

The Complaints of the Well to Do, by Daniel H. Kuhn, Jr. 18050918
Exodus 16:2-15 and Matthew 20:1-16
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You have heard the chorus. It echoes in your ear. You and your children are driving in the car. The scenery is beautiful, you think. You see the rolling hills and the leaves on the trees. You're excited because you know what lies ahead. But soon comes that chorus: "Mommy, how much farther?"

"When can we stop. I'm hungry."

The chorus jerks you out of your anticipation of hopeful horizons, back into the reality of the travail of traveling. The chorus declares the fact: your passengers are not enjoying the journey as much as you thought you were! And it's all *your* fault. The journey was your idea. You thought it would be good to expose the kids to some new sights— some different areas of the country. It was *your* idea to go see Aunt Jane. You thought it would be good to get the family alone together in the car for a week so you could restore relations— get them to know each other better! Yet, all you've heard is grumbling and complaining.

So, you have just a little taste of what it must have been like for Moses. Instead of a couple of kids pushing and griping in the back seat, Moses had thousands of people he was leading out of slavery and toward a promised land. The people didn't have much use for a promised land. They didn't care much about freedom. All they could think about was their stomachs.

Two and one-half months before, Moses had risked his life for the Israelites by challenging Pharaoh. His tenacious spirit had won freedom from slavery. God had worked wonders to show God's power and will. God did not and does not want to see anyone enslaved by any person, place, or thing.

By wondrously parting the waters, or at least blowing them away from the marshlands by a powerful north wind, God saved the Israelites from the horses and soldiers of Pharaoh's army. God had given freedom. What more could you ask for?

But the people complained saying, "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."¹

Granted, trekking through the wilderness with so many people and so few resources was quite a bit more difficult than it is for us to travel with a family today— in a car, with an air conditioner, with lots of McDonald's and Burger Kings and Wendy's, and gas stations and roadside rest areas along the way. Still, we complain.

We're talking about freedom here, not just a drive in the country to see the sights. Freedom is a wondrous thing, and it has its costs. Sometimes it's easier to sit by the fleshpots than it is to journey toward freedom.

It is painful to be the one who plans the trip, or the one who drives the car, or the one who runs the business. You become the focus of the complaints:

"Why do we have to do this?"

"How much longer?"

"It was a lot better back then."

Someone is bound to complain. But, we continue to lead or to drive the car, because we know

¹Exodus 16:3

that the end of the journey is worth it. It certainly is more desirable than the certain death that awaited back there.

When you suffer through an illness in the hospital, It can be painful to lie on your back, helpless, with tubes stuck into your body. You begin to lose perspective. It was better back there, the way things used to be, but the end of the journey is worth it. God desires health, healing, and wholeness. We journey onward, because God has given us a glimpse of the promise.

The point of this Exodus story is that God provides. Our job is to be patient and to quit complaining. The complaining makes it difficult for leaders, and decision-makers, and God grows tired of it. If we are patient, God provides. It may be manna instead of croissants, it may be quail instead of T-bone, but God provides.

Perhaps in our society, we've had it too easy. We've been given too much. Our parents, suffering through the Great Depression, didn't want us to be deprived. Parents for two generations now, have just wanted to make their kids happy. Too many of us don't know what it means to struggle to survive. We are well-to-do, and we complain. It doesn't sound very pretty.

We complain about taxes, yet our citizens at the bottom of the economic scale have lost much of their medical and social safety net. We complain about the high salaries of teachers, yet force them to purchase their teaching supplies and classroom equipment with their own money. We complain about big government, yet when we deregulate and skimp on civil construction projects, levees give way and people drown and homes are washed away.

We are the richest nation on earth, using far more than our share of the world's resources, yet we complain we don't have enough. We worry that somewhere, someone has more than we have. Somewhere, someone is happier than I am. How long will we weary God with our complaining?

It's not how much a person has that indicates wealth, it is how much a person gives away! We could turn this whole thing around: we could enjoy this journey so much more if we could keep track of the wonder and wealth we have. Tonight, when you go to bed, write down three things that happened today for which you're grateful. Then do it tomorrow night, and the next and the next. Quit the chorus of complaining, and join the chorus of thanksgiving. God has given us all we need.

Then Miriam and Moses and the Israelites sang this song to the Lord:

"I will sing to the Lord, for he has triumphed gloriously...

The Lord is my strength and my might, and he has become my salvation; this is my God, and I will praise him,
my father's God, and I will exalt him." ²