

Fear, Faith and Complaints Exodus 16:2-15

Sept 2020

Exodus 16:2-15

2 The whole congregation of the Israelites complained against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness. 3 The Israelites said to them, "If only we had died by the hand of the LORD in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the fleshpots and ate our fill of bread; for you have brought us out into this wilderness to kill this whole assembly with hunger." 4 Then the LORD said to Moses, "I am going to rain bread from heaven for you, and each day the people shall go out and gather enough for that day. In that way I will test them, whether they will follow my instruction or not. 5 On the sixth day, when they prepare what they bring in, it will be twice as much as they gather on other days." 6 So Moses and Aaron said to all the Israelites, "In the evening you shall know that it was the LORD who brought you out of the land of Egypt, 7 and in the morning you shall see the glory of the LORD, because he has heard your complaining against the LORD. For what are we, that you complain against us?" 8 And Moses said, "When the LORD gives you meat to eat in the evening and your fill of bread in the morning, because the LORD has heard the complaining that you utter against him--what are we? Your complaining is not against us but against the LORD." 9 Then Moses said to Aaron, "Say to the whole congregation of the Israelites, 'Draw near to the LORD, for he has heard your complaining.'" 10 And as Aaron spoke to the whole congregation of the Israelites, they looked toward the wilderness, and the glory of the LORD appeared in the cloud. 11 The LORD spoke to Moses and said, 12 "I have heard the complaining of the Israelites; say to them, 'At twilight you shall eat meat, and in the morning you shall have your fill of bread; then you shall know that I am the LORD your God.'" 13 In the evening quails came up and covered the camp; and in the morning there was a layer of dew around the camp. 14 When the layer of dew lifted, there on the surface of the wilderness was a fine flaky substance, as fine as frost on the ground. 15 When the Israelites saw it, they said to one another, "What is it?" For they did not know what it was. Moses said to them, "It is the bread that the LORD has given you to eat."

Introduction:

The great value of the book of Exodus.

- It anticipates what churches commonly experience when travelling together with a leader.
- It's a text book of typical dynamics, pitfalls, triumphs and tragedies that happen when you have 1. God, 2. a group of people and 3. an appointed leader trying to move them all together.
- It's the story of a man who has met with God being commissioned to take a tribal clan of slaves on a transforming adventure to a new homeland they have only ever heard about.
 - Now slaves have some attitudes that play into this.
 - They only know leadership as boss-man dominance.
 - They were not used to making decisions.
 - They are not used to adventure. Life is regular: you eat, you work, you rest.
 - Archeology of worker's dwellings around Egyptian pyramids suggest that slave workers had good diets, simple homes and so were not mistreated as much as we might expect. Egypt was rich in food but life was lived around building sites and not roaming the open spaces.

I will not go into this but here is something to consider: Even in our age of prosperity and freedom, some people at least have a slave mentality. There are no chains around the ankles or physical limitations but still, the mindset is that of a slave used to life's basic realities and unable to live free. They have a very defined comfort zone beyond which they are not ready to go.

A good day in Exodus

Last week we heard the all-important story of the people of Israel being rescued from the military might of Egypt at a place known in Hebrew as *Yam Suph*. We know this in English as the Red Sea or Reed Sea. All this raises questions about where it was and how deep it was.

At the end of this great day we read in chapter 14.31

Israel saw the great work that the LORD did against the Egyptians. So the people feared the LORD and believed in the LORD and in his servant Moses.

This is my springboard for looking at today's segment of the Exodus Story.

It's such a good verse because it identifies the three parties involved in the people of God when they go on a journey.

Israel all recognized that on this day they had been saved. God had acted to save them. Washed out chariots and dead Egyptians lay where a few hours earlier they expected to die that day.

So the people got three things clear in their hearts and mind that would hold them together and aligned.

#1 The people feared the LORD

#2 The people believed in the LORD

#3 The people believed in the LORD's servant Moses.

That was a good day in Exodus.

That would be a good day in Church too.

This is the basic plot.

- Take God seriously
- Trust God
- Trust those who serve and lead as servants of God.

Q: What do you think now?

