

Zip-It!
Restraining Your Complaining
February 5, 2012

Good morning everyone. I'm glad you're here today.

As we begin this new series, Zip-It!, I need to make a couple of disclaimers.

First of all, I need to tell you that the idea for this series is not original with me. What you're going to experience over the next three Sundays is based on a series that was originally taught at LifeChurch in Oklahoma City.

Second thing I need to tell you is that when I heard their version of this series (as well as other versions which were done by other churches), I decided we should do it

because I felt like this was a topic that would be of benefit to almost all of us.

Actually, that wasn't what I *really* thought. What I really thought was that it would be of benefit to *me* because these are problems that *I* tend to struggle with – especially, the issue of complaining and criticism – and I thought it would be good to experience these messages not only as a teacher but also as a learner, which is why Irving and Ladell are going to teach the second and third messages. I'm literally going to “zip-it” for a couple of weeks and we're all going to listen to them for a while!

Third, this is one of those series where it will be very tempting for us to listen to it with ears for someone else. In other words, it will be very easy for you to hear this teaching and think:

- “Yeah, that’s exactly my husband’s problem. He complains too much. I hope he’s paying attention to this.”
- “Yeah, she has a real problem with gossip. I sure hope she shows up at church for that one. In fact, I’m going to call all her friends and remind them they should be here at church.”

I want to encourage you to not do that and to, instead, do what Jesus tells his followers to do: to take care of the log that’s sticking out of our own eye before we try to pick the speck out of someone else’s. Now, it may be that you don’t *have* a log when it comes to any of these issues. If not, congratulations. You’re very fortunate. But I suspect that if these are not problems for you now, at some point they will be. So I want to encourage you, even, to focus on what God wants to say to you over the next few weeks, not what you think He should say to someone else, OK?

In fact, let's pray to that end.

God, we do want to ask that your Spirit will come and be among us this morning. I pray that the light will shine on our hearts and reveal truth that we need to see so that we can become more like you. We know that as much as you love us as we are, you also want us to be more than we are. We give you this time for that purpose, and we pray in Jesus name. Amen.

Jesus once said ...

"Out of the overflow of the heart the mouth speaks. The good man (or woman) brings good things out of the good stored up in him/her, and the evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in him."

Matthew 12:34-35 (NIV)

What Jesus is saying here – and this is the foundation for everything we’re going to talk about in this series – is that you and I never say anything accidentally. There’s no such thing as “letting words slip.” If it makes its way out of your mouth, then it’s been growing in your heart. If we have a complaining or critical or gossiping mouth, it’s because we have complaining or critical or gossiping heart.

“Complaining” Defined

We’ll come back to that thought a bit later but, first, we need to define what we mean by *complaining* ... because one of the things I do not want us to communicate in this series is that “you should never, ever, ever express any kind of negative thought or emotion. Just put on a happy face no matter

what the circumstance and pretend like everything is OK even though it isn't."

If you've been around NHCC over the past couple of years you know that we have spent a lot of time talking about that (actually, talking *against* that) because so many Christians (and, I suppose, non-Christians, too) are messed up by thinking that's what God wants: *for them to never acknowledge their emotional pain and suffering; for them to always put on a phony smile and say "Praise the Lord" even though The Lord himself is grieved by what's going on.* And so, I want to be very clear that I'm not all of a sudden switching gears on you here; I'm not all of a sudden saying, "Forget all that other stuff we've talked about over the last two years. What you really need to do is to zip it. Shut up and never ever say anything negative." That's not what we're saying.

So, let's define what we mean by complaining. And I want to do this in comparative fashion – to put what I mean by “complaining” in terms of comparison to some of the things we've learned about emotionally healthy and unhealthy forms of expression. I think will make the definition *and distinction* very clear.

So, let's start with the kind of emotional pretense I just described and compare it to complaining.

Emotional pretense (the stuff that really messes you up long-term if you do it) is acting like everything is OK when it really isn't.

I think we all understand that. We've talked about it a lot. On the other hand ...

Complaining is acting like “everything sucks” when it really doesn't.

