

Complaining

I grew up a city slicker. Granted, the population of the “city” was about 2,000, there was a farm across the street, a farm a few hundred yards behind us and another one just a lot away but still, my family was in the city limits. I suppose I figured that’s what gave me the right to fuss about the farmers driving their tractors down the road and slowing traffic. The big city guy felt right at home lamenting the slow farmer plodding along on his John Deere. Then one day I saw a bumper sticker on a pickup truck belonging to one of these farmers. It read, “If you complain about farmers, don’t do it with your mouth full.” The point was that if not for the farmers, our food supply would be minimal and we city folk should consider that the next time we’re feeding our faces with the food these farmers were providing.

That memory caused me to think about how often we complain about even the smallest of aggravations or inconveniences. Now, I’m not saying that complaints are completely unproductive. When something goes wrong with a retailer for example, we need to let that retailer know of our dissatisfaction with his or her product or service. What I’m wondering though is how often we complain about our situation in life without considering the many blessings that God has given to us or even without considering the fact that there are probably thousands of people who would gladly trade their lives for ours.

Since all good gifts come from above (James 1:17), could our complaining indicate that we really don’t appreciate what God provides for us on a daily basis? Suppose that you had bought a gift for someone. You had spent a lot of time searching for just the right present and when you saw this particular item you just knew that it was the one. You carefully wrap the gift, all the while imagining the look of delight on the face of the recipient. Now comes the time for the presentation. The person unwraps your gift, takes one look at it and says, “This is really nice, but it’s the wrong color and I don’t like the style. I could never use this, and besides, it looks like it’s really cheap.” I don’t believe I have to tell you how hurt you would feel. Do you suppose a complaining attitude toward God’s blessings and daily gifts hurt Him any less?

The primary Bible example of complainers is Israel in the wilderness. God had taken such marvelous care of them, even to the point that through the forty year period of wandering neither their clothes nor their shoes showed any type of wear and tear (Deuteronomy 29:5). Nevertheless we find records of 13 different complaints that they lodged against God during this time. Here is a list of their complaints:

- When Pharaoh’s army was chasing them (Exodus 14:11)
- When they were thirsty (Exodus 15:23-24)
- When they were hungry (Exodus 16:2-3)
- When they were thirsty again (Exodus 17:1-2)
- When Moses was gone from them for a short time (Exodus 32:1)
- General complaining (Numbers 11:1)
- When they wanted meat (Numbers 11:4)
- Moses got caught up in it too (Numbers 11:11)
- When they were afraid to go into Canaan (Numbers 12:1)
- When God disciplined them due to their disobedience (Numbers 14:1ff)
- Again, when God disciplined them due to their disobedience (Numbers 16:41)
- When they were thirsty again (Numbers 20:3)
- General complaining (Numbers 21:5)

In addition, we find them complaining even before they left Egypt (Exodus 5:21). Certainly from our vantage point it’s easy to criticize Israel for their complaining, but do we ourselves allow trivial matters to lead us to complain? We can look at Israel and wonder why they didn’t know any better. Why would they complain about simple, every day matters like food and water? Why would they allow fear to turn them away from God? Before answering, perhaps we should ask ourselves if we complain about these things as well. If so, why do we do so? If Israel complained because of a lack of appreciation for God’s care as well as a lack of faith, could that be our reason for complaining too?

If we were to have a set of scales on which we could place the blessings of life on one side and the aggravations of life on the other, it would weigh down heavily on the side of the blessings. Paul said it best when he wrote, “And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to the which also ye are called in one body; and be ye thankful.” (Colossians 3:15).

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