- Was this a good day in Exodus?
- Would this be a good day in Church?

The trick is to keep these elements in priority, clear and separate

Now a not-so-good day in Exodus

So we come to Exodus chapter 16

Which begins this way from verse 2:

2 The whole congregation of the Israelites complained against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness. 3 The Israelites said to them, "If only we had died by the hand of the LORD in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the fleshpots and ate our fill of bread; for you have brought us out into this wilderness to kill this whole assembly with hunger."

What has changed between the end of chapter 14 and chapter 16?

Instead of having their considerations in order of Fear God, Trust God and then Trust Moses his servant.

When the going gets tough, complain direct to Moses and his brother Aaron.

Q: What happened to the fear of the LORD and the trust in the LORD?

A: My answer has two parts:

A: The LORD and Moses have been disassociated

B: The LORD is no longer trusted or feared and is effectively out of consideration.

Can you see that?

Exactly -

- when the awareness of God should have been strong and focused in a time of need and hardship.
- when people should have been calling out to God their provider and praying for their daily bread.

At that moment the people, all of them focus on Moses with Aaron and complain. They moan and groan to the point where Moses feels unsafe. It is a full-scale pity party by unhappy people who have forgotten about their God.

But God is gracious and begins remedial work. We read from verse 4 how the Lord and Moses seek to re orientate the people to fear and trust the Lord with Moses simply being a local servant leader under God.

4 Then the LORD said to Moses, "I am going to rain bread from heaven for you, and each day the people shall go out and gather enough for that day. In that way I will test them, whether they will follow my instruction or not. 5 On the sixth day, when they prepare what they bring in, it will be twice as much as they gather on other days." 6 So Moses and Aaron said to all the Israelites, "In the evening you shall know that it was the LORD who brought you out of the land of Egypt, 7 and in the morning you shall see the glory of the LORD, because he has heard your complaining against the LORD. For what are we, that you complain against us?" 8 And Moses said, "When the LORD gives you meat to eat in the evening and your fill of bread in the morning, because the LORD has heard the complaining that you utter against him--what are we? Your complaining is not against us but against the LORD."

So when you complain, OK Moses and Aaron are easy targets, but your issue is really with the LORD. Take it all up with the LORD and not just his servants.

Application

I have seen a lot of this in church land.

There is un happiness and some or many people start to complain about the Leader.

I can fully understand that in a political party or secular government.

I can understand that in a tennis club

I can understand that in an orchestra or a football team.

In a church among the people of God the leader does need to be carefully looked at.

But he or she is in importance well behind the bigger reality of God whose people we are and who sustains and feeds us.

How do you confuse the creator, sustainer and judge of all creation with local management?

When Israel fell to complaining because food ran out, they turned their backs on God.

The Lord then had to get them looking at him again as their provider and protector.

I could say much more about this because from my experience, unhappy people in church will complain and complain, and who better to complain about than the pastor, or sometimes the pastor's wife?

What I would suggest to apply from this is as follows.

Are you unhappy about something?

That can happen. There is no commandment insisting that you always be happy.

But if unhappy, feeling a lack or just sad.

#1 Pray to God. Seek the LORD in and through what you are facing. Where are you Lord? - Psalm model this well.

#2 Place your trust in him. Consider what God might be doing in you and his church at this time? - Laments get there after venting complaint.

#3 Pray for those who serve in God's house.

Now what was that complaint again?

That is a path to spiritual maturity in faith.

Now I have one very simple application in mind
 Within the next year you may well have a new pastor?
 Before that you will have an interim pastor, perhaps two?

You will notice quite quickly these pastors are different from what you are used to either as experienced in me or other pastors.

Their way of leading might be quite different from what you are used to or expect.
 He/she will come doing their best, no one moves to a new church to not do their best but it may not scratch where you itch?
 Some people might leave? Typically 10% do, while another 10% come in which is change that those in very stable churches might find destabilizing?

Make the LORD your 'Go to'. Muzzle the complaint muscle until you have prayed and sought God on how to understand what you experience.

Finally, do dip into Exodus and ask yourself, whether you recognize some church life in this bunch of slaves being taken out on an adventure to be the people of God.