In both cases – whether you’re stuck in the pit of emotional dysfunction and pretense or the pit of complaining – you’re not being honest about reality.

And as destructive as it is to your heart and soul to pretend that everything is OK when it isn’t, it is just as destructive to act as if everything sucks when it doesn’t. (And if my use of that word bothers you, I hope you will understand I use it *intentionally* because *that* word best expresses the kind of attitude – the kind of heart issue we’re talking about here. Remember, what’s in your heart eventually comes out of your mouth).

Ok, let me give you another comparative definition.

This past fall we spent five weeks talking about the biblical concept of *lament* – of taking all that junk you feel about your life

and the losses you have suffered and then in an act of worship, really, literally dumping that on God. We learned that a large percentage of the Psalms – “the prayer manual of the Bible” some have called it – are prayers of lament. We actually had a service where we took a card and wrote down all of our laments and came up and put them on the stage. It was kind of an act of worship, just giving them to God. And I remember seeing people in this congregation who were visibly angry in that moment over the stuff they were dealing with in their lives slamming their card down on the stage.

And that was good. It was an act of worship. It was lamenting.

But there is a big difference between lamenting and complaining.

Lamenting is a God-focused spiritual encounter that purifies and strengthens the heart.

See, when you're through with the process of lamenting, there is a sense of relief because you've gone to God and dumped your junk on him. Now, you may have to come *back* to God in lament more and pour it all out again, but the process serves to build you up. It makes you stronger.

On the other hand ...

Complaining is an unfocused negative ongoing commentary that accomplishes nothing.

You see the difference here?

- Instead of being God-focused, it's unfocused. It just pours out of me on everyone and no one in particular. Whoever is unfortunate enough to be

around me in the moment I'm complaining gets to hear it.

- Instead of being spiritual it's negative.
- Instead of being a short-lived, directed encounter with some closure to it, it's a persistent commentary that just goes on and on and on.
- Instead of purifying and strengthening the heart, complaining accomplishes nothing.

Well, that's not exactly true. It *does* accomplish something – three things, actually, and none of them good.

The Fruit of Complaining

1. It displeases God
2. Other people hate it
3. It messes up our lives

The book of Numbers tells the story of the

nation of Israel wandering in the desert after being delivered from centuries of terrible oppression and slavery in Egypt. And they start complaining and they start saying things like, "Oh, we had it so much better in Egypt than out here. Moses, why didn't you just let us die back there instead of out here? At least there was food"

See what they were doing? They weren't being honest. They were acting like the whole world was terrible and everything sucked and nothing was good or right. But that wasn't true by a long-shot.

Numbers 11 tells us that this went on for some time until finally, the Bible says, "God's anger was aroused."

So much so that ...

*Then fire from the LORD
burned among them and*

*consumed some of the
outskirts of the camp.
Numbers 11:1 (NIV)*

It was kind of like a warning. God burned the outskirts of the camp. It doesn't sound like anyone was hurt in this little incident, but you would think that would have served as some kind of a warning to them, that *that* would have said something to them, but the next four chapters of Numbers tell of the same kind of thing happening over and over again: an ongoing negative commentary from the people that was met with the same kind of response, in some form or another, from God!

They didn't get it but apparently, the lesson was not lost on the Apostle Paul who referred to these very incidents in the 10th chapter of his letter to the 1st century Christians at Corinth.

He warned them ... and us ...

Do not grumble, as some of them did--and were killed by the destroying angel. 1 Corinthians 10:10 (NIV)

And again, in his letter to the Christians at Philippi:

Do everything without complaining or arguing so that you may become blameless and pure, children of God without fault in a crooked and depraved generation, in which you shine like stars in the universe.

Philippians 2:14-15 (NIV)

What a vivid word picture – blameless, pure, shining like stars – all linked to doing everything without complaining. It's amazing how much this matters to God.

But it also matters to other people.

I doubt you have ever heard anybody say, “Man, I just loving hanging out with that guy; he complains so much. I’m so glad she is my friend because I get to listen to her whining and complaining.” What happens is just the opposite: *Complainers lose friends*. People who complain too much – people who engage in an ongoing negative commentary about life – are labeled as whiners. And nobody wants to be around a whiner for very long.

