

LET GOD TAKE CARE OF IT NUM 11:4–6, 10–16, 24–29
EIGHTEENTH SUN. AFTER PENTECOST SEPT 27, '15

⁴ Now the rabble that was among them had a strong craving. And the people of Israel also wept again and said, “Oh that we had meat to eat! ⁵ We remember the fish we ate in Egypt that cost nothing, the cucumbers, the melons, the leeks, the onions, and the garlic. ⁶ But now our strength is dried up, and there is nothing at all but this manna to look at...”

¹⁰ Moses heard the people weeping throughout their clans, everyone at the door of his tent. And the anger of the LORD blazed hotly, and Moses was displeased. ¹¹ Moses said to the LORD, “Why have you dealt ill with your servant? And why have I not found favor in your sight, that you lay the burden of all this people on me? ¹² Did I conceive all this people? Did I give them birth, that you should say to me, ‘Carry them in your bosom, as a nurse carries a nursing child,’ to the land that you swore to give their fathers? ¹³ Where am I to get meat to give to all this people? For they weep before me and say, ‘Give us meat, that we may eat.’ ¹⁴ I am not able to carry all this people alone; the burden is too heavy for me. ¹⁵ If you will treat me like this, kill me at once, if I find favor in your sight, that I may not see my wretchedness.”

¹⁶ Then the LORD said to Moses, “Gather for me seventy men of the elders of Israel, whom you know to be the elders of the people and officers over them, and bring them to the tent of meeting, and let them take their stand there with you...”

²⁴ So Moses went out and told the people the words of the LORD. And he gathered seventy men of the elders of the people and placed them around the tent. ²⁵ Then the LORD came down in the cloud and spoke to him, and took some of the Spirit that was on him and put it on the seventy elders. And as soon as the Spirit rested on them, they prophesied. But they did not continue doing it.

²⁶ Now two men remained in the camp, one named Eldad, and the other named Medad, and the Spirit rested on them. They were among those registered, but they had not gone out to the tent, and so they prophesied in the camp. ²⁷ And a young man ran and told Moses, “Eldad and Medad are prophesying in the camp.” ²⁸ And Joshua the son of Nun, the assistant of Moses from his youth, said, “My lord Moses, stop them.” ²⁹ But Moses said to him, “Are you jealous for my sake? Would that all the LORD’s people were prophets, that the LORD would put his Spirit on them!”

What would you do if you were going to preach on text
and noticed flaw of main character in text is flaw you have,
at least according to some people.
You could pick another text or just ignore that part of it
or you could apply that part of text to yourself.
It is said best sermons are ones pastor preaches first to self.

This is also good advice for all those every day “sermons”
we preach to those around us.

Have you ever noticed that what people criticize others for
is often a flaw they have themselves?

Other way to put it, faults of others that bother you the most
can also be seen by looking carefully in the mirror.

In this text notice who it is that is impatient and complaining?

Who doesn't think someone else is doing things right?

GOD HAS US DEAL WITH DIFFICULTIES
WHAT WE OURSELVES DO IS DEFICIENT
EVERYTHING DEPENDS ON WHAT GOD DOES

GOD HAS US DEAL WITH DIFFICULTIES

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In Papua New Guinea, where I visited this last summer,
main food is sweet potatoes, which are very nutritious.

We were told students at seminary got tired of eating
sweet potatoes twice a day every day.

I asked what they would eat if they were home. Same thing.
Manna, the miraculous food God gave Israel in wilderness
was also sweet and very nutritious.

It could be ground and boiled and fried.

like corn meal mush I had as kid,

boiled mush, fried mush, cold mush, not bad but boring.

Sometimes when you are bored you daydream.

Israelites dreamed about food they remembered from Egypt.
problem was they didn't remember everything.

They forgot part about being slaves who had to work so hard they didn't have time to eat.

In church too, there is temptation to have selective memory, to think about glory days when pews were packed and fail to notice glorious things God does here now.

Part of problem was the "rabble", crowd, that was among them, Egyptians who God's miracles & left in Exodus with Israel probably because they also were poor & dissatisfied.

All nations are invited to join in the freedom God gives but freedom from burden of law is not freedom to sin.

Church today may have those among us but not part of us and we may be tempted to join them instead in doing things James also warns about in today's epistle: loving the world, desiring luxuries and complaining.

In first verses of this chapter, people had been complaining and God punished them so that they cried to him for help.

Now v. 4 says they returned to complaining.

What they needed to do was return to God, i.e. repent.

Why does God put them and us through hard times like this?

When Moses reviews this event in Deuteronomy he says

"God made you hunger and fed you with manna to teach you that man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of God."

In v. 6 they say "our strength is dried up",

word in original Hebrew is "spirit" is dried up.

Problem wasn't physical strength but spiritual strength.

What they needed was God's word and spirit.

This is what God gives us today in his sweet Gospel about salvation from sin through Jesus suffering for us, which nourishes and sustains our spiritual lives.

but today too is temptation to be bored by same old gospel.

Why can't we have prosperity gospel, social gospel, theology of glory, talk about self improvement.

Why can't it be more interesting and exciting?

In this text God does something exciting. He pours out his spirit.

He helps Moses by equipping more to speak his word.

But even then, people don't do as they are supposed to.

