

Numbers 11:11-16

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[0 : 00] I love us out of the road. We are all good aren't we at whinging and whining and complaining.

! I mean particularly our culture. And we just don't recognise how serious a problem that! Whining and whinging. It's not one of the seven deadly sins.

I think there are 50 deadly sins, I don't think we need to put it in there, because we don't recognize it for what it is. There's no such beating as there for grumblers and others.

I feel really loud. Am I loud? Sorry. It's good to be loud sometimes. Is that better? And so there's no 12-step programme designed to cure your grumbling. And yet it's not because there are too few grumblers out there. We know how to grumble, don't we? It's second nature to us. We complain about politicians, we complain about our kids. Pastors complain about their people. People complain about their pastors. We are whingers. It comes naturally to us.

But what numbers 11-16 teaches us is it's a very, very serious matter. There's 2-3 million people on their way to the promised land. And they're just a few days away from the land flowing with milk and honey. And they start whinging and 2-3 million people miss out on the promised land. That journey should have taken, according to Deuteronomy 1 verse 2, it should have taken 11 days. And they actually took 40 years. And the only 2 people who survived that journey were Joshua and Caleb. All the rest perished in the wilderness because they were whingers. And because they complained and they murmured. They've already had 3 days' journey.

[2 : 22] Now that's in 2 chapters before. 3 days' journey. And they describe the journey from Sinai to the promised land. And in 10-33 they've already travelled 3 days from Sinai. So they're 8 days to go.

8 days. That's all. To the land flowing with milk and honey. Just a week away. The equivalent of Easter Monday for us now looking forward. And instead of looking forward to that, they are going to grumble and complain. And it affects the whole camp of Israel. And ultimately it turns them back on themselves. In the wilderness. And it costs them the promised land. That generation.

And Paul in the New Testament makes much of this. Let me read you some verses. 1 Corinthians 10. He warns us. He says, don't grumble. Don't grumble as some of them did, pointing back to the wilderness, and were destroyed by the destroyer. These things happened to them as an example. But they were written down for our instruction on whom the end of the ages has come. So it's not just an interesting and quaint story in Numbers 11. It's actually warning you and I. Or listen to what Jude says. He warns of ungodly men and their ungodly acts and their ungodly ways. And when you read that, you think, what's he going to talk about? What have these men been doing? He says it was about these that Enoch was sent from Adam prophesied, saying, Behold, the Lord comes with ten thousands of his holy ones, to execute judgment on all, to convict all the ungodly of their deeds of ungodliness, that they've committed in such an ungodly way. And he inspected that with the reader and they were drug dealers. They were perverts. They were paedophiles. And of all the harsh things that ungodly sinners have spoken against them, these are, here it is, grumblers, malcontents.

Fault finders. Following their own simple desires, their loud mouth boasters, showing favouritism to gain advantage. Or hear what Paul says. He writes to that lovely church in Philippi. And he exhorts them, he says, Therefore, my beloved, as you've always obeyed so now, not only as in my presence, but much more in my absence, work out your salvation. He's not talking about working for it. When Christ died on the cross, he cried, It is finished.

[4 : 45] You are saved. But you have to work it out in your life. There are consequences to being saved. There are implications. So work out your salvation with fear and trembling. For it's God who works in you both to will and to do, to work for his good pleasure. How do you work it out? And he

says, Do all things without grumbling or complaining. That you may be blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish, in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation. And a man whom you will shine like stars, holding fast to the word of life. What's the distinguishing thing about the people of God who've been saved? They're not grumblers and they're not whingers. It's what stands out, Paul says, in a crooked and perverse generation. And so it really is an important thing. And I suspect most of us here are not as concerned about grumbling as we should be. We don't see it for what it is. Forgive me for this lengthy quote, but it's a great quote. I've used it before. It's C.S. Lewis and the

Great Divorce. And in that book he explores the difference between heaven and hell. I wouldn't agree with everything in it. But there's a conversation that takes place. And these in hell, and these are basically ghosts in hell in Lewis's picture. The people in heaven, they are the solid people. And there's exploration as to why these people are there in hell and why these people are in heaven. And what's the difference? And there's a conversation about a little old lady. She's a lovely little old lady, but she can't shut up. She just goes on and on and on all the time. And she whinges and she complains. And this is how the conversation goes. There are these two people talking, you see, and discussing this little old lady.

