

“The Cost of Complaining” – Justin Beadles

Philippians 2:14-15 7-15-07

Mark McClain’s introduction:

We were lazy and decided to get a guest speaker from another church named Grace Bible Church. Last week, it was Matt Morton from Grace Bible Church of College Station; near what? – Blinn Junior College.

Justin Beadles who is here with us today is the Senior Pastor of Grace Bible Church of Nacogdoches, which has Stephen F. Austin University there. He was reared on a family farm in Thomas, Oklahoma. He said there are about 4.5 people per square mile in Thomas. I take it that there is a lot of livestock because that led to the next part. He majored in Agricultural Communications at Oklahoma State University. I was surprised to learn what that is about. It is not to help cows talk to each other. It is actually about how we can talk to the cows. When he finished that degree, he decided – what the heck – maybe that was not where he wanted to spend his life, talking to cows. He did a stint in the military, got married to the woman of his dreams, Heather, and they have four children: a son 5 years old, a son 3 years old, and twins, a boy and girl, who are 1. Recently, he asked Heather what kind of day she had and she answered: It was a 22 diaper-day. Justin graduated from Dallas Theological Seminary and did some interning at Northwest Bible Church where he met David Fletcher. In Nacogdoches, Justin has been serving that church for 7 years. He was initially a youth pastor there for 7 weeks. Based on that extensive experience, when the senior pastor suddenly resigned, they said – Hey, why don’t you preach? -- He has been doing a great job for them ever since. They are a growing congregation.

Today you will hear about the cost of complaining and you are in for a treat. Welcome, Justin.

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An introduction for which my mother would be proud. I am from a tiny town. We lived in a trailer house far enough out in the country that you could not see another house from there. I graduated with 36 people in my high school class. My dad graduated with 8 people in his high school class; that means if you were not the valedictorian or salutatorian then you were not in the top 25% of your class. People will say that there is nothing up there in Oklahoma. We think – *Yeah, there is*. But when you move away to Texas and do a trip home, you realize that comment is true.

I have had the opportunity to be in different environments during my career. I was in the Army and believe it or not, people in the Army complain. There was a guy who worked for me whose name was Edgar Arturo Valencia Mesa, Jr. That kid moaned constantly. I would tell him – *Edgar, if you weren’t*

complaining, that is when I would worry about you. – Do you know people like that, who if they weren't crying, something would be wrong? It's not you. You work with some of them, don't you.

Then I became a pastor and got to be around so many Christians. They are so awesome but they complain. I love my church and am privileged to be a part of it. Do you know what is wrong with the church? People come to it. We have it all figured out on paper how this thing will work. I was just there seven weeks when our senior pastor left and they decided to go with young-and-dumb. I hear whining at church from time to time over really important things like the placement of the doorknobs.

Then I go home at five o'clock to my wife and my four kids and as all parents know that is the witching hour. You arrive at home and your wife hands you one kid because she is going to put the dog in the blender; she is done. She is tired of it. She is whining at you about something because it is a frustrating experience.

Right now you are thinking of somebody else who needs to hear this sermon.

Today we are going to talk about complaining and we will try to answer three questions:

Where does complaining come from?

What does complaining cost?

What would life look like if I didn't complain?

Where does complaining come from?

Turn in your Bibles to the book of Genesis which includes the account of God creating the whole world. Then God creates these two people: Adam and Eve. They are a married couple living in a state of untested innocence before God in the Garden of Eden. God tells them they have everything conceivable at their disposal. God demands one thing of them and that is not to eat from a particular tree. If they do eat from the tree, the cost of eating from that tree will be death, spiritual separation from God and physical death that will follow. Adam and Eve had eaten from the forbidden tree and then ...

Genesis 3:11-13 And He (God) said, "Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?"

God knows already but He wants Adam to admit it.

The man said, "The woman whom You gave to be with me, she gave me from the tree, and I ate."

Then the Lord God said to the woman, "What is this you have done?" And the woman said, "The serpent deceived me, and I ate."

