

"You Murmured In Your Tents"

Have you ever murmured? Maybe we don't use that word much. In our passage we see Israel murmuring. Murmuring is something often done in private, either to yourself, or to a small audience. The word here in verse 27 could also be translated as "whisper," or maybe even "grumble." Usually when the bible talks about the sin of murmuring it's referring to that quiet complaining that we like to do. It might be like a mix of slander and gossip. It's something that's usually shared in private or just to yourself, instead of voicing your feelings publically.

Well, the sin of murmuring is one of several sins in this passage. And yet in many ways it's the sin of murmuring that becomes so devastating here for Israel. And of course, the sin of murmuring is really something that reveals the condition of their heart. It's not so much that murmuring causes a heart to go hard, but that a hard heart results in murmuring. And yet murmuring can be so destructive because it can then sow further seeds of unbelief and discouragement among yourself and with others. Murmuring often stirs up rebellion and other sins. And this is all a part of what we see going on in this passage with the nation of Israel. And so today I want us to look at this sin of murmuring, both with Israel, and with us. But of course, most of all, we'll be looking again this morning at the gospel of Jesus Christ, even as we think about the sin of murmuring.

As we start out our passage for today, we start out on a good note. Israel had completed their initial wilderness journey. They had left Mount Sinai. They went on the journey from there to Kadesh Barnea. Earlier in the chapter we were told that this was an eleven day journey, so it was probably a fairly quick journey, but it was a *tough* journey. We don't know if it did only take eleven days, but no matter how long it took, it would have been tough. It says in verse 19 that they had to go through a great and terrible wilderness to get there. Well, the geography confirms this. This journey would have been over one hundred miles long, and they would have had to go through a waterless limestone plateau to get there. It wouldn't have been a very fun journey. Again, verse 19 says it was *terrible*. But they had made it. They were in Kadesh Barnea.

They were now right on the edge of the Promised Land. It was time for the conquest. It was time for the Israelites to go in and take the Promised Land. That's what verse 20 says. They had come to the area controlled by the Amorites, and this was part of the land that the Lord was going to give them. In verse 21, Moses reiterates God's promise. He basically tells everyone at that time, "Hey, guess what, we're finally here! The promise is about to be fulfilled. God promised our forefather's we'd inherit this Promised Land, and we are about to see the fulfillment of it!"

So the people proceed to obey God. They decide that the first step should be to send out some spies to check out the land. This would let them know the best route to take, check out the enemy ahead of time, figure out what cities they'll have to capture, etc. Moses thought it was a good plan, and so he agrees, and sends out one spy for each of the twelve tribes of Israel. And so all Israel is represented by these spies.

Well, the spies come back. They had good news and bad news. But unfortunately, it seems that only the bad news really resonates with the people. Look at the scout's report. Verse 28 tells us the bad news. There's concern over the people, and there's concern over the cities. The people, the enemy they'd have to conquer: they are taller and greater than the Israelites. It goes on to tell us that they were sons of the Anakim. We don't know a lot about the Anakim, just that they were basically giants. Well, giants still exist today, as I'm sure most of you are aware, for different medical reasons. And evidently at times in history there've been groups of people like the Anakim who generally exhibited these traits. Well that was the enemy they were being faced with, and that was scary. Do a search on google on gigantism, and you can find a list of well known people who are classified as giants medically. Then you can see some pictures of them in relation to other people: there's quite a difference. Then think of a whole city generally full of such giants. That would be a pretty scary prospect for trying to take over that city.

And then along the same lines, the scouts report back that the cities are fortified up to heaven. That's obviously not a technical description. It's exaggeration by the scouts. But the point is clear. The cities would not be easily taken. The cities full of tall people were surrounded by tall walls. Who were they to conquer these people and places?

And so we see the people's response to this bad news in verse 27. The sin of murmuring. It says, "And you murmured in your tents, and said, 'Because the LORD hates us, He has brought us out of the land of Egypt to deliver us into the hand of the Amorites, to destroy us.'" Again, murmuring is basically a form of complaining. But notice the private, almost secret, nature of murmuring. Notice where they murmur. It's in their tents. In the quiet of their own homes. Where they think no one will hear. But God hears. God knows when we murmur.