He says, she doesn't seem to be, to me, to be the sort of soul that is even in danger of damnation. She's just a harmless little old lady. She's only a silly, garrulous woman who's gone into a habit of grumbling and feels that a little kindness and rest and change would do her some good. Oh, that's what she once was, says the other guy. That's maybe what she still is. If so, she'll certainly be curious. But the whole question is whether she is now a grumbler. I should have thought there was no doubt about that. Aye, but you must understand me. The question is whether she is a grumbler or only a grumble. If there is a real woman, even the least trace of one, still there inside the grumbling, it can be brought to life again.

If there's one wee spark under all those ashes, we'll blow it to the whole pile is red and clear. But if there's nothing but ashes, we'll not go and blow it in our own eyes forever. They must be swept up. But how can you, how can there be a grumble without a grumbler?

The whole difficulty of understanding hell is that the thing to be understood is so nearly nothing. But you've all had experiences. It begins with a grumbling mood and yourself still distinct from it, perhaps criticising it. And yourself in a dark hour may will that mood, embrace it. You can repent and come out of it again, but there may come a day when you can do that no longer. Then there will be no you left to criticise the mood, nor even to enjoy it, but just the grumble itself going on forever like a machine. It should be one of the deadly sins.

[8 : 19] And grumbling is a sin that will destroy you as much as any public wickedness. The sin of grumbling and moaning and whinging and complaining, we need to take it seriously.

And that is the theme of the next four chapters, so you might want to take a holiday after Easter for a few weeks. I want us to see two things in chapter 11. Number one, the spirit of the people, and in the second half of the chapter, the spirit of God. The spirit of the people is a grumbling, complaining people, and then the spirit of God poured out on the people.

That's so encouraging. That's God's answer. And it's encouraging that God has the final word in chapter 11, not the grumbler. So let's look at these people, the spirit of the people. Now notice where it starts. Verses 1 to 3. Let's read them.

And the people complained in the hearing of the Lord about their misfortunes. And when the Lord heard it, his anger was kindled, and the fire of the Lord burned among them and consumed some outlying parts of the camp. And the people cried out to Moses, and Moses prayed to the Lord and the fire died down. So the name of that place was called Taborah, because the fire of the Lord burned among them. Now don't jump to conclusion. There is no indication in these verses that there was loss of life. I don't think there was. They are three days into their 11-day journey. Three days out from Sinai. It's a pretty dramatic terrain. The Sinai Desert is one of the most inhospitable parts of the world. And they're starting to enter that part of the country, and they begin to complain. And fire comes from the Lord that threatens to destroy them. Maybe it was a lightning strike, we don't know. But anyway, Moses gets down on his knees, and he prays for them, and the fire dies down. He prays for them. And the crisis is over. That should have been the end of the story, shouldn't it? But it's not.

Look what happens next. Verse 4, the rabble. It's really interesting. The rabble means a mixed multitude. There were all sorts of other people that came out with the Israelites from Egypt.

[10:20] There were Egyptians that came, and others came. It was a rabble. Verse 4, now the rabble that was among them had a strong craving. And the people of Israel also wept again and said, oh, that we had meat to eat. And they start to complain about food. And then guess what?

Verse 10, can you see that Moses himself begins to complain. Moses heard the people weeping throughout their clans, each one at the door of his tent. And the anger of the Lord blazed hotly. And Moses was displeased. And Moses said, why have you dealt ill with your servant?

Why have I not found favour in your sight that you laid a burden of these people on me? So you see that he feels it's a burden that he's been given by God. And he starts to complain.

He's the leader. And so just notice, verses 1 to 3, the grumbling is on the outskirts of the camp. And then it goes right into the centre of the camp. And even to the leader.

And Numbers 11 tells you that grumbling and complaining is contagious and it's infectious. And that means we need to be really careful what we say to one another. And we've got to be careful who we listen to. And we've got to ask ourselves in any kind of relationship, what is happening here in this relationship? Who is influencing who? If you mix with people grumblers and complainers, and that's what you listen to all the time, then your whole life will become skewed and distorted. And you see that very clearly in the chapter.