It is said that half the job is just showing up

and two who are chosen as leaders can't even do that.

So we see the problem isn't just the people but the leaders.

Our problem too is not just those other people but us.

WHAT WE OURSELVES DO IS DEFICIENT

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How does Moses react to unhappy people complaining to God?

He is unhappy and complains to God.

He was not the last prophet or preacher to feel,
when people God sends him to resist and are unfaithful,
I feel like such a miserable failure I would rather
just die right now and keep slogging through this.

Moses had problem with patience ever since he lost temper
when he was young man & ended up killing an Egyptian.
But after 120 years God finally taught him patience.

James tells us too: be patient, don’t grumble but pray.

Another problem Moses apparently has is failure to delegate.

Already before this his father in law had noticed
that he was exhausted from thinking he was only one
who could deal with every little detail
and encouraged him to appoint other tribal leaders.

His assistant, Joshua, seems to have picked up on attitude that
if others don’t do things just right they can’t do it at all.

He is like disciples in Gospel reading who think
those not doing things their way must be stopped.

Both Jesus and Moses say that is wrong approach.

This doesn't mean we can't help correct & instruct others
when they are not behaving or believing correctly
and help them do better.

James says in epistle if someone wanders from the truth,
someone should bring him back.

One of main things I see in text is we should be less concerned
with what others are doing wrong
than with what we ourselves are doing wrong.

But another thing I see is how God uses
even those who are imperfect, including us.

Jesus allowing non-disciples to cast out demons in his name
reminds of Paul who tells Philippians while he is in prison
some others talk about Christ out of rivalry
but he doesn't care because God still uses it.

God still uses Moses all of the 70, or is it 72?

If v. 24 says there are 70 elders gathered at the tent
but there are 2 more in the camp, that would make 72.

I notice this because God uses numbers with a meaning.
like the 12 disciples which mirror the 12 sons of Jacob
& 12 tribes to show they are beginning of new Israel.

These 70 are mirrored in 70 Jesus sends 2 by 2 in Luke 10.

But some ancient manuscripts say 70, others 72
Number of these disciples is thought to represent
the number of nations in world needing to hear gospel,
Genesis 10 lists 70 nations in world - in Hebrew,
in Greek Septuagint translation it is 72.

In Bible, #7 is number of finished and divine perfection,
like 7th day when creation was very good & God rested.
and #10 is number of complete totality, the whole group.
so 7 x 10: 70 symbolizes complete perfection,
those filled with God's spirit, ready to do what is lacking.

But #6 is number of humanity, created on sixth day,
falling short of God's perfection.

and #12 is number of God's chosen people.
so 72, 6 x 12 is ordinary men chosen as God's people.

That is us. We are to called by God's spirit to be
complete 10s and perfect 7s, part of the 70
but we fall short and are merely human 6s
but we are still God's chosen 12s, the 72
not always where we are to be, doing what we are to do
Yet God uses us in spite of our imperfections & failures.

So even though Moses is frustrated because it feels like everything is resting on him and he has to do it all...

EVERYTHING DEPENDS ON WHAT GOD DOES

²⁵ Then the LORD came down in the cloud and spoke to him, and took some of the Spirit that was on him and put it on the seventy elders. And as soon as the Spirit rested on them, they prophesied. But they did not continue doing it.

Their prophesying, like at Pentecost, is an outward sign that God has poured out his spirit, Point is that God's Spirit makes them able to do something they were not able to do on their own.

This is what God does for us as well.

Moses prayer that God's spirit is poured out on all his people is answered In our baptism.

God's Spirit ends our complaining and fears by giving us confidence and faith in God.

He makes us see beyond the current circumstances to the promised land where he is leading us.

and where he has prepared for us a feast far richer than anything that could be imagined

in the earthly Egypt we are tempted to long for.

This is all because of Jesus who has done for us everything that needs to be done for our salvation.

When he went hungry in the wilderness, he resisted every temptation to sin, taking our place

He is the one who carried all our burden of sin to the cross and who was ready to die, not in frustration

but in love, fulfilling the sacrifice that makes us holy.

He is the one who gave us birth so that we are his and who carries us in his bosom like little children.

He calls us to his place to feed us his word & sacraments.

When it seems to the people God is doing too little, he pours out his gifts overabundantly.

He gives so much food they gorge selves and get sick.

He pours out so much Spirit it overflows into the camp which provokes criticism.

But God's response to our complaining is not just giving us what we are asking for

but giving us the abundant grace he knows we need and causing his word to go through camp of all the world.

He does this by calling us out from among the crowd of rabble
to be crowd that speaks his word in response to whining.
Everything depends not on what we do or others do
but what God does, yet he chooses to do it through us
in spite of our weaknesses.

So, for now, GOD HAS US DEAL WITH DIFFICULTIES
so we learn to depend on him and his word,
including difficulty of dealing with difficult people,
people much like ourselves.

So we realize WHAT WE OURSELVES DO IS DEFICIENT
we need to worry less about what others do wrong
than about what we are doing wrong
but most of all we want to focus on how

EVERYTHING DEPENDS ON WHAT GOD DOES

He gives us life as his children through faith in Jesus.
He revives our dried up spirits, he gives us his gifts.
He does indeed provide for us all we need for life
both now and forever.