Of course, that's who the murmuring is against here. It's against God. Look at the horrible thing they say about God. They accuse God of hating them. They accuse God of plotting their destruction, as if God went through all this trouble to free them from the Egyptians just to have the Amorites destroy them. This obviously couldn't be further from the truth. It was God's great love and kindness that's been at work the whole time. Just read the Psalms, and you see lots of description of God's steadfast love for his people. The people complained against God, and they falsely impugned God's motives. Of course, isn't this such a common temptation for us when we start to complain about others? One of the first things we do is assume someone's motives. But we can't read people's minds. Unless they tell us their motives, we can't presume to know them. And so how much worse is that the case here with Israel? God's motives *have* been clear. He had promised to graciously bring them into this land, not destroy them.

And so Israel not only murmurs about God, but also about the situation. After slandering God, they then complain about the situation. Look at verse 28. We see them complaining about what they learned from the spies. They ask "Where can we go up?" Then they go on to complain about the big people and the big fortified cities. They just don't have any hope of taking over these people, they say. They don't want to go back to Egypt. They don't think they can go into the Promised Land. And they certainly don't want to go back into that terrible wilderness. Where can they go?

And so think about their murmuring. They are discouraged and afraid. They say in verse 26 that their brothers discouraged them by their report. And certainly their murmuring is not helping the matter. The more they murmur from tent to tent, the more people just get stirred up. The more they lose hope. The more afraid they become. They sink in discouragement. And what's the result? The result ultimately is disobedience. They don't go up. God had called them to go up and take the Promised Land. Verse 21. He told them to go up and possess it. But they don't. They just sit there, murmuring. They sit there afraid, hopeless, and discouraged. They blame God and pity themselves.

All of this murmuring ultimately reveals their heart. Look at verse 32. "Yet, for all that, you did not believe the LORD your God." Isn't that the fundamental problem for the Jews here? Their fundamental problem was unbelief. Their hearts are revealed by their murmuring. They didn't believe God. They didn't trust that he could then bring them into the Land. If they trusted in anyone, it was in themselves, but they didn't do that even. Look at their fears. They themselves can't take over these tall people with these tall fortified cities. But that was their problem. They knew they couldn't do it, and they were right. But what they failed to see, is that they needed God to do it. They needed to put their hope in God to bring them into the land.

I think back to Moses and the burning bush. When God told Moses to go to Pharaoh, Moses at first objected. Moses basically asked who he was, to go to Pharaoh demanding that the Jews go free. And God basically told Moses he was right, he was no one. But God would be with Moses. God would do the work. If God is with you, then you have no reason to fear. That's what the Israelites needed here. They needed to have faith in God. If God was with them, it didn't matter that the cities are fortified *up to heaven*, because God is *in heaven*, and made the heavens. God could do what they couldn't do. They were right to recognize their inability. But they failed by doubting God's ability. Their murmuring revealed their heart. Their hearts were hardened with unbelief.

I suspect this is at the root of why we ourselves murmur and complain. That fundamentally it's from lack of trust in God's plan for our lives. We don't believe that God really is leading and guiding us in a good way. We're not content with what he's doing in our lives. And so we complain and point the finger at God or at others.

So I hope now you're beginning to see how Israel *should* have responded. They should have responded with faith. With trust. They should not have been discouraged, but encouraged. I can point to so many reasons here why this should have been their response.

First, in light of God's promise. Moses reiterated God's promise to bring them into the land. Verse 20. Moses says this is the land God was about to give them. Verse 21 Moses reminds them that this was a promise God made long ago to their forefathers. Why should they doubt God's promise? He hadn't lied to them yet. He'd kept all his promises so far, which of course includes bringing them out of Egypt with a mighty hand. They have no reason to doubt either God's ability or his truthfulness. God's reminder of his promise to bring them into the land should have increased their faith and left them encouraged.

Second, God's command should also be a reason for them to have responded in faith. God commanded them to go and take the land in verse 21. He was their covenant Lord. He was their God. The right response was obedience to his command.