In fact, what people want to do after they’ve been around a whiner for very long is something like this.

<END SLIDE SET 1 >

Video - “The Head Butt” (20 seconds)

<BEGIN SLIDE SET 2 >

Has anyone seen that before? That is from a book called "The No Complaining Rule." And the guy wrote the book about complaining in the workplace because it's such a time waster and kills productivity. So he wrote this book and they have a series of videos that go with that and they're all pretty funny.

So, complaining displeases God ... and other people hate it ... but *it also messes us up.*

I like the way pastor Craig Groeschel explained this in the original message on this topic, so I'm going to just quote him. He says ...

Now, let me just give you a formula to really jack up your whole life, okay? If you want to just mess it up big and be miserable, here's what you do. Let me

tell you how you can hate your life:

Complain about everything, everything, I mean everything. Complain about the weather, complain about the economy, complain about the prices of gas, and complain about your physical features, how you used to be hot and now you're not. Complain about the misplacement of your hair: it's no longer on your head, now there's more on your back or coming out of your ears. Complain about the way people drive ...complain and complain and complain and you will be miserable.

You want to hate your job for the rest of your life? Complain about it every single day. Complain about the commute to work, complain about the people that you work with that just get under your skin like putting fingernails

on a chalkboard. Complain about your idiot boss that doesn't know squat. Complain about the lousy benefit package. Complain about how you are undervalued. Complain about how you don't like your work environment, and I guarantee you, you will hate your job.

He also gives advice on how to screw up your marriage, through complaining, but I'll let Irv address that next week if he wants to because it deals more directly with criticism.

Anyway ... that's what I mean when I talk about complaining.

- It's acting like "everything in your world sucks" when it really doesn't.
- It's an unfocused negative ongoing commentary that accomplishes nothing good.

Why We Complain

And I suppose a valid question to ask at this point would be ... *am I a complainer?* Do I personally engage in an ongoing unfocused negative commentary? Do I focus so much on the bad that I can't see the good anymore?

Now, I think most of us would say, if we're really being honest, "yes, I am a complainer." Maybe not 24/7 but often enough that's it's an issue in my relationship with God, it's an issue in my relationship with other people and it even affects how I view and live out my own life.

In 1993, a university professor by the name of Robert Hughes wrote a best-selling book called *The Culture of Compliant* that addressed one of the fundamental reasons for our complaining: *we have developed an expectation that all of our needs should be*

met; that all of our desires should be fulfilled; that somehow this is our right. And if things don't go the way we wish, then our default setting has become complaining – we are the culture of compliant.

Of course, back then Hughes had no idea how much worse things would get with the explosion of the internet and social media. Today, it's even easier to make our complaints known far and wide through Facebook and Twitter and anonymous comments you can leave on forums and blogs – things that you would never say if you were having a conversation with someone face-to-face.

But why are we so prone to complain? Obviously, part of the reason has to do with this cultural drift and the expanded opportunities we have. But there are other reasons.ⁱ

- Some people complain to get attention. It's their way of starting a conversation. "Sure is cold out. Traffic was horrible getting here today. Boy, what a bonehead move by the Chiefs ... or the Royals ... or the Jayhawks." For some people, it's kind of a way of saying "hi, I don't know what else to say; let's have a conversation," so they do it negative. This is one of the things I do a lot, unfortunately.
- Some people complain to avoid responsibility. "The system is so corrupt. You can't ever win." (translation: "I don't need to try. It's ok for me to avoid responsibility and do nothing.")
- Another reason a lot of people complain is that they're clinically

depressed. Did you know that? A symptom of clinical depression is complaining. They've been negative for so long or they've stressed themselves out for so long that, now, it's become physically rooted in their body. And unless they deal with that physical issue, either through anti-depressants or vitamins or nutrition or some other way, it's now a physical issue. Unless they deal with that physical issue, they're never even going to get to talking about the emotional issue.