[12:01] Look at how distorted things become in verses 4 to 6. Now the rabble that was among them had a strong craving, oh, that we had meat to eat. We remember the fish we had eaten. That cost nothing. The cucumbers, the melons, the leeks, the onions and the garlic. Now our strength has dried up. And there's nothing at all but this manner to look at. It would be funny, wouldn't it, that verse, if it wasn't so serious.

They've been travelling three days and yet they've started complaining about food. The menu's getting a little bit repetitive. And so they start to fantasise, don't they? They fantasise about creamy onion and leek soup for starters. About salmon fillets grilled with garlic nesting on a bed of melon and cucumber in Egypt. And do you see how their grumbling distorts reality? They forget that in Egypt they were slaves. If they got melons and cucumbers and garlic, it's because they had to go around the dustbins and rummage for them. They were whipped to an inch of their life. Their kids were killed in Egypt. They were slaves in Egypt.

They'd forgotten that. And God had rescued them and now they are complaining. What was the man like? When it was 79, it tells us. It was quite delicious. You could cook it in a variety of ways. It didn't always have to be cooked in the same way. It tasted like something cooked in olive oil. It was a bit like a cake. Psalm 78 tells you that it was the bread of heaven. It was the food of angels. It's a bit like angel delight, maybe. It was delicious. And what is more, it came down every morning and it was there ready for them to gather it up.

[13:48] But isn't it so typical? We're never satisfied with what we've got. We're never satisfied. We don't appreciate what we have until it's taken away from us. God has miraculously promised and rescued them from Egypt. He's promised them that we'll be a land to a land flowing with milk and honey.

He's taking them there. He's feeding them every day delicious food and they complain about the diet. In Egypt they cry out to God to rescue them and here they cry out against God. But then just look where that leads. In the case of Moses. Where God says, it's not about your diet and it's not about food and it's not about taste.

And he says, if you want meat, I'll give you meat. I'll rain meat down on you. There'll be mountains of meat. It's funny. Here they are complaining about the manna in the wilderness and God says, you want meat? I'll give you meat.

Those migrating birds that fly across the Sinai Desert that they still do today. The quails. And what does God do? He blows them out of the sky and the meat rains down on them.

[15:01] You want meat? Eat it. And it's not difficult for God to do that. See what's happening in verse 20. But for a whole month until it comes out of your nostrils and becomes loathsome to you because you've rejected the Lord who is among you.

And I've wept before him saying, why did we come out of Egypt? That's what's going on. They've rejected the Lord. That's what the grumbling is about. It's about rejecting the Lord in the end. I'd be better off if I never heard about Jesus. My life was so simpler before I became a Christian. My life was so much easier. Selective memory is the problem, isn't it?

What is happening here is that they are rejecting the Lord who's redeemed them and rescued them and done so much for them. And what about Moses? Look at verse 10 and following.

It's a really interesting thing that I think Moses refers to himself 20 times in these five verses. Verse 10. Moses heard the people weeping through their clans, each one at the door of his tent.

[16:08] And the anger of the Lord blazed hotly and Moses was displeased. And Moses said, why have you dealt ill with your servant? And why have I not found favour in your sight that you lay the burden of all these people on me?

Did I conceive all these people? Did I give them birth that you should say to me, carry them in your bosom as a nurse carrying a suckling child to the land that you swore to give their fathers?

Where am I to get meat for all these people? For they weep before me and say, give us meat that we may eat. I'm not able to carry all these people alone. The burden's too heavy for me.

If you will treat me like this, kill me at once. If I find favour in your sight that I may not see my righteousness. Now he's obviously under stress. Here's a leader that is stressed out.

He's not sleeping. Do you see what grumbling does? It's really important to see it. Grumbling distorts reality. He takes his eyes off and he turns them in on himself.

[17:06] And instead of being taken up with the promise of God and the power of God and what God has promised to do, Moses turns in on himself and he becomes full of self-pity. I don't believe. How are you going to get these people through the wilderness?

Where are we going to find meat to feed them? God has been giving them manna every day, hasn't he? They didn't lift a finger. God just gave it to them now. And they want meat to eat now.