The foundational idea of where complaining comes from –

- **My desire to be seen as blameless.**

Do you see what happened with Adam and Eve? That is really the first complaint. Something happened that went wrong and God is asking questions. You can see in their response that they are complaining about their new situation already. – *She did it. It is her fault.* – Eve blames the snake.

We see this again in Genesis 4 which is about Cain and Abel, the first two sons that Adam and Eve had. The two men are offering sacrifices before the Lord. Cain offers a sacrifice that is not acceptable to God. Abel does the opposite of that.

Genesis 4:6 Then the Lord said to Cain, “Why are you angry? And why has your countenance fallen? If you do well, will not your countenance be lifted up? ...

You can see there is a problem with Cain and God has told Cain there is a problem. Cain is mad because he wants to be seen as blameless. He says to his brother, Abel, let’s go out to the field. Abel falls for that ruse and Cain ends up killing him.

Genesis 4:9 Then the Lord said to Cain, “Where is Abel your brother?” And he said, “I do not know. Am I my brother’s keeper?”

Cain is basically saying – I am blameless and by the way I am a little frustrated that You asked. You see everything. I want to be seen as blameless.

Say you go home and you say to your spouse – *Your kids messed up.* – If I complain to my wife about something the kids are doing wrong, I might say – *You are with them all day. Why don’t you get this thing figured out? Let’s get on board.* – What I am really saying is I am blameless. I couldn’t possibly have any influence over these children of my own. That is my wife’s responsibility.

At work, you might say – *Why is everything so messed up here?* – After all, you are the perfect worker and you would never foul up on your watch.

Why is this church the way it is? These people mess up Grace Covenant Church. -- We whine because it is obviously not me. It is our deep desire to be seen as blameless.

- **My propensity to glorify the past.**

We become nostalgic about the way things used to be. Turn to Exodus 16. This is the story about the people formed into a nation called Israel. As a result of their being formed into a nation, they ended up going to Egypt. They are held in captivity about 430 years as slaves; that is multiple generations. Through the process of time, God is making good on His promises and so He sends Moses to speak to Pharaoh. Moses says – *Let my people go.* – These Israelites are marvelously delivered. This is the story where you

hear of the plagues and Passover. When the Israelites leave Egypt, God turns the Egyptian people's hearts toward the Israelites and they offer money and free stuff as they leave Egypt.

Exodus 16:1 Then they set out from Elim, and all the congregation of the sons of Israel came to the wilderness of Sin, which is between Elim and Sinai, on the fifteenth day of the second month after their departure from the land of Egypt.

That is 45 days later, after seeing unbelievable movements of God.

16:2 The whole congregation of the sons of Israel grumbled against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness. The sons of Israel said to them, "Would that we had died by the Lord's hand in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the pots of meat, when we ate bread to the full; for you have brought us out into this wilderness to kill this whole assembly with hunger."

Back in the good old days, it was awesome. --- Right, you were slaves. --- We sat around pots of meat.

You may be thinking, I am picking on old people. No, my oldest son was 4 when the twins were born and at first he was excited. A few days into the babies being home, he asked – *Are these babies going to be here forever?* – He is already thinking about the good old days when Dad used to play with him more. These babies changed things for him. It used to be so awesome. – He was 4 and it only gets worse.

We start thinking "it" was so great before... I love it when people start telling me stories about back in the 1940's; it was awesome. I say – *So, you don't like air conditioning?* – Before the turn of the century when we took prayer out of the schools, everything was great. --- *Remember, they used to measure women's death rate in 100's when they gave birth as opposed to 1 death in every 18 gazillion now. – Back then, you could own people. That was good? ---* Were there good things? Yes. Was it okay for those people to think – back in Egypt we could see when the Lord was faithful to us. Fantastic, just remember the whole story.

When you are glorifying the past, you forget the whole story. Remember how tough it was in high school? It wasn't that good. We have this tendency in our families: Before we had teenagers, everything was fine. Before I got married, I was happy. Before all these things happened, life was better.

You are going to be tempted to think that because this church is in this big building project and things are going to change, different parking spots, with all the fences it will look like TDC – you will have a tendency to glorify the past. – *Back then, it was amazing.* – Let's remember the whole story as long as we are thinking about the past. That is the root of my complaining. When you are the one tempted to gripe about something, it is coming from this well that **I am blameless** and **it used to be better**. The fact is, it just used to be different.