By the way ... since I'm talking about depression, I want to let you know of something really great that's going to happen here at NHCC in a couple of months. For over a year, I've been trying to arrange a seminar with Roxanne Renee, the author of a really great book called *Laughing Again: A Survivor's Guide to*

Healing Depression. Roxanne is local here and I went to seminary with her, and I've finally succeeded, we finally agreed on a time.

She's going to be joining us on Sunday evening March 18th.

More details on that very soon, but I just want to make you aware of it. Some of you struggle with depression and you need to put this on your calendar right now. What I like about Roxanne is not only has she battled depression and overcome it, she's also a pastor ... which means she's not content to just deal with the symptoms and surface issues. She wants to get down to the heart issues behind depression.

And that's what I want us to do now – to talk about the heart issues that are behind a complaining mouth. Remember, that's what Jesus said: if bad stuff is coming out of us –

and I think we would agree that an ongoing unfocused negative commentary about how “everything sucks” is bad stuff – if bad stuff is coming out, it’s because bad stuff is already in there at the heart level. *A complaining mouth reveals the presence of a complaining heart.*

So, what do our hearts complain about? When I look at my own heart, I see a couple of things. Maybe you see these things in your heart, too.

1. I’m frustrated with the brokenness of life.

I’m frustrated that things in this world do not work like they should. Even this morning as I was getting ready to come to church, I was taking a shower, and I shave in the shower, and when I get done, I’ve got this little shower caddy - and, it always happens, I don’t know why

- I take my razor blade and I put it in this little thing that is made to hold the razor blade in the shower caddy, then I turn around and it falls out, and I'm going, "*Why does this thing never stay in there!*" It just doesn't work like it's supposed to.

I'm frustrated that people don't work like they're supposed to. I'm frustrated that *I* don't work like I'm supposed to.

I think a lot of people have this frustration with the brokenness of life, particularly those who suffer from some kind of chronic illness or pain in their lives. I think the issue is we know that life is not supposed to be this way. We know that we were made for more than this. And that can get into our hearts and we can become bitter and angry and it comes out in complaining.

The other thing I see a lot of in my heart is that ...

2. I'm unappreciative of what I have been given.

I'm kind of like the Israelites in the desert. They had escaped centuries of abuse and a certain future of more of the same, and God Himself was in the process of leading them to "a land flowing with milk and honey" – the Promised Land – and all they could think about was the short-term lack of a certain kind of food. They had no appreciation for how good things really were than what they could have been and how much better they were going to be when they got to where they were going.

And, I think sometimes I fall victim to that, and I'm sure some of you are the same way. You probably have other things you

could put on the list.

Changing Your Heart

But, the question I really want to deal with is ... “how do you change this? How do you change your heart on the *inside* so that you’re able to restrain your complaining on the *outside*?”

First of all, and I say this in almost every message – we’ve got to repent. It starts with admitting that this is an issue we have, that it’s not just a “bad habit” or a pattern we’ve fallen into ... it’s sin, it’s wrong, it’s offensive to God as we read earlier, and it’s not how He wants us to live. We’ve got to change our thinking about this (which is what “repent” means).

And then once we repent, we have to rejoice that on the cross, Jesus forgave us for the sin

of complaining. Jesus forgave complainers like you and like me. His death paid for that – every complaint that has come from your mouth and heart – Jesus’ death paid for that just like it paid for everything else. And, we’ve got to rejoice in that and not beat ourselves up over it.

So, we repent and we rejoice. That’s *always* how change at the heart level begins to take place.

But once we’ve established that – once we’ve begun that process, God then gives us some wise instruction on how to increase and enhance that change, especially as it applies to this particular issue we’re talking about.

For instance, the Bible tells us that if we want to reduce our complaining and change our complaining heart, we’ve got to ...

1. Limit our exposure to negative commentary.

If you're constantly getting filled up with someone else's complaints, it's going to affect you.

That's why the Book of Proverbs says ...

It's better to live alone in the desert than with a quarrelsome, complaining wife. Proverbs 21:19 (NLT)

And that's not meant to be a slam on women because the same thing is true about a quarrelsome, complaining husband. (Jetta tells me all the time ... just kidding).

