

19 July 2020

"Trusting in God's Goodness" – Numbers 11:4-23

Steve Christian

✿ Good morning. Thank you to those who have joined with us online.

We continue to follow the journey of the Hebrew people from their slavery in Egypt into the Promised Land.

Have you wondered how long they spent in the various places as they went through the desert? From my understanding, they left Egypt and it took them around three months until they arrived at Mt Sinai. They hadn't been there long when Moses went up the mountain to receive the ten words from the Lord. He was gone for 40 days and they got impatient and made the golden calf. He went up a second time (again for 40 days) and came back with the instructions for building the tabernacle. The building of the tabernacle took almost 2 years. Once completed, they were now ready to begin again their journey toward the Promised Land.

Again, from my understanding I think it only takes them around 3 weeks to arrive and send in some spies to check it this land. So, from my calculations, from Egypt to Israel was a journey that took them around 4 months, yet it turns out to be 40 years. Why? Because of their lack of faith in God. Are we learning to trust God more and more as the days go by?

✿ Today we look at a passage from Numbers 11. As the Hebrew people set out on their way, having been camped at the foot of Mount Sinai for the past two years, it doesn't take them long to begin to complain. ✿

And to complain, I think is part of the human condition; we don't like change, and we'd like things to be familiar to us; and so we complain when things change. It would be easy to complain about the changes that have been forced upon by Covid-19. We don't like that we can't "do church" the way we used to. We don't like that we cannot hug or handshake. We complain about the restrictions, and we complain about those who haven't been abiding by the rules and the virus continues on. We too can be quick to complain because we don't like change.

Although I've not heard any complaints yet, we too might be tempted to complain about our church because of the changes that have been forced upon us. It was 25 years ago that Kylie and I left our church in Horsham in Victoria and came up to Brisbane to Bible College. We missed our beloved church. But we soon realised, as we went back at our first opportunity, that the church had changed whilst we'd been away. It wasn't the same. But the fact that it was not the same, didn't give us the right to complain. And regardless of Covid-19 or not, everything continues to change. However – our God does not.

Well, this time the Hebrew people complain because as they travel they don't have enough time to slaughter and prepare their own meat to eat. Like little kids they chuck a food tantrum.

✿ V.4-9, **"The rabble with them began to crave other food, and again the Israelites started wailing and said, "If only we had meat to eat! We remember the fish we ate in Egypt at no cost—also the cucumbers, melons, leeks, onions and garlic. But now we have lost our appetite; we never see anything but this manna!"**

**The manna was like coriander seed and looked like resin. The people went around gathering it, and then ground it in a hand mill or crushed it in a mortar. They cooked it in a pot or made it into loaves.**

Now, there are two things that I'd like us to notice from these verses. Firstly, how quickly the people complain. ✿ The Hebrew people began to long for the cucumbers, melons, leeks, onions, and garlic, and the free fish they enjoyed in Egypt. How quickly they forgot,

that although the food may have been free – they were not free. How quickly they forgot that they were not just slaves, but were the victims of genocide – their baby boys were killed upon their birth. We always tend to look back with rose coloured glasses!

And yet, they missed having meat on the menu. ✨ How quickly too, they failed to appreciate one miracle whilst demanding another. God was graciously, daily, supplying manna for them – they didn't have to plant crops and wait till harvest – God was miraculously supplying their daily needs. They complain about one miracle, whilst demanding another.

And don't we do the same at times? We long for something else all the while failing to see and appreciate God's goodness already. God is pouring out His blessings upon us constantly. God is good all the time, and all the time, God is good.

And secondly, ✨ notice how they were easily led and stirred on by others. Have you noticed how some news programs seem to always harbor on the negative and publicise the complaints of others as news? They go looking for a complainant or a rabble rouser and push their view as though they are hard done by or not receiving justice.

"The rabble with them..." The stirrers; the troublemakers; the dissenters. There are always people who are unhappy, and they voice their opinion. There are also those who hear what is being said and join in the chorus. Have you noticed that with Covid-19? There are the voices who come up with their conspiracy theories, and others start to join them. There are those who are quick to protest and then there are those who want to join in. Beware the rabble; the stirrers; the trouble makers; the dissenters; because you might not end up with what you want – and as a Christian we need to ask ourselves is this the way that Jesus would respond; joining the rabble; stirring the pot?