Third, God's encouragement should have been a reason for them to have responded in faith. Twice God specifically encourages them here through Moses. In verse 21 and in verse 29, God specifically addresses their natural emotions. Do not fear or be discouraged, he says. Don't be terrified or afraid of them. God addresses the very temptation of the heart that he knew they would be going on in them. God speaks to their heart words of encouragement. When the almighty God encourages you and assures you, you should be encouraged and assured!

Fourth, the report of the spies should have encouraged them. They only chose to really listen to the bad part of their report. It's as if they missed the good news completely. The spies come back saying that the land is a good land. Verse 25. They even bring back a cluster of grapes as proof that it's a good land. This *confirms* God's Word. God had previously told them that he was bringing them into a *good* land; a land of milk and honey. When the spies check it out, they confirm what God had promised. Indeed, it was a good land. If it was a good land, that means God had told the truth about it. That should lead them to trust God's Word all the more. If God told them the truth about the quality of the land, why should they doubt God's promise to bring them into the land? Again, this is a reason why their faith and trust in God should be encouraged, not discouraged.

Fifth, they should be encouraged when you contrast God with the spies. Moses says something interesting in verse 33. Look with me there. Moses is trying to encourage the people. He tells them that God had gone before them to search out a place for them. God had led them all the way through the wilderness and now here to the Promised Land. The people had wanted to send spies to check out the land. No matter how the spies reported, it could never match the work of God going ahead of them to check things out. God's report and God's advice trumped anything that any human spies could give them. They should have trusted in God over man.

Sixth, and finally, in light of the history between God and them, they should have responded with faith. What God had already done for them, should have encouraged them. That's what Moses tells them starting in verse 30. He points back to the Exodus. God was powerful enough to bring them out of Egypt. He points back in verse 31 to the wilderness, how God brought them safely through. God uses the imagery in verse 31 of a man carrying his son. I've personally done a lot of that recently. Will is starting to get pretty heavy. But I love my son, and it's my pleasure to pick him up and carry him. And usually I do that when we need to go to places that he wouldn't be able to get to very easily on his own. It's part of my love for him as my son. How dare the people think that their God didn't love them! He loves them as a father loves a son. Everything that God had done for them up to this point should have told them that. It should have encouraged them. It should have strengthened their faith.

And so do you see all these reasons why the people should have responded with faith and trust in God? Do you see why they should have been encouraged, not discouraged? Do you see why their murmuring was so shameful in light of this? They missed all these signs. They missed all these things that God was doing for them. Of course, what about us? Do we murmur against God,

while missing all the signs of his work in our lives? Do we get into complaining about God, or about our circumstances of life, while failing to see the very things God is doing in our lives?

I hope you see that there was no place for murmuring here with the Israelites. They had no right to murmur against God or about their situation. They shouldn't have been grumbling or complaining. There was no place for that in the old covenant. God worked so mightily in their lives. We've seen just a small snapshot of that today.

But if that was the case for the Israelites back then, how much more is that the case now with the coming of Christ. If there was no reason to murmur under the old covenant, how much more is there no reason to murmur under the new covenant? Just think about what Moses says in light of their murmuring. Beginning in verse 29, Moses tries to encourage them by appealing to everything that God had done for them. We just mentioned all those things. If Moses could appeal to what God had done for them, as a reason not to murmur, think about Christ. How much more has God now done for his people by sending Jesus?

God did not spare even his own son, but sent Jesus Christ to save us! Through Jesus Christ, God's people have something better than freedom from Egyptian slavery. We have freedom from the slavery of sin. Through Jesus Christ, God now carries us through the wilderness of life. For Jesus has sent his Spirit to live inside us, to guide us all the way home. To persevere us in our walk with him. The people under the old covenant knew this was coming, but they had to trust in faith that it would happen. They could only look back on the wonders of the Exodus. But if the miracle of the Exodus was a sufficient reason for them not to murmur, how much more is that the case with the coming of Jesus. As God's people, he has freed us from sin in Christ.

And so I'd ask then, what circumstance in your life would warrant murmuring? In light of Jesus? What circumstance? I can't find any. Oh, I could think of plenty of circumstances to grumble and complain about. Murmuring is an easy thing to do. But if we really think about the full ramification of what Christ has done for us, I just can't justify any murmuring in my life.

