

## EXODUS 16

<sup>2</sup>The entire Israelite community grumbled against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness. <sup>3</sup>The Israelites said to them, “If only we had died by the LORD’s hand in the land of Egypt, when we sat around pots of meat and ate as much food as we wanted, but now you have brought us out into this wilderness to have this whole community die of hunger.” <sup>4</sup>Then the LORD said to Moses, “Watch what I will do. I will rain down bread from heaven for you, and the people will go out each day and gather enough for that day. In this way I will test whether they will follow my instructions or not. <sup>5</sup>On the sixth day they will prepare what they bring in, and it will be twice as much as they gather on the other days.” <sup>6</sup>So Moses and Aaron said to all the Israelites, “At evening you will know that it was the LORD who brought you out of the land of Egypt, <sup>7</sup>and in the morning you will see the Glory of the LORD, because he has heard your constant grumbling against the LORD. Who are we that you should grumble against us?” <sup>8</sup>Moses said, “Now the LORD will give you meat to eat in the evening and as much bread as you want in the morning, because the LORD has heard your grumbling against him. Who are we? Your grumbling is not against us but against the LORD.” <sup>9</sup>Then Moses said to Aaron, “Tell the entire Israelite community, ‘Come before the LORD, because he has heard your grumbling.’” <sup>10</sup>As Aaron spoke to the entire Israelite community, they turned toward the wilderness, and suddenly the Glory of the LORD appeared in the cloud. <sup>11</sup>The LORD spoke to Moses: <sup>12</sup>“I have heard the grumbling of the Israelites. Say to them, ‘At evening you will eat meat, and in the morning you will eat bread until you are full. Then you will know that I am the LORD your God.’” <sup>13</sup>So in the evening quail came and covered the camp, and in the morning a layer of dew surrounded the camp. <sup>14</sup>When the layer of dew was gone, there were thin flakes on the surface of the wilderness, thin as frost on the ground. <sup>15</sup>When the Israelites saw it, they said to one another, “What is it?” because they did not know what it was. Moses said to them, “This is the bread which the LORD has given to you as food to eat.



I’d like to tell you about the “Church of the Holy Roller Coaster.” This was the greatest concept for a church ever. The plan was to purchase an old amusement park and call it “church.” “Going to church” at the “Church of the Holy Roller Coaster” meant doing the happiest things on earth—roller coasters, scramblers, concessions, food and candy and everything that gives you immediate pleasure. Going to the roller coaster was considered going to church, and the pastor

counted it that way. It was almost like a new religion, because you could find your experience with God in the loops and twists and speed of Bible-themed ride. The plan was foolproof. No one would ever complain about going to “church” again—not at the “Church of the Holy Roller Coaster.”

But as fun as church was, there was something missing. The days when you could attend grew hot. The lines were long. The food was not good for you. The children started to poke and bother each other. You really only got a few minutes on each worship service. It wasn’t the nicest theme park in the world or anything. The biggest missing piece of the puzzle was that it just didn’t feel like *church*.

Free admission made the park difficult to support. The church had to charge offerings, and then people really complained, grew frustrated, and stayed home. So the park deteriorated and people grew tired and largely forgot about the “Church of the Holy Roller Coaster.” So that church failed. Isn’t the human heart predictable? Imagine **complaints** at the “Church of the Holy Roller Coaster”!

Imagine **complaints** from God’s people who were led out of slavery into freedom. Maybe we could say the Israelites were suffering from “selective memory syndrome.” You know what it is. We remember what we want to remember and forget what we want to forget.

Only about 30 days had passed since God led the Israelites out of slavery. And during that short time, the people of Israel apparently forgot everything they’d ever known about Egypt, their home for 400 years.

- They suddenly forgot the Egyptians enslaved them with hard labor.
- They forgot they were forced to make twice the bricks and get their own straw.
- They forgot Pharaoh commanded the murder of their baby boys.
- They suddenly forgot the signs and mighty plagues and how God let the Egyptians have it from every direction.
- They forgot God parted the Red Sea and God brought them through it without getting a single sandal wet.
- They suddenly forgot God destroyed the chariots of Egypt.