Now, when it comes to your husband or wife, if they're negative and complaining, there's

not a whole lot you can do about it. I suppose you *could* go for the head butt. But you said "for better or worse" and unfortunately, that's just part of the "worse."

However, there are so many other sources of negative commentary these days that we *can* do something about ... like the TV we watch ... like the music we listen to. There is so much negative "crap" (and I use that word intentionally) that comes off the TV. There is so much negative crap that comes out of popular music. And, I'm not on some crusade against popular music – we do popular music here. But, so much of it is just crap, and we're not filtering it. We just let that run through us. There are people that we run around with that we know when we get together with them they will be negative. All of that has an effect. We think it doesn't, but it does.

So, one of the things God tells us is if you want to see your heart change, part of the solution is to limit your exposure when you can.

Another thing God tells us to do that will enhance this change in our hearts is to ...

2. Count our blessings.

Count our blessings. It's an old fashioned statement, but it's biblical. Paul writes to the Thessalonians:

Be thankful in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you who belong to Christ Jesus.

*1 Thessalonians 5:18
(NIV)*

I was talking to a lady after the first service

and she said, "I've memorized that scripture, and every morning when I get up I make a list of three things that I'm thankful for. Every night when I go to bed, I make another list of three things I'm thankful for. I do this every day - it's a discipline." And I thought that was the coolest thing.

But, some of us would say, "that's really great for her. But, what if, when you look at your life, there's really not a whole lot for you to be thankful for? What if there aren't a whole lot of blessings for you to count?"

In that case, you need to follow the advice of John Ortberg – a well-known pastor and author – who once said, "Sometimes, you ought to just look at your life and say, 'It could be worse. It really could be worse.'"

For some of us, that would be a good discipline to adopt – to say, on a regular

basis, if you can't make a list of all these good things, you could say, "It could be worse." In fact, that is what we're need to do this morning. This is audience participation time. When I count to three I want everyone in this room to say with great passion those four words: "It could be worse." OK? On the count of three ... here we go: 1, 2, 3 ... "It could be worse." Let's try that again, just a little louder "it could be worse."

And today, when you walk out of church and you put your key in the ignition and the thought comes to you, "man, why do I have to drive this old clunker? Look at that nice car over there" ... today, you are not going to say that. Today when you look at your car, you are instead going to say with great passion ... say it with me: "It could be worse." Well said.

And today, when you get home, and you put

the key in the front door of your house and you open up your house and the thought comes to you: "Why do I have to live in this house? It is so small, dirty, and cramped; I wish we had more room" ... today, you are not going to say that. Because today, when you walk into your house you are going to say with great passion ... say it with me: "It could be worse."

Tomorrow morning, when you get out of the shower and you look at yourself in the mirror ... especially that side view ... and the thought comes to you: "Why did I get stuck with this particular body?" ... tomorrow morning, you are not going to say that. Tomorrow morning you are going to say, to yourself with great passion ... "It could be worse."

Yes, and tomorrow morning when you wake up and you roll over and you look at your

spouse you're going to say ... no, no, no ...
you are not going to say it, because there's a
place where we draw the line. Okay?ⁱⁱ

When we count our blessings – even if it's
comparatively (“it could be worse”) – our
heart and attitude will begin to change. We'll
become more appreciative of what we've
been given.

Ok, one more piece of biblical advice. And
that is to ...

3. View hardship as a pointer to what is to come.ⁱⁱⁱ

And that will turn a complaining heart into a
joyous heart. The Apostle James was very
direct about that. He wrote ...

*When troubles come your
way, (he didn't say to whine
and complain) consider it an*

*opportunity for great joy.
James 1:2 (NLT)*

And the Apostle Paul echoed the same idea when he advised the Christians at Rome to be ...

*Be joyful in hope ... Romans
12:12 (NIV)*

And just to be clear, these words that were written were not just pious platitudes, “we’re pastors; we’ve got to say that to people to encourage them.” No, these words reflected the real experience of these men.

