

Grumbling

Want to talk to you this morning about a subject that is applicable to us all. something were all guilty of from time to time, something we all do whether consciously or unconsciously, and that is '**grumbling or murmuring'** in fact it was something I was aware of of this week, grumbling about someone, a situation, and the worst thing is; sometimes we don't even recognise were doing it!

It becomes one of those 'blind spots' that were not aware of, and that's because it can slip in and become part of our everyday conversation. The danger is: Grumbling can allow the devil to get foothold and that foothold (if we don't watch out) can eventually become a stronghold in our lives.

As we will see later, it's not something we should do as a Christian; in fact grumbling is something we should avoid at all costs! It is something God punished very severely in the OT and something, as far as I can see, God doesn't see in a lighter way in the NT.

We have been talking a lot lately about the 'return of Christ' and being **ready for His coming**, lets here what 1 Peter 4:7 says:

"The end of all things is near (What shall we do then?) *So being self-controlled and sober-minded for the sake of your prayers. Above all, love one another earnestly"* and "**show hospitality to one another without grumbling.**" Without grumbling so when He comes again, He should not find us grumbling!

I think this grumbling / complaining is 'part and parcel' of our old fallen nature, it started at the very beginning of creation. As the old pastor said jokingly "You all know that God created the world in six days and rested on the seventh. Do you know what He did on the eighth day? He started answering complaints!"

But if we look at the very beginning of creation, when God created Adam and Eve we can see grumbling rears its ugly head! They sinned, and disobeyed God when they ate of 'the tree of the knowledge of good and evil' in Genesis 3, and God questioned them why they had done so?

First of all Adam said (Gen 3:12) "the woman whom you gave to be with me, she gave me fruit from the tree, and I ate." When God questioned Eve, she said, "*The serpent tricked me, and I ate.*" Basically, both said, "I took it, but it's not my fault; the other one made me do it."

There is so much in the scripture about this type of grumbling. The Bible classes it as a **sin**, in fact it references grumbling in the same category as sexual immorality and idolatry (1 Corinthians 10:8) also God is not pleased with it and takes appropriate, but severe action in

serious cases of it as we see in scriptures, as we shall see later on - but we need to 'nail it' to begin with as **sin**.

So what is this grumbling that is taken so seriously in the Bible? It is important to define what it is and what it isn't! – The Greek word for our English word grumbling is '**goggusmos**' and it means a "secret displeasure, not openly stated"

The English dictionary definition: **grumbling** is
"a complaint uttered in a low and indistinct tone"

So there is this major element that defines grumbling, you keep it at a low tone, you don't want everyone to hear it - you have heard the term 'muttering under your breath' this probably describes the attitude of grumbling quite well – lets say it wouldn't be something you did with a microphone for instance – grumbling is something you keep 'in the shadows' out of public view for the fear of being found out. And that is a good indication of the wrong of it because the scriptures tell us to 'bring everything into the light' (Eph 5:13)

Now these are challenging times for us all and as Christians, we can be tempted to either grumble or complain in our hearts about circumstances, events or other people or conversely we could also just suppress our feelings. I don't think either is scriptural, and so on the opposite side of grumbling there is what I would call a 'positive or faithful complaining'

Firstly let's figure out the difference between grumbling and this 'positive/ faithful complaining'.

The truth is we hear complaints throughout the Bible. David complained to the Lord in the Psalms. Prophets like Jeremiah & Habakkuk also complained. Faithful complaining is an honest, groaning expression of what it's like to experience the trouble, anguish, and grief of living in this fallen, futile world.

Faithful complaining involves total honesty, a spirit of submission and recognition that God is sovereign. Let's have a look at this 'Honest Complaining' in the Bible.

Firstly Psalm 142:1-2

*"I cry aloud to the LORD;
I lift up my voice to the LORD for mercy.
I pour out before him my complaint;
before him I tell my trouble".*

2 things we can learn about from this scripture - firstly David brings his complaint to God; "*I pour out before him my complaint; before him I tell my trouble*"... If only we would do this! How many of us bring our complaints before God? Or even, to that mind, pray about them to begin with at least? We just launch right in! With little regard to what God thinks.

I do believe as well, there are some complaints we have that we just leave there with God, we say nothing to anyone else - it's just between God & ourselves - that's faith! - Because it hands our concerns over to God, trusts Him to take control of the situation, the person, it lets God deal with it rather than us grumbling on about it.

One of the key differences between grumbling and positive complaining is; complaining in this way **looks up to** God – grumbling always **looks down** to the earth, finds solace in grumbling to others, in fact grumbling in this way doesn't include God at all or even acknowledge God in the situation.

Secondly Jeremiah 12: 1-2

*"You are always righteous, LORD,
when I bring a case before you.*

Yet I would speak with you about your justice:

Why does the way of the wicked prosper?

Why do all the faithless live at ease?

What can we learn about positive complaining from this verse? Well that it's ok to be real with God, to ask Him questions. Lets face it there is much to 'complain' about in the world! So much injustice, it's ok to ask these questions. 'He knows our frame' He knows we grapple with these things. That they are legitimate questions. But when we are real with God we are able to bring **all our circumstances** to Him, all the highs and lows, the things that bother us.

