

Perhaps some of us remember the incident about twenty years ago. Anna Ayala claimed to have found a human finger in a bowl of Wendy's chili. Wendy's determined the ensuing investigations and bad publicity cost them \$21 Million. That's quite a complaint to lodge!

3. We often lodge complaints, even with God. It would appear as though complaints are the national pastime of our nation. We can complain about the weather. We can complain about family. We can complain about work. We're not quite happy with our health. We grumble about the latest decision of a politician or what most recently broke at our house. We live in a land of discontentment.

The more things change, the more they stay the same. **“All the congregation of the people of Israel moved on from the wilderness of Sin by stages, according to the commandment of the LORD, and camped at Rephidim, but there was no water for the people to drink. Therefore the people quarreled with Moses and said, “Give us water to drink.” And Moses said to them, “Why do you quarrel with me? Why do you test the LORD?” But the people thirsted there for water, and the people grumbled against Moses and said, “Why did you bring us up out of Egypt, to kill us and our children and our livestock with thirst?””**

The people of Israel are thirsty, and what comes from this thirst? Quarreling, testing, and grumbling. Moses even comments to the Lord that they are ready to stone him! We need to rewind a bit and understand that the Israelites had seen a lifetime's worth of miracles in the span of a few months: the ten plagues including the Passover, God guided them as a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night, God parted the Red Sea, Moses turned bitter water sweet, and manna and quail rained down from heaven.

You would think that in the face of all these miracles and wonders they would get with the program, but at the first sign of trouble, we see the Israelites grumbling again, lodging a complaint against Moses, and even more than that, lodging a complaint against the God who redeemed them out of Egypt. Not only do they complain, they accuse Moses of taking them into the wilderness to die. They long to be back in Egypt where at least they had water.

Yes, we can even complain to God. However, I think there is a difference. There is certainly room for us to confess disappointment, sadness, and even anger at God. In fact, there are many Psalms written in the Bible that do just that. The Lord wants us to be open and honest with Him when we approach Him in prayer. However, the important part is to always understand that God is God and we aren't. We may not understand why God lets grandma get sick and die. We may not understand why we've had to pay our fifth unexpected major bill in three months. But we can do so with a humility that understands that God is still in control.

It becomes sinful when we demand answers like we're in charge and God is our servant. We see this attitude in the Israelites. It was as though they were the real God and the Lord was beholden to their beck and call. God doesn't want us lodging complaints with Him as though we could trap Him and prove that He's to blame after all and somehow made a mistake.

Yet oftentimes in life when we complain and grumble, we're the ones who end up humiliated. When our concerns come to light, we were not so righteous after all. As more evidence was discovered regarding the case, Anna Ayala was the one who planted the finger. The entire thing was a fraud. Within six months of Ayala claiming to have discovered the finger in the chili, her and her husband were arrested and sentenced to nine and twelve years of prison, respectively.

Likewise, 2. God uses our complaints to lodge His law within our hearts. When we go out on a hunt to trap God, we find that we're the ones trapped. When we want to bring God to court, we're the ones who end up indicted.

God speaking through the Psalmist writes, **“Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts, as at Meribah, as on the day at Massah in the wilderness, when your fathers put me to the test and put me to the proof, though they had seen my work. For forty years I loathed that generation and said, “They are a people who go astray in their heart, and they have not known my ways.” Therefore I swore in my wrath, “They shall not enter my rest.””** Because of the pattern of hard-heartedness and complaining, the Israelites who were freed from slavery in Egypt would wander through the desert for forty years and would not get to see the Promised Land. They wanted to grumble and complain, but the Lord had the last laugh.

God uses our complaints and grumbings as a chance to speak His word of law to us. God's law isn't always easy to hear, but it's often what we need to hear. In many cases the problems about which we complain are self-inflicted. The headache is a result of having stayed up too late last night watching television. The mechanic did warn you several times about the timing belt, yet you chose to ignore it. Your dad let you know that if you stayed out past curfew one more time, you would lose cell phone privileges for a week.

Yet there are many things in life which have no good explanation. Nonetheless, God's Law has a diagnosis. The Bible tells us **“For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now.”** Should it not surprise us that there are earthquakes, tornadoes, and other natural phenomena? God's law tells us that the consequences of sin is death. Should it surprise us that we grow old and frail as sin takes its toll on our bodies?

What's the most amazing of all of this is that God still provides for us even despite complaints. 1. Despite complaints, God wants to lodge with us. The Lord speaks to Moses saying, **“Behold, I will stand before you there on the rock at**

Horeb, and you shall strike the rock, and water shall come out of it, and the people will drink.” And Moses did so, in the sight of the elders of Israel.”

The Lord could have zapped the people to dust starting over. The Lord could have let a few people die of starvation just to make them feel the consequences of their sinful hard-heartedness, but the craziest thing is that despite the fact that the Israelites treat the Lord so horribly, He actually delivers.

Despite our bad attitude, despite our complaining, God still wants to be with us and provide for us. Paul tells us that Christ was the Rock which followed the Israelites in the wilderness. God the Son was watching over Moses and the elders even in the wilderness.

The ultimate example of God caring for a discontented and grumbling people was when He sent His Son into this world to lodge with sinners. Jesus came to save us from our sins. Jesus provided the people miracle after miracle: miraculously multiplying fishes and loaves, healing the sick, and even turning water into wine.

Yet He was not received. Some sought to stone Him claiming He was speaking blasphemy saying He was God. They eventually arrested Him and took Him to court to try Him for that charge of blasphemy. They tortured and crucified Him.

Yet it is in that cross that we find our complaints and grumbings somehow fade into the background. We see our sins having nailed Him to the tree, and yet in this we see the Son of God willingly and gladly suffering for sinners just like you and me, just as He portrayed such longsuffering for His people in the wilderness in Exodus.

From this Rock flows water. The same water promised to the woman at the well, living water welling up to eternal life. Living water which satisfies and produces contentment, even in the most adverse circumstances. This is the water that has claimed us in baptism. This is the water flowing from Jesus’ side alongside the blood when the spear struck Him at His death.

EVEN THOUGH WE LODGE COMPLAINTS, GOD STILL WANTS TO LODGE WITH US IN CHRIST. Jesus loves you. Yes, there is room to make your requests known to God. Indeed, He knows what you need before you ask. And your Savior wants to lodge with you and stay with you throughout this journey of life. There’s no need to trap Him or quarrel with Him because He’s already yours in Jesus. Find contentment in the perfect Lord who gives us godliness with contentment even in a land of grumbling and complaint.