For instance, in chapter 16 of the Book of Acts, we read that Paul and Silas are in the city of Philippi. Paul has been preaching and at one point, he heals a demon-possessed young woman who had a special power because of that demon – she could foretell the future. Her owners (she was actually a

slave) were making a lot of money off of her because of this special ability, so when Paul healed her, they realized they're weren't making that money anymore. So they get very angry and drag Paul and Silas into the marketplace and bring them to the authorities. And the authorities say, "you're disturbing the peace, and what we do with people who disturb the peace around here is we beat the crap out of them." So, they flog them. If you've seen the *Passion of the Christ* and how they did that to Jesus - that's what happened to Paul and Silas; they were beat to a pulp.

Then, with their backs literally in ribbons Paul and Silas are dragged off to prison. And when they get to prison the jailer doesn't just throw them into any cell. The text says that he throws them into the inner cell. The darkest, foulest cell in the entire prison and then – just to make their stay as

pleasant as possible – the jailer would have stretched their legs as painfully far apart as possible and then boom, locked the stocks down on them. It's just miserable.

So, what do Paul and Silas do? I mean, they have every reason to complain, but verse 25 says, "About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the other prisoners were listening to them."

They're singing! And this is not some slow, gloomy, funeral, organ sounding church song. No, this is a victorious song that they are singing. The Message translation of the Bible says they were singing "a robust hymn to God." They are *praising God* with all their might. And the other prisoners are thinking, "I can't believe my ears. I mean I have met some tough guys in my time, but those guys are either the toughest or the craziest guys I have ever heard of."

So, what in the world could make a man sing in prison? It was joy. It was the inner condition of a heart of joy. Paul was a man who was marked by joy. In fact, if you read through his letters – over 40% of the time that the word joy shows up in the New Testament, it shows up in Paul's letters. He's always talking about his joy. And whenever trouble comes, he sees it – as James put it – as an "opportunity for joy."

But why? Well, if you read his letters closely you see that Paul has several big reasons – like God's glory revealed in His creation, it brings him great joy when he thinks about that; like God's grace revealed in his salvation, what Jesus did on the cross, it brings him great joy – but probably the biggest source of joy in Paul's life is his anticipation of what's to come, what his hardship is pointing to.

“I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us” he wrote to the Christians in Rome.

To his protégé, Timothy, Paul wrote ...

The Lord will rescue me from every evil attack and will bring me safely to his heavenly kingdom. To him be glory for ever and ever. Amen. 2 Timothy 4:18 (NIV)

It's interesting, when Paul wrote that, he was about to be executed and he knew he was going to be executed, so he wasn't talking about some miracle rescue like he had experienced previously. No, he knew, "I'm dying. They are going to kill me this time." He was talking about being rescued to what was to come, what God had in store for him in the future.

Paul could sing in prison because he was looking forward to the day when he would see Jesus face-to-face. It was the hope of heaven that gave him joy and caused him to sing.

Pastor Robert Fulghum writes about the biggest wedding that he ever performed. (I'm going to take a rabbit trail, but you'll see how it fits.) This wedding had an 18-piece brass and wind ensemble, and twenty-four bridesmaids, groomsmen, flower petal throwers, and ring bearers. It was a huge event. He said the whole thing was just clicking along smoothly, flawlessly ... until the climactic moment of the processional when the bride is about ready to walk down the aisle.

Now let me read to you what he says:

"Ah, the bride. She had been dressed for hours if not for days. No adrenaline was left in her body. They had left her alone with her father over in the reception hall of the church (as the marching of the maidens had gone on and on and on). And there in the reception hall, the bride had begun to walk along the tables, laden with all of the gourmet goodies, and she had begun to absentmindedly sample. First, some of those little pink mints, and then some of those little yellow mints, and then some of those little green mints.

Then she picked through the silver bowls of mixed nuts and she ate all pecans. She followed that with a cheese ball or two, and then some black olives, a then a handful of glazed almonds, and then a little sausage with

the frilly toothpick stuck in it, and then a couple of shrimps blanketed in bacon. To wash all of this down, she had a glass of pink champagne – her father gave it to her to calm her nerves.