And yet saints, we know that murmuring is such an easy sin to fall into. And so I remind us again today of the gospel. That Jesus died on the cross even for the sin of murmuring. That even in sins like this that we might still struggle with, there is forgiveness at the cross. Believe in Jesus, trust in the cross, and be encouraged. Because if you have, then your sins are forgiven. Even all the murmurs against God you may have made said, and will yet say in the future. That's the good news of salvation in Jesus! Again, a reason why we ought never to murmur, by the grace of God, of course, in our lives.

And so saints of God, having tasted of the mercy of God in Christ, how ought we to live, in light of this truth? If we know the dangers of murmuring, let's do strive to rid our lives of this. Pray for strength against this. Struggle against it by the power of Christ in your life.

Murmuring is sinful. It's discouraging. It sows seeds of rebellion in your hearts and in the hearts of others as they hear you grumble and complain. You know, what's the opposite of murmuring? It's encouragement. It's

praise. Let's speak words of encouragement to others. Let's speak to God things of praise and trust.

You know this is especially pertinent for the church. I think this is all too common for people in a church to fall into the sin of murmuring. Often it's because of dissatisfaction over what the church and its leadership is doing. Sometimes those are legitimate concerns. Other times they are not. Sometimes leaders in the church deviate from the authority of Scripture. At that point, we should be concerned. But even in that case, murmuring is not the solution. Grumbling and complaining is not the solution. Sin is never the right response to sin.

Instead of going around murmuring, we need to each go around encouraging. And if there is a legitimate concern that you have about something the church is doing, or not doing, then there is a way to address it. Start by bringing it to the Lord in prayer. Then, find a humble way to bring it to the church leaders. And I say this next thing cautiously: Don't be afraid to be a persistent widow about it. What I mean is, if you bring to my attention, or to the attention of the elders, and don't feel the issue is adequately addressed, then don't just go murmuring, bring it up to us again. If God tells us to pray like a persistent widow, continuing to bring a matter to him, then we as church leaders should have the patience and openness to have you bring a matter repeatedly to our attention, until the concern is adequately addressed. I as your pastor, plead with you to bring your concerns to me. Don't just let them fester inside you or become an opportunity for grumbling and complaining. Of course the other side of that, is that if you bring a matter to the elders of the church, you should come with an attitude that is willing to be shepherded. You should come willing to adjust your concerns if the elders present you with a biblical justification for why they are doing what they are doing.

And yet I continue to submit, that murmuring about a concern, either against God or about a particular situation, is never the godly solution. Let's not murmur. This is something that will help you in every place in life. Not just in a church setting. Murmuring can poison any institution. It can poison families, schools, organizations, civil governments, etc. It breeds politicking, and divisions, and can just eat away at your heart, while at the same time demoralizing others. This is true in a church setting, and it's true in any setting. Instead find biblical ways to deal with concerns and conflicts.

At the end of the day, when we struggle with murmuring, we need to look inward. Regardless if the situation is something legitimately to be concerned about or not, the temptation to murmur represents a heart problem. This passage shows us that our murmuring represents a lack of faith and trust in God. It's representative of the seeds of disobedience that we are already sowing in your hearts. Look at your own murmuring and I think you'll find this to be true.

If we really believe that Christ is working *all things* in our life for good, then our grumbling and complaining is against God. Even if we don't directly blame God in our grumbles. Our complaints ultimately come back to him. Instead, if we find our satisfaction in Christ, if we find our contentment in him, then whatever situation befalls us, we can say, it is well with my soul.

So that's the ultimate solution for our murmuring. When you find yourself tempted to murmur, realize this is an issue of our heart. And so turn again

to our Lord, the one who changes hearts and changes lives. Look to his Spirit to work heart change in your life. And be content to trust in him that he will work this in just the right time and in just the right way. God may even be using your particular trial that's before you to do that very thing; the thing you want to murmur about! God doesn't want us terrified, or discouraged, or dissatisfied. He didn't give up his own son so that we could live such a defeated life. And so let's not feed our murmuring with unbelief. Let's meet our murmurs with a greater trust in Christ, and in his plan for our lives. He will not disappoint us. Amen.

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