

## The Glorious God and the Grumbling Mob

**[Proposition: It's through the tests of life that God displays his power, discloses his purposes, and demonstrates his presence; therefore, we must embrace the struggle as part of God's redemptive story.]**

### Introduction

Do you ever feel interrupted? Not just by all the small unexpected or inconvenient things come up day by day, but I mean, do you have the sense that the life you are looking for and longing for is interrupted or impeded by the bigger, ongoing, expected things. Do you ever feel like school, responsibilities, your current job, an ongoing illness, or maybe even your own current capacities and abilities, these sort of things are getting in the way of the life you hope for? Do you ever feel that way? I know I do.

In a letter to a friend, C.S. Lewis once wrote:

The great thing, if one can, is to stop regarding all the unpleasant things as interruptions of one's 'own', or 'real' life. The truth is of course that what one calls the interruptions are precisely one's real life – the life God is sending one day by day: what one calls one's 'real life' is a phantom of one's own imagination.<sup>1</sup>

Lewis is right. The people, responsibilities, and situations we look at as interruptions or barriers to the “real life” we want *are actually real life*, and this is key, that God is sending us day by day. As long as we go on grumbling about these “interruptions” as barriers to our real life we are cut off from seeing and experiencing what God is doing here and now and how the life he has given us fits into his redemptive story. **It's through the interruptions—the struggles of life—that God displays his power, discloses his purposes, and demonstrates his Presence!** This is a principle that we can apply to our lives as we look at the recurring grumbling of the people of Israel in Exodus 14-16.

### **I. It is through the struggles of life that God displays his power.**

#### ***A. God displays his power by delivering his people from their enemies.***

Israel witnessed God's power over Pharaoh and the Egyptian gods again and again in the plagues, and experienced God's sheltering grace in the Passover. Pharaoh finally sent them away, but when Israel arrived at the Red Sea, Pharaoh changed his mind, and they were very afraid. Here we see the beginning of Israel's pattern of grumbling before God. The text doesn't use the exact word, but it is hard to read their complaint any other way. Listen to what Israel says in Exodus 14:11-12:

---

<sup>1</sup> C.S. Lewis, “Letter to Arthur Greeves, 20 December 1943,” in *Yours, Jack: Spiritual Direction from C.S. Lewis*, (New York: HarperOne, 2008), 97-98.

*11 They said to Moses, “Is it because there are no graves in Egypt that you have taken us away to die in the wilderness? What have you done to us in bringing us out of Egypt? 12 Is not this what we said to you in Egypt: ‘Leave us alone that we may serve the Egyptians’? For it would have been better for us to serve the Egyptians than to die in the wilderness.”*

Here at the Red Sea they are overcome with fear of the Egyptians, and fear that the LORD will not show up or be up to the task of protecting them.

But God has specifically orchestrated this showdown, so that he could display his power over Pharaoh. The LORD told Moses to go and camp by the sea. The LORD hardened Pharaoh’s heart so that he would go out to attack them. This was all in order that, 14:4:

*4 And I will harden Pharaoh's heart, and he will pursue them, and **I will get glory over Pharaoh and all his host, and the Egyptians shall know that I am the Lord.**”  
**And they did so.***

God does get glory over Pharaoh. He demonstrates his power, dividing the watery chaos and leading Israel on the dry land into a new life with Him. Pharaoh and his chariots gave chase, but their wheels were weighed down by the mud, and the LORD released the water the Egyptians were covered. Israel saw the Egyptians dead on the seashore, and they believed in the LORD and in his servant Moses (14:30-31).

### ***B. God displays his power over false gods by triumphing at the sea.***

But it isn’t only that the LORD displayed his power by delivering Israel from their earthly oppressors, Pharaoh and the Egyptians. It’s deeper than that. There at the sea the one true God triumphed over the false gods of Egypt and the nations.

In the ancient world this is simply how people thought. The LORD fights for Israel, the gods of Egypt fight for Pharaoh. The plagues on Egypt were the LORD’s combat with the gods of Egypt,<sup>2</sup> and here at the sea, Israel’s God has won his decisive victory. Look at 15:11-12:

*11 “Who is like you, O Lord, among the gods?  
Who is like you, majestic in holiness,  
awesome in glorious deeds, doing wonders?  
12 You stretched out your right hand;  
the earth swallowed them.*

Swallowed whom? The other gods.<sup>3</sup>

---

<sup>2</sup> It has been suggested that each plague corresponds to one of the gods or goddesses of Egypt. The conflict between the LORD and the gods is made explicit in the 10<sup>th</sup> plague. See Exodus 12:12: <sup>12</sup>For I will pass through the land of Egypt that night, and I will strike all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, both man and beast; and on all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgments: I am the LORD.”

<sup>3</sup> The setting of the story and language of the song Israel sings after the sea makes this all the more clear to the ancient reader. This dramatic event at the sea happens at the foot of Ba’al-Zaphon—the mountain of Ba’al. In the Ancient Near East, this is where the god Ba’al the “cloud rider” was supposed to have set up his throne after defeating the god of the sea, Yamm, and coming back from the underworld. The song in Exodus 15 tells us it is God who throws the “rider” into the sea. The Hebrew word for “sea” is “yam,” but in the song it is not a god but a

Israel can go forth from the sea with the assurance that the LORD fights for them and will defeat every enemy they encounter both natural or supernatural. Ultimately, no one will stand in the way of God's purpose to dwell in the midst of his people and give them goodness and rest in a new land.