And what you noticed as the bride stood in the doorway was not her dress that was white, but her face that was white. For what was coming down the aisle was not a bride. Oh no, it was a living grenade with the pin pulled out. The bride threw up ... just as she walked by her mother. And by 'threw up', I don't mean a polite, little ladylike urp into her handkerchief. She puked. There's no nice word for it - she hosed down the front of the church. She hit two bridesmaids, the groom, a ring bearer, and me. Only two people were seen smiling. One was the mother of the groom and the other was the father

of the bride.”

Fulghum says that somehow they managed to pull themselves together, they went into the reception hall and they finished the ceremony in there, away from the mess.

“Everybody cried, as people are supposed to do at weddings. Mostly because no groom ever held a bride in his arms more tenderly than that one did.”

“But the best part of the story actually came ten years later when everybody was invited back for another party to celebrate this disaster of a wedding. They watched the whole thing on three TV sets (the mother of the bride had arranged three video cameras that day to catch all of the wedding details).”

Fulghum writes: "Give her credit, this party was thrown by the mother of the bride herself." And then he asks this question, "How could all these people rejoice when everything had gone so wrong? Why didn't they complain? Well, it was because in spite of all the mess, the bride still got the groom. At the end of the day, that was all that mattered. The bride got the groom."

Do you want to know why I think Paul sang in prison? Do you know why you can have a joyous heart, why I can have a joyous heart? Because at the end of the day we know that the bride gets the groom. You know we, the Church, are called the bride of Christ. And, there is a day coming when Jesus will return and He will receive his bride. He will redeem his bride. Revelation 19:7 says, "... rejoice and be glad and give Him glory! For the wedding of the Lamb has come."

Revelation 21 is the greatest promise of all that when that day comes there will be no more crying, no more tears, no more night, no more pain, no more death - and it says "God will be with them. He will live among them and they will be His people, and He will be their God."

And, this, friends, is why Paul sang in prison. This is the reason why you and I can have joy, not just joy because "it could be worse" – as true as that is. No, the reason that we can have true joy is because we know that someday "it will be better" and our hardship in this moment is just another pointer to that truth of what God is going to do. That's how our hearts can be transformed from complaining to joyous. That's how we can sing instead of complain.

Conclusion

And speaking of singing ... I'm going to ask the band to come get in place as we draw this to a close this morning.

And, I don't know what God said to you through this. I hope God spoke to you in some way. I think maybe for some people the first thing that I said about the repenting and the rejoicing, for some of us today, there is just the aha of, "Oh my gosh, this is not just some bad pattern. This is a sin." And, you need to repent and you need to say, "God, this is the truth about me. And I know you love me but you don't want me to stay the way I am. So, God, I want you to begin this work in my life."

And some of you, you've listened to this and you've said, "Man, I've had way too much exposure to negative commentary. Some of this stuff I can't do anything about, but, man, there's a lot of crap I choose to put in my

brain." Maybe for today you need to say, "I can't do these things anymore; I can't have this stuff going in me."

Some of us maybe need to adopt the habit of the gal I was talking about earlier, who made a list of three things every day. Some of us, maybe we need to do the opposite and say, "it could be worse."

Some of us, I think, have already got that nailed down and we need to start thinking of these little hardships, maybe even these big hardships, as a pointer to what's coming so that we're not so sucked into complaining. We say, "Yeah, it is hard, but this hardship reminds me that there is a day coming when it's not going to be like this."

I don't know what God wants to do, but I'm just going to pray that he will have his way and do what he wants with us.

God, I do offer this time to you. I offer what the band is going to sing to you as a way of your Spirit speaking to us. God, you don't leave us alone in this world, even though it's hard sometimes and it's so easy to fall into this trap. You're with us and you promise a great future to us. And, God, help us to focus on that. Help us to be the kind of people who are looking forward to what you are going to do. We ask it in Jesus' name. Amen.

Feature – “Stop Complaining” (Skye)

Endnotes

ⁱ The first two reasons are from Will Bowen's *A Complaint Free World* sermon notes.

ⁱⁱ This great example comes from Matt Proctor's "Complaining" message given at Trader's Point Church 7/17/11.

ⁱⁱⁱ This section also inspired by Matt Proctor.