And Moses says, where am I going to find food to feed all these people? Where am I going to find the meat? Where are you going to find the meat? He says, God I've got 600,000 infantry. There are 2 to 3 million people.

It's a big job that Moses has been given. It's amusing. Where are you going to find the meat? And God says, here. It's easy.

But do you see how tragic it is that Moses, this great leader, this great leader that God has raised up, has turned in on himself and he's feeling sorry for himself. He's full of self-pity.

[18:07] He's ready to give up. In fact, it's worse than that, isn't it? He feels suicidal. He says, I've had enough, God. Please, please. If you're not going to help me, take my life away. And you know what God does?

God is a God of grace, isn't he? God does not deal with you as you deserve. God does not deal with Moses as Moses deserves. Do you know what God does?

God doesn't answer Moses' prayer in that way. Do you see what God does? God makes him a Presbyterian. It's not a judgment or a blessing. What does the word Presbyterian mean?

It means, the word Presbyter means elder. Presbyterianism just really means a multitude of elders. It's not led by one man.

But it's led by a plurality of elders. And here's Moses, he's feeling the burden of leading his people through the wilderness. And he says, I can't possibly do this on my own. And God replies, okay, that's fine. I'll give you 70 elders to help.

[19:08] I'll make you a Presbyterian. And what he does is he gives them all these elders. Why does he give them these elders? To help them carry the load. You see, it's not about you, Moses.

It's never about you. And it's never about me. It's about God's oath and promise. And what God has sworn to do. And people come and people go. And leaders come and leaders go.

And God buries his workers. But the work goes on. And it's all about Moses. And yet you notice in verses 21 and 22. That even after God gives him this promise of help.

Moses is still complaining. Verse 21. But Moses said, the people of Man were by number 600,000 on foot. And you said, I will give them meat and what they may eat for a whole month.

Shall flocks and herds be slaughtered for them and be enough for them. Or shall all the fish of the sea be gathered together for them and be enough for them. And the Lord said to Moses. Is the Lord's hand shortened?

[20:04] Now you shall see whether my word will come true for you or not. It's wonderful how patient the Lord is with Moses. You would have thought the Lord might have clipped him around the ear.

Slapped him about a bit. But no. Is my arm too short that it can't reach? Now you will see whether my word will come true for you or not.

Grumbling is contagious. It is infectious. It turns us back on ourselves. And in the end it will make you disbelieve the promise of God.

And it will make you discount the power of God. And it makes us distrust that providence of God. When God has been so faithful and there is evidence in your life.

And in my life that God has intervened again and again and again. And grumbling turns us in ourselves. And what is to be done with it? Well how does God deal with it in the camp? He does something truly remarkable.

[21 : 05] He pours his spirit out upon them. Look at verse 23. So Moses went out and told the people the words of the Lord. And he gathered sanctity men and the elders of the people.

And he placed them around the tent. And then the Lord came down in the cloud and spoke to him. And took some of the spirit that was on him. And put it on the sanctity elders. And as soon as the spirit rested on them. They prophesied. But they did not continue doing so.

It wasn't an ongoing thing. It was evidence of what God had just done. In the camp of Israel. He had given his spirit to help Moses.

And these men. Just by the way. If God pours his spirit out upon you. It is so that you will bear the burdens of other people. I think you see that again and again.

It's not look at me. I'm a spirit filled person. I've got these great gifts. I can zap you with it. Not at all. When God pours out his Holy Spirit. It's so that you can carry the load for others.

[22 : 05] So that people can come and lean on you. That's what it means to be a spirit filled person. That you'll want to carry others burdens. That's why Jesus says. Come unto me. All you are weary. And heavy laden.

I will give you rest. That's what it means. To have the spirit of God amongst us. And that's what happens here in this camp. I love this bit about Joshua. Joshua is like a kind of.

Cornhill apprentice. To Moses. In verse 26. And following. We're told that these two men. Eldad and Medad. Had remained in the camp. They were elders.

But they obviously weren't in the right time. In the right place. And yet the spirit rested upon them. There's something so. Childish about this. Story. Eldad and Medad.