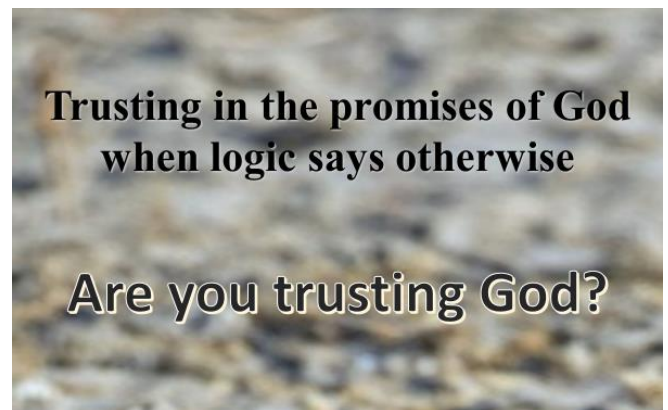
And so Moses once again turns to the Lord. ✨ Moses; the great leader empowered by the Spirit of God, has had enough of this mob that causes him such grief and anxiety. As you read v.10 through 15 you see that Moses has had it up to here; he's had it. Enough is enough; he's ready to quit – in fact he asks the Lord to end his life. He's distressed and depressed; even suicidal.

When you are troubled, where do you turn? When you want to complain, where do you turn? I hope you turn to God, rather than just sit and sulk. Do you turn to God and seek His comfort and guidance? Moses takes his complaint to God.

And the Lord answers Moses. And the Lord's first action is to take care of Moses. ✨ He's at the end of his rope. Moses had cried out to Lord in desperation. V.14-15, **"I cannot carry all these people by myself; the burden is too heavy for me. If this is how you are going to treat me, please go ahead and kill me."**

And the Lord cares first for Moses. ✨ V.16-17, **"Bring me seventy of Israel's elders who are known to you as leaders and officials among the people. ...I will take some of the power of the Spirit that is on you and put it on them. They will share the burden of the people with you so that you will not have to carry it alone."** God provides through the power and presence of His Holy Spirit. And He still does for you and I today.

God then says that He will supply meat for the people. But, when the people were complaining and demanding meat, I don't think they had any idea what the result may have



been. Be careful what you ask for! God tells Moses to go and tell the people that they will receive the meat they have demanded. ✨ V.19, **“You will not eat it for just one day, or two days, or five, ten or twenty days, but for a whole month - until it comes out of your nostrils and you loathe it - because you have rejected the Lord.”** Does God have a sense of humour? But be careful how you complain, or what you ask for, because you just might get it.

Now, we might be quick to mock the Hebrew people for their lack of faith in God, having seen all that God had done for them. ✨ But you know, Moses even struggles to trust God with this one. V.21 he points out that the numbers just don't stack up. With 600,000 men and their families – to supply meat for just one day would be astronomical. He says, “I doubt that there's enough fish in the sea to feed this lot; and You're suggesting that you'll supply meat for all of them for a month.”

Any self-respecting accountant is now trying to do the sums. Let's say just 100grams of meat each per day, for a conservative 2 million people – that's 200,000 kgs. 200 tonnes of meat each and every day. Now, that is impossible, with no infrastructure in place – no feedlot or abattoirs.

Moses is questioning God, and God responds, “Is the Lord's arm too short?” Are you going to trust me Moses? God has not told Moses how he will fulfil his promise, but will Moses trust Him?

There are times when we cannot see our way through. When we're feeling like Moses, when we find ourselves weak, in the dark, uncertain of the future; when all the colour has drained out of life, and our soul is downcast; when you lose your job; when your family is in disarray; when a loved one dies; when your health is declining; when you can't understand what is going on. Where do you turn? ✨ Who are you trusting?

Can we agree with David, that even though we walk through the valley of the shadow of death, we know that God is with us; we trust in Him for His provision and protection, and that no matter what the future holds, our hand is placed firmly in His.

There are times when we can't see how God could break through in our situation, or into a non-believers life. But with God, nothing is impossible.