But here's the thing: how would Israel see the LORD's power, and know that the LORD fights for them, if they didn't have their backs to the sea with mighty Pharaoh and his chariots bearing down on them. The only way Israel could see and experience God's power is through the very situation that makes them grumble. And so it is with you Christian, the display of God's power comes through those struggles that make you want to grumble.

*Application:*

So that opposition you are facing in your workplace that feels like it's sapping your joy and life, through the eyes of faith is a situation where God will fight for you. That tension or struggle in your marriage that has cut the legs out from under your domestic bliss, submitted to God in faith is the very situation where God means to set up his kingdom on the mountain of your life.

It's not that, if you follow Jesus everything goes your way, or your vision of "real life" or the Promised Land is the one that comes to pass, Rather, by faith we know that Jesus has triumphed over the spiritual forces and put them to open shame in his cross., God works all things to our good, and one day our Egyptians will someday lie dead on the seashore.

One preacher put it this way:

...the Egyptians are dead. And in their death your right and duty are to read the prophecy of the death of every power which stands between you and the Promised Land!<sup>4</sup>

God displays his power by conquering the enemies of his people.

## **II. It is through the struggles of life that God discloses his purpose for his people.**

Just three days after these dramatic events at the sea, we find Israel grumbling again at Marah where they have no water to drink. Exodus 15:24 tells us:

*24 And the people grumbled against Moses, saying, "What shall we drink?"*

It doesn't say they cried out, or asked, or prayed—it says they grumbled. So guys, your wife is right it isn't what they said but how they said it. Nevertheless, God graciously guides Moses to a tree that will purify the water. Here God tells them:

---

weapon in the hand of the LORD. The ground (representing the underworld) has swallowed up the gods at the right hand of God. It is the LORD, not Ba'al, who will establish his sanctuary on the mountain and reign forever and ever. See Brian D. Russell, "The Song of the Sea and the Subversion of Canaanite Myth: A Missional Reading," in *The Asbury Journal* no. 72/2, p. 107-118, available at <https://place.asburyseminary.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?referer=https://www.google.com/&httpsredir=1&article=2404&context=asburyjournal>

<sup>4</sup> From Phillips Brooks, "The Egyptians Dead Upon the Seashore," in *The Consolations of God: Great Sermons of Phillips Brooks*, p. 29.

**A. God's purpose is to make Israel his own particular people.**

Look at 15:25b-26

*There the LORD made for them a statute and a rule, and there he tested them, 26 saying, "If you will diligently listen to the voice of the LORD your God, and do that which is right in his eyes, and give ear to his commandments and keep all his statutes, I will put none of the diseases on you that I put on the Egyptians, for I am the Lord, your healer."*

Notice it says in v. 25 "there he tested them." The idea is that he brought them out to the wilderness and gave them water to show them that he can be trusted, and to call them to trust him. Just as a couple in a dating relationship will eventually have that, "Where is this going?" conversation, you can think of this as the LORD saying to Israel, "Here's where this is going." He's going to be their God—their only God. He is the LORD their God and he can be trusted.

God is fully committed to them, and is laying the foundation for his proposal in Exodus 19:6 where he promises to make Israel a kingdom of priests and a holy nation, his own treasured possession.

**B. God purpose for Israel is to obey him so he might bless them.**

God's mighty work bringing Israel out of Egypt shows his commitment and love for them—and now they are to live out their lives with a commitment to obey him. They are to listen to God's voice, and build their life on his definition of right and wrong. They are to attend to his commandments, and follow him as Lord.

This is God's call for Israel, no matter what hardship or test comes, to live in light of his power and grace. God's promise to Israel if they will continue in faith and obedience is to bless them, as he says in the last part of v. 26:

*I will put none of the diseases on you that I put on the Egyptians, for I am the Lord, your healer."*

God is saying to Israel, if you will abide with me, and be my people I will not judge you in my wrath, but I will be your "Healer."

It is important to notice that this isn't works righteousness or earning God's love or forgiveness—God has already graciously rescued them from bondage. The entire Bible, OT and NT, teaches that we have no merit before God, we cannot repair the breach our sins have made, our only hope is faith in his promise in the OT and it's fulfillment Jesus in the NT.

Nor is it anything you have or haven't done is a barrier for God's grace to save you. But it is saying that if you want to be in relationship to God, if you profess to believe in Jesus as your Savior and Lord, then you don't get to decide for yourself what is right and wrong—the Lord decides that. In coming to faith in Jesus, repentance—turning away from ourselves as the lord of our lives—is require. The Gospel is come as you are, but with God's help we don't stay as we are.

*Illustration:*

This week was somewhat disheartening for me as I watched many people I know, mostly former classmates from seminary publicly advocate for a sexual ethic that is against the clear teaching of both testaments including Jesus himself. Several even chastised or villainized those pastors and leaders who are holding fast to the teaching of Jesus and the Apostles.