Instead, God’s people chose to remember only this—when they were in Egypt, they had meat. This is what sin does. Sin afflicts us all, even us believers who have known God’s mercy and kindness. Sin not only changes our actions for the worse but twists our attitudes. It brings on our selective memory and opens the floodgates to complaining.

We should probably not be too hard on these people of Israel. Oh, they deserve the criticism. They grumbled and were ungrateful and complained. Their lack of trust was inexcusable. They sinned and it's not even close.

Yet we've been just as impatient. Think about it; we start getting cranky after spending four or five hours in a minivan. They didn't even have cars, but they were walking through a desert. They'd been doing this for something like a month. We get irritable and complain if we miss a meal, but the Israelites were living in the desert. It was difficult to find even a glass of water.

Bible scholars estimate there were as many as 2 million Israelites wandering through the desert, one of the driest places on earth. Food was not their only problem. What about clothes? There were no Wal-Marts in the desert. There were no hospitals. It would take a miracle to provide for all these people.

Nice to have the God of miracles around! God is able. "*The LORD said to Moses, "Watch what I will do. I will rain down bread from heaven for you, and the people will go out each day and gather enough for that day"* (16:4). When the people needed water, God made it gush forth from a rock. When they needed food, He dropped bread from heaven onto the ground every morning. When they needed meat, quail flocked to them every evening knee-high and reported dutifully to the butchers. Talk about awesome miracles of love and power! These were miracles straight from the Lord who hears His people's complaints.

We do it too, don't we? Sunday school students complain about learning a memory verse or having to pay attention. Husbands and wives complain that they never had that discussion about that family activity. Christian couples complain about having to wait until marriage to indulge in the marriage bed. Pastors complain that no one is helping them with their bad idea. And church leaders complain that people aren't treating them like God.

Is it possible that even God has selective memory? He seems to forget all this complaining, at least in the meantime. You wonder what He may say when, three times (16:7,9,12), He "*heard the constant grumbling*" of His own people. Well, they're ingrates! This is going to be good! Drop a plague or lightning bolt or something on them from heaven! It must have been quite a sight when the Glory of the Lord descended in the cloud and appeared to them. The Almighty Lord of heaven and earth was standing just outside their camp.

But the Lord did not drop death and plagues. His true glory does not lie in punishing the wicked. He was patient with them, not wanting any of them to perish. He was selective with them, remembering not them but His own love. As always, the Lord remembered His promise to Abraham. He selectively remembered His own covenant of grace. He remembered not the sins of Israel, but instead He kept in mind the seed of Eve that would come through their line. He remembered His rescue plan of the Messiah from sin. And in the cloud, the Lord came to drop blessing on them instead.

## **THE LORD HEARS YOUR COMPLAINTS**

The Lord will hear your complaints now—your appeals, your requests, even your roller coaster laments. He'll even hear you when your prayers are sinful, for we do not know how to do this well. He may give us many opportunities for complaints, but we will always complain if we look at life from the top-down. If we always expect life in this sinful world to be ceiling-high perfection, life will never meet our expectations. There will be no end to our complaints.

If we instead look at life from the bottom-up, life looks much better. Count every blessing, starting with the most basic. Construct our life blessings from the bottom-up, knowing we have life, breath, food, sleep, etc. Then we count the luxuries. Then we mix in the fact that we don't even deserve the basics due to our sin, then how could we not laugh and shout for joy every moment? But God does not leave us wallowing in earthly promises alone. On top of it all He gives us life eternal, for free, for nothing, no cost at all!

There was something that people need more than food, more than roller coasters, more than immediate pleasures. When we were lost and helpless in the desert of our own sin, God heard our cry and gave us what we needed. He sent His Son, Jesus, as the Bread of Life that feeds our souls. Through Him God has given us forgiveness of sins and eternal life. He gives us Himself forever. There is now no condemnation, not even for our complaining. That sin is taken away. We have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. He who has all authority in heaven and on earth promises He is surely with us always. How will God not also, along with His Son, Jesus Christ, graciously give us all things? Amen.

Now the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in Him, so that you may overflow with hope, through the power of the Holy Spirit. Amen.