And so, Moses faces a choice; “will I trust God and go out make this ridiculous promise to the people that God will supply them meat, or not?” Logic is screaming no; faith is whispering yes. And Moses has to choose between the two. “Will I trust God?”

With whatever you are facing; whatever challenges that lay before you; whatever changes you don't agree with or are urged to complain about; are you trusting in God to be your refuge and strength; your shelter from the storm? Are you believing in His promises regardless of how it looks?

You see, even when the Lord provides for the people – in this case it would require a daily quail storm, ✨ 200 tonnes of meat falling out of the sky every day. Yet the Hebrew people continue to waiver in the faith. They come and go; their obedience to God ebbs and flows. God continues to care for them and provide and protect, and even once they're in their Promised Land, God raises up His prophets in an attempt to turn the nation back to Himself. Eventually, even the voices of the prophets are quiet, until at just the right time God sent His Son. Even while we were still His enemies.

God in His grace, continues to give and give and give, - by His grace. The Hebrew people did nothing to attract God's favour – yet He gave. You and I have done nothing to attract God's grace and forgiveness, yet He gives and forgives – and we are so much more than blessed.

Nothing is impossible for God. He produced a quail storm, and then so many years later, He produces a forgiveness avalanche, ✠ through the gift of His Son and His death. And you and I are the blessed recipients.

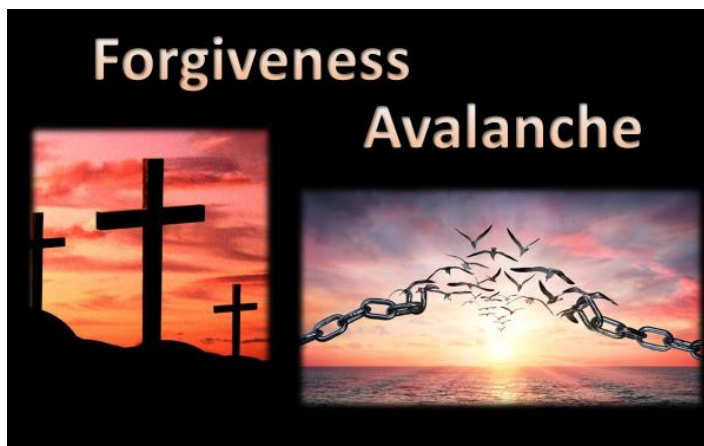
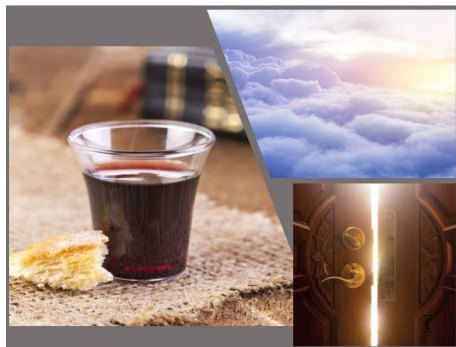
We're about to share in communion, so I invite you to take your biscuit or bread. But before we do, I want to share these encouraging words from Paul, who said this in Romans 8, and I'm reading from the Message. **"By entering through faith into what God has always wanted to do for us - set us right with him, ...We find ourselves standing where we always hoped we might stand-out in the wide open spaces of God's grace and glory, standing tall and shouting our praise.**

**We continue to shout our praise even when we're hemmed in with troubles, because we know how troubles can develop passionate patience in us, and how that patience in turn forges the tempered steel of virtue, keeping us alert for whatever God will do next. In alert expectancy such as this, we're never left feeling short changed. Quite the contrary - we can't round up enough containers to hold everything God generously pours into our lives through the Holy Spirit!**

**Christ arrives right on time to make this happen. He didn't, and doesn't, wait for us to get ready. He presented himself for this sacrificial death when we were far too weak and rebellious to do anything to get ourselves ready. ...God put his love on the line for us by offering his Son in sacrificial death while we were of no use to him whatsoever."**

**"At just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. God demonstrated his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us."** Thank you Lord, for Your avalanche of forgiveness.

#### ✠ COMMUNION



**Hymn: Great is Thy faithfulness**