

SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSONS
Commentary by Michael Sigler
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People Grumble

Numbers 11:1-6, 10-15

Key verses: “The rabble among them had a strong craving; and the Israelites also wept again, and said, ‘If only we had meat to eat! We remember the fish we used to eat in Egypt for nothing, the cucumbers, the melons, the leeks, the onions, and the garlic; but now our strength is dried up, and there is nothing at all but this manna to look at” (Numbers 11:4-6).

“When our granddaughter was 4, she came to the table one day in a disgruntled mood. She complained loudly about every dish on the table. Hoping to change the mood, her mother suggested that she give the blessing. After a sullen pause, she prayed, ‘OK, God, I forgive you for this food’” (Arden Taylor in *Christian Reader*).

What might be cute in a 4-year-old is not so funny in folks who are old enough to know better. *Ingratitude* can become a problem that hurts us, hurts others, and damages our relationship with God.

That’s the situation described in Numbers 11. God has delivered the people from slavery in Egypt. As they journey through the wilderness of the Sinai Peninsula, God provides for them with *manna* from heaven (see Exodus 16).

Set free from slavery, fed by God’s own hand, on their way to the Promised Land of Canaan—yet the people are not content or thankful. Instead, their hearts are filled with ingratitude. Somehow they seem to forget the cruel slavery of Egypt. Now, Egypt seems good to them, especially the food they remember eating there—“the fish...the cucumbers, the melons, the leeks, the onions, and the garlic” (v.5). In fact, just about anything seems better than another manna burger for lunch!

Although their discontent may seem harmless, God saw in it the beginning of a rebellious and destructive attitude. What seemed a small sin, the sin of ingratitude, had the potential to cause great destruction. That’s how sin works. As someone put it, “Sow a thought, reap an act. Sow an act, reap a habit. Sow a habit, reap a character. Sow a character, reap a destiny.”

What, then, were the destructive effects of the Israelites’ ingratitude and discontent? What are the consequences of ingratitude in our lives?

1. Ingratitude damages our relationship with God. “Now when the people complained in the hearing of the Lord about their misfortunes, the Lord heard it and

his anger was kindled....Moses heard the people weeping throughout their families, all at the entrance of their tents. Then the Lord became very angry” (vv. 1 & 10).

Although we may feel that grumbling about our circumstances has nothing to do with God, ingratitude is ultimately a “God issue.” The person with an ungrateful heart has the attitude that “everything he does for God is too much, and everything God does for him is too little” (Don Kistler in *Tabletalk*, 9-18-01).

2. Ingratitude hurts other people around us. The constant grumbling and complaining in the Israelite camp eventually took its toll on Moses. He became disheartened, discouraged, and ready to quit: “So Moses said to the Lord, ‘Why have you treated your servant so badly? Why have I not found favor in your sight, that you lay the burden of all this people on me?...If this is the way you are going to treat me, put me to death at once—if I have found favor in your sight—and do not let me see my misery’” (vv. 11 & 15).

The constant grumbling and complaining got Moses so discouraged that he says, in effect, “God, just put me out of my misery!” *Ingratitude damages our relationship with God. Ingratitude hurts other people around us.*

3. Ingratitude hurts us and robs us of God’s best. Ultimately, the generation of Israelites who came out of Egypt did not inherit the Promised Land. Ingratitude and grumbling became rebellion, unbelief, and disobedience. As a result, a journey that should have taken only a few months—the passage from Egypt to Canaan—ended up taking 40 years! The older generation of former slaves died in the wilderness.

If ingratitude can bring such hurt and destruction, it’s important that we learn the grace of gratitude. I first met Dr. Ellsworth Kalas when he led a revival meeting at the United Methodist church where I served in Pensacola, Florida. His ministry as a pastor, educator, and author has blessed many.

Recently Dr. Kalas shared eight “Lessons Learned” over his 86 years of life and ministry. Number 1 on that list is the following:

*“Buy a house on Gratitude Street. Do so as soon as you can, because this is the only place to live, and the longer you live here the more you’ll love it. And believe me, you will enjoy your neighbors. The price on this street is steep, but you can afford it. You purchase this property with humility, by acknowledging that you are deeply indebted to both God and people. You confess that you wouldn’t have anything if it weren’t for what has been given to you. The important thing is not only to realize this, but to acknowledge it—to say ‘thank you’ as often as you can, to God and to people” (from *The Asbury Alumni Link*, Summer 2009).*

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