We end up in a place of humility, submitted to His sovereignty – and we see this throughout the Psalms, where so often it starts with David pouring out his complaint to God, but then ending up praising Him. Read the book of Psalms for examples of this.

There are also everyday situations in life where it is ok to complain, to enquire, to seek justice, to change a situation. For e.g. if I heard a complaint from my mom about her being treated unkindly in the care home she's in, would it be wrong of me to complain? Or if I brought some faulty goods do I just throw them in the bin say and nothing?

Edwin & I worked in the quality department and our 'bread and butter' was complaints, if something went wrong (it usually did) they sent the faulty part back, we had to investigate, and put actions in place make sure it didn't happen again - no all these type of complaints were ok because they are a vehicle for change, for improvement, they weren't negative and inward looking and they are not about ourselves, our own personal needs or wants, they are usually in the interests of the well being of another person or a faulty system or procedure that needs correcting.

Grumbling on the other hand is what the Israelites did in the desert.

Let's read Numbers 21:4-6- "*From Mount Hor they set out by the way to the Red Sea, to go around the land of Edom. And the people became impatient on the way. And the people spoke*

(or grumbled) against God and against Moses, “**Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness?** For there are no food and no water and we loathing this worthless food.” Then the LORD sent fiery serpents among the people, and they bit the people, so that many people of Israel died.”

From this we can see 3 Root causes of grumbling

Firstly selfishness (the root of all sin) - They were starving, thirsty and unbelief had set in, although God had provided for them ‘manna from heaven’ they wanted something better; **meat**, they weren’t satisfied with their lot –Gods provision for them, this selfish grumbling forgets God’s call to submission and humility (**Ephesians 5:21, Hebrews 13:17**). .

They believed God had forced them out into the desert to die rather than having their best interests at heart in the long run. Their eyes were focused solely on their surroundings and their circumstances. They thought only of themselves. They thought nothing of God. At the heart of this grumbling is **selfishness** it’s all about my own interests.

Secondly we see another cause of this grumbling - unbelief Grumbling in the spiritual sense for us as Christians directly or indirectly declares that God is not sufficiently good, faithful, loving, wise, powerful, or competent. Complaining against God sovereignty – That He isn’t in control, Otherwise, He would treat us better or run the universe more effectively. Grumbling is tainted with pride and unbelief - unbelief in Gods provision. This Faithless complaining is sinful because at its root it accuses God of doing wrong.

Thirdly it shows a lack of maturity a ‘baby type’ attitude have you noticed children (we love them to bits) but they often grumble ‘when will we get there’ – ‘I don’t want vegetables’ – ‘I don’t want to go to bed’ it’s just the same as these people in the desert are saying..... That they don’t like it one bit and want it their way, right now. If they don’t get what they want, they will complain, grumble, murmur, and whine, like a spoilt child, just like we do when we grumble.

So what is the Antidote to grumbling the way out of grumbling - 3 things;

Firstly we need to **stop doing it!** Recognise **its sin**, God hates it! Scripture says; **Philippians 2:14** “Do nothing with grumbling or disputing”

Take it seriously’ God did; 1 Corinthians 10:8 says;

“*We should not commit sexual immorality, as some of them did—and in one day twenty-three thousand of them died.⁹ 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*” that’s pretty alarming isn’t it!

So when we find ourselves doing it and the Holy Spirit convicts us - confess it quickly to God, make recompense if at all possible with whoever you have been grumbling against.

Secondly & this is the key! The antidote to grumbling and unfaithful complaining is **gratitude** and **thankfulness**. 1 Thess 5:18 says “*Give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus*” ***Giving thanks should be an essential part of our Christian life.*** Give thanks in all situations especially those that we would grumble about.

Gratitude & thankfulness brings contentment it is said that ‘gratitude makes what we have enough’ the truth is: If we can’t be grateful for what God has given us already getting more will not satisfy us, being thankful is a key to contentment.

It also guards against envy – envy looks at what others have and feels we should have it or deserve it! A heart full of gratitude does not compare what we have or do not have with other people and has no room for envy.

Thirdly - be submissive! Humility defeats grumbling and especially with our leaders. Exodus 16:8

“You will know that it was the LORD when he gives you meat to eat in the evening and all the bread you want in the morning, because he has heard you’re grumbling against him. Who are we? You are not grumbling against us, but against the LORD.”

It’s often the case that grumbling in church is usually against those in authority but by doing so **“You are not grumbling against us, but against the LORD.”**

And finally this grumbling / murmuring is a danger signal to the unity of a church - any church and if it’s going on below the surface, which it often does, Satan will divide a church and the devil finds a ready foothold in our lives and the life of a church with the sin of grumbling.

I do believe it’s one of the basic things, the fundamentals of the Christian life, giving thanks rather than grumbling, if we don’t get this right God won’t move us on as a church. So avoid it at all costs! And I will leave you with these verses from Ephesians 4 which is a call to us all;

“Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen.³⁰ And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.³¹ Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice.³² Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you”.

Amen

Tony Troy

31/10/21