far less than our parents and grandparents. According to one recent study, the average worker spends between 35-40 hours on the job, as opposed to a generation or two ago that spent between 60-70 hours on the job. We have more time off than ever before. Time off for holidays and vacations were nonexistent years ago. I recently read a book by Tip O’Neill, Speaker of the House of Representatives in the 1970’s and 1980’s. He said that when he was a boy growing up in the 1920’s, mailmen delivered mail even on Christmas day. We have things so much easier than previous generations, but we complain perhaps more than they did.

I will mention one other instance of our complaining before moving on. It is about the economy. When there is a downturn, you would think that it is the end of all hope. The most recent downturn was considered “the worst since the Great Depression.” When it was in its beginnings a few years ago, I commented that they must have forgotten about the 1970’s. By the way, if I remember correctly, the recession of the 1990’s was also supposedly the worst since the Great Depression. I am not saying that it is a fun thing to lose a job or to see others lose their jobs because of an economic downturn. But we are not the first to experience it. In fact, every generation, about every 20-30 years, experienced some kind of economic downturn. Historians used to call them panics. There was the Panic of 1819, and so on. The one at the end of the 19th century was called the Great Depression, until that term was used for the economic downturn of the 1920’s and 1930’s. Why do I mention this? To help us realize that complaining is never right and never acceptable, even in talking about economic situations. Complaining is always wrong.

Before we get into the message itself, let me give you a couple of

things that will introduce this subject of complaining. First, we will consider an **Understanding of the Words in Scripture**. There are many related words that we could consider, but we will narrow them down to murmuring and complaining. The Hebrew word for murmuring means to express resentment, dissatisfaction, anger, and complaint by grumbling in half-muted tones of hostile opposition to God’s leaders and the authority which He has invested in them; the true nature of this murmuring is seen in the fact that it is an open act of rebellion against the Lord and a stubborn refusal to believe God’s Word and God’s miraculous works; the right attitude in real difficulty is unconditional acceptance and obedience. The Greek word for murmuring describes a secret displeasure, not openly avowed. Our English word murmur means a mumbled or muttered complaint.

The word that I have chosen to use for the message is complain. As we see in the above definitions, murmuring is a form of complaining, but not in an outspoken manner. True complaining is louder. Notice the meanings of the words. The Hebrew word means to strive; to contend; a controversy. The Greek word means to accuse or to bring a charge against. Our English word means to claim or express pain or displeasure; to find fault; to declare annoyance. We both murmur and complain. We do it softly and then we become so bold as to do it loudly and contentiously. In essence, we are saying that our way is right and what God is doing is wrong. In reality, we are wrong. God is always right.

Notice also the **Usage of the Words in Scripture**. I do this often when preaching on particular subjects. It gives us an idea as to how often the subject actually occurs in Scripture. I will give the tally of the words and then make a few comments.

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| 1. Murmur—8 times | 6. Complain—4 times |
| 2. Murmured—19 times | 7. Complaining—1 time |
| 3. Murmuring—2 times | 8. Complained—2 times |
| 4. Murmurings—8 times | 9. Complaint—9 times |
| 5. Murmurers—1 time | 10. Complaints—1 time |
| | 11. Complainers—1 time |

Just looking at the New Testament passages, we notice this: murmur is used 2 times, once against Jesus; the other refers back to the Old Testament. Murmured is used 9 times, most when the Pharisees murmured against Jesus; once when the disciples murmured after the Bread of Life discourse. Murmuring is found twice, once against Jesus, the other concerning the Grecian widows in Acts 6. Murmurings is found one time, and it is a command not to do it. The one time complaints is found is when the Jews utter complaints against Paul. Complainers and murmurers are both found in Jude 16 and describe unsaved people.

Upon looking at these words, we reach this conclusion: only the unsaved and selfish, non-Spirit filled believers murmur and complain; a Spirit-filled believer will never complain, no matter what they face in their life. We will prove that in the succeeding issues. May God help us not to complain.