They are prophesying. And we're told. A young man ran. And told Moses. He finds out about it. I'm telling Moses. He says. And Eldad and Medad. They're prophesying.

[23 : 02] They've got no right to prophesy. That's not the way things are done. We've never had it done this way before. They're out of order. I'm telling Moses. And Joshua son of Nun. Verse 28. Stop them.

Stop them. It shouldn't be happening like this. And don't you love Moses' reply? Such a wonderful thing. Verse 29. Moses said to them. Are you jealous for my sake? Would that all the Lord's people are prophets.

That the Lord would put his spirit on them. And of course. We know that he has. We know that that verse has been fulfilled.

That after the resurrection of Jesus. On the day of Pentecost. God poured out his spirit on all flesh. Do you remember. What we're told in Acts chapter 2.

On the day of Pentecost. Where you see this great fulfillment. In Acts chapter 2. Where Peter says.

[24 : 01] This is what was uttered through the prophet Joel. And in the last days. It shall be. God declares. That I will pour out my spirit. On all flesh. And your sons and your daughters. Shall prophesy. And your young men shall see visions.

And your old men shall dream dreams. Even on my male servants. And female servants. In those days. I will pour out my spirit. And they will prophesy. God's spirit is poured out.

Guess what? All God's people. On the day of Pentecost. Become prophets. They speak the word of God. To one another. Now let me wind this up. My point is.

It is Jesus that we need. Not Moses. Moses falls short here. Doesn't it? It's better than Moses.

That we need. Moses lets you down. Instead of interceding for the people. Like he did at the start of the chapter. Once they start wailing.

[25 : 02] At their tent doors. Instead of interceding for them. He joins with them. And he starts grumbling with them. And he becomes a grumbler too. And he said.

I'd rather die. Than carry on bearing the burden of these people. I'd rather die. Than carry the burden of these people. I can't carry this load.

It's too heavy for me. The burden of my people is too heavy. But Jesus says. I will die to bear that burden. Jesus says.

I will die to bear that burden. So that I can carry them. Into the land flowing with milk and honey. And Jesus turns to the man on the cross. And he says. Today you will be with me in paradise. Why? Not because the man deserved to be there. But because Jesus was bearing his burden. And taking his sin away. So that he could be brought. Into the promised land. And so Jesus stands in the gap.

[25 : 59] And he intercedes for us. In the power of an endless life. And so in the gospels. We read about Simon. Simon didn't know himself. Did he? Do you remember?

Simon Peter said. If everyone else denies you Lord. I won't deny you. And Jesus says to him. Simon. Simon. Simon. Satan has desires to have you.

That he may sift you like wheat. But I have prayed for you. I have prayed for you. And we don't realise how much in danger of hell that we are.

I don't think that there are any here necessarily who are kind of public sinners. Who are kind of scandalous sinners that bring kind of disgrace on the church. But if we are grumblers and moaners. We are just as much in danger of hell. As Adolf Hitler was. And we don't realise that.

[27 : 04] But the wonderful truth is tonight. There is a better than Moses who bears our burdens. Who carries our guilt. Whoever lives to intercede for us. And so if you are a grumbler.

Or a whinger. Or a complainer. What I am saying to you is this. And who isn't? We have all done it haven't we? You need Jesus. You need Jesus. Because without him you are damned. What will happen to grumblers.

If there is no one to intercede for them. Well you can see what is going to happen in verses 31 to 34. What God does for these grumblers. And these murmurers. We want manna.

We want meat. And God says. Okay I will answer your prayers. Sometimes that is the worst thing God can do for you.

It is the worst thing God can do for them. It was the greatest judgement wasn't it? It is the greatest judgement. That anyone can have. For God to answer your prayers sometimes. Romans 1 teaches us.

[28 : 08] That the anger of God is being revealed. Against all godlessness and wickedness. How is God revealing his anger today? He gives people up. He gives people up to what they want. We see that in our culture don't we?

He gives people up to sinful lust. And a depraved mind. And he gives them what they are asking for. And that is the worst thing that can happen for you.

For God to give you what you want. And instead you and I need to plead. That God will give us his spirit. The Holy Spirit might not only be poured out on us.

But live in us. Let's pray. Let's pray. Let's pray.