There are complicated issues in our day and age, and the church's track record on distinguishing between the person and their sin could definitely be better, and needs to be better. Yet none of that changes this truth: If we follow God by faith he promises to bless us, to be our healer and savior, to give us grace to change and his Spirit to empower us. But if we refuse to follow his clear teaching in Scripture, we show that in our hearts we are denying his purpose. We are more like the Egyptians than the Israelite.

**It is through the struggles of life that God discloses his purpose for his people:** to make them his own so he might bless them.

Finally,

**III. It is through the struggles of life that God demonstrates his presence.**

***A. God delivers his provision.***

Israel continued on their journey, but eventually the supplies they brought from Egypt ran out, and again they grumbled against the LORD:

***“Would that we had died by the hand of the LORD in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the meat pots and ate bread to the full, for you have brought us out into this wilderness to kill this whole assembly with hunger.”***

Again Israel focused on their circumstances and missed what God was doing. Just as we can only see God's power when we are aware of our own weakness, so we can only experience God's provision if we first have a desperate need.

God did not bring them there to kill them, or take something from them, but to 16:4:

***4 Then the Lord said to Moses, “Behold, I am about to rain bread from heaven for you, and the people shall go out and gather a day's portion every day, that I may test them, whether they will walk in my law or not.***

Many people want God to rain down blessing, but no one wants to be desperate.

## ***B. God delivers his provision to demonstrate his Presence***

But it isn't just about the bread—there is something deeper and more beautiful happening in God's provision. Listen to what it says in 16:6-7:

*6 So Moses and Aaron said to all the people of Israel, "At evening you shall know that it was the LORD who brought you out of the land of Egypt, 7 and in the morning you shall see the **glory of the LORD**, because he has heard your grumbling against the Lord.*

Do you get what Moses is saying? He's saying in the bread that comes in the morning is the glory of the LORD. The bread isn't just about filling your bellies, it's about demonstrating God's Presence in the midst of his people. That is what this book, these events are all about, God bring a people out to be in his Presence! The ultimate provision that God makes for Israel is himself: their Creator, Sustainer, and Savior who is supremely beautiful and good. The bread is a sign of this beautiful truth.

## ***C. Israel will struggle to be content in his provision***

They don't take to heart that God's Presence is what brought them out of Egypt and sustained them all along the way—that he himself is their supreme blessing. They don't understand that if they have the LORD they have everything, and if they had everything in Egypt without Him they'd have nothing. And so they are never content.

As one author wrote:

The person with the discontented heart has the attitude that everything he does for God is too much, and everything God does for him is too little.<sup>5</sup>

That seems to fit to a t the attitude of Israel in Exodus and how their story unfolds. God's purpose and blessing is never enough for them, but they will chase after many other things. They view what God is doing as barrier to their blessing—even though it's through that very struggle that God is going to deliver them to himself. They did not trust the LORD. So, they remain a grumbling mob before this glorious God.

### *Illustration:*

They say that while:

Optimists see: A glass half full.

And pessimists see: A glass half empty.

Chronic complainers see: A glass that is slightly chipped holding water that isn't cold enough, probably because it's tap water when I asked for bottled water and wait, there's a smudge on the rim, too, which means the glass wasn't cleaned properly and now I'll probably end up with some kind of virus. Why do these things always happen to me?!<sup>6</sup>

---

<sup>5</sup> Don Kistler, *Tabletalk*, 09-18-01.

<sup>6</sup> Guy Winch, "How to Deal With Chronic Complainers," *Psychology Today Online*, available at <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/the-squeaky-wheel/201107/how-deal-chronic-complainers>

Do we sound just as foolish when we grumble about the struggles in our life in comparison to the great blessing we have in Christ Jesus through faith?

### *The Gospel*

The Gospel of John tells us that one day Jesus worked a miracle and turned five loaves and two fish into more than enough food for five thousand men. The following day some of the crowd came to him, and he talks with them about this very incident of God sending Manna from heaven. But then he tells them that God has sent the true bread—that give life, and that he himself is the “bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst.” (6:35). Israel ate manna in the wilderness but they died. Whoever feeds on Christ will live forever.

In Jesus, God provided what people most deeply need—God sent his own Son into the world to be with us and to save us so we could be with him. He is the one true Israelite. Who perfectly obeyed the commands of God, and was counted faithful not only as a servant but as God’s own Son.

Every one of us deserves a worse judgment than Pharaoh and Egypt. From birth we follow after other gods, proudly enthroning ourselves in our hard hearts. Giving God grumbling when we were made to give him glory.

But, in his great love for us, Jesus Christ laid his life down on the cross and absorbed the judgment we deserve, and exchanged it for blessing: forgiveness, freedom, adoption, and promise of a future. He conquered the spiritual forces of sin, death, and the devil and promises to raise us up on the last day.

He offers himself by faith to any who would receive him as Lord, and promises to sustain us as we walk through the struggles and trials of life.

We need not grumble, but in the midst of our struggle can look to him and all he has done for us, until he brings us safely to our Promised Home with him in the New Heavens and New Earth.