- **Feeling a sense of entitlement.** Matthew 20:1-16 – it is the parable of the vineyard. Multiple times the vineyard owner speaks in terms of *his* vineyard. The owner starts at the beginning of the work day, say 8:00 a.m., and hires these workers to work for him in his vineyard. The owner says – *I will pay you a day's wage* (we'll call it a dollar). About three hours later, the owner hires more laborers and tells them he will pay whatever is fair, not mentioning a price. Near the end of the day, the equivalent of 4:48 p.m., the owner hires more laborers and tells them he will pay them whatever they are worth. At the end of the day when it is time to pay the workers, the owner pays backward. He first pays the guys who were hired last. They get paid a full day's wage. So, what would you be thinking if you started work at 8 a.m.?

Let's think about it this way. Christmas bonuses are coming around and you have worked for this company 27 years. A new worker is hired on December 18 and you see his Christmas bonus which is \$500. What are you thinking if you have been there 27 years? I must be getting more than \$500 because I have been here longer. I am entitled to more because I have been faithful.

In this story of the vineyard, the owner says to the complaining laborer – You agreed to work here and this is my vineyard. I can do whatever I want to with my money and my vineyard. – Every time when we find ourselves complaining, coming from the root within us is the thought – *I am entitled*.

You may think entitlement only means people who are too lazy to work. You come home from work and things aren't going the way you want. -- *I am entitled to a little peace and quiet around here*. -- Who says? You wanted kids. – You might think that at work you are entitled to be treated a certain way. Really? --- *I have been going to this church for ____ years and I expect people to listen to me*. -- Really? You are entitled? You are owed something?

You never want what you are owed. You never want God working on that plan. We all want grace.

- **Refusing to have my faith stretched.** In Numbers 14, the Israelites have rocked along and are more than 45 days into the journey. They have been told they will go into this land of Israel where they will dwell forever in the land of peace. This is from a promise made to Abraham. Moses had sent in twelve spies to check out the land to scope it out and see how it will be taken. 10 of the spies say they cannot take the land; that the men are too strong and it's too hard. Joshua and Caleb, 2 of the spies, report that they can take the land; that they need to be faithful.

Numbers 14:1 Then all the congregation lifted up their voices and cried, and the people wept that night. All the sons of Israel grumbled against Moses and Aaron; and the whole

congregation said to them, “Would that we had died in the land of Egypt! Or would that we had died in this wilderness! Why is the Lord bringing us into this land, to fall by the sword? Our wives and our little ones will become plunder: would it not be better for us to return to Egypt? So they said to one another, “Let us appoint a leader and return to Egypt.”

They might say they are just trying to bring to Moses’ attention that there is trouble here.

No, they did not believe God could be faithful. They are simply refusing to have their faith stretched, to walk out in faith and to have to rely upon God’s provision for the next step in their lives. They won’t do it.

That is how it works in your family. You can read the Bible and find out there is a certain way you are supposed to treat your spouse. There is a certain way you are supposed to raise your children, immaterial of how they respond to you. – *I’m not going to do that.* – It is the complaining and it is the root of it here as unbelief. I don’t really think God could possibly be faithful enough to deliver on the promises He has made me that these family instructions would work.

That happens all too often in my life. God has told us as a church to operate in a certain way and good things will happen. He has told us here at Grace Covenant Church that if we remain outwardly focused, if we continue to reach out and not be afraid to have new people join us that He can be faithful to make good things happen. – We might think, *I get really scared because things are going to be different.*

About this time, you are thinking one of two things. “A”, I hope *he* is listening; or “B”, great, but I am just made this way and it is not worth it for me to change. What does it cost if you remain on this same track of complaining? I want you to decide and if it doesn’t cost you anything, then by all means keep complaining – maybe somewhere else, but keep doing it.

What does complaining cost?

- **Makes life for my leaders miserable.** – If you are a person who hires people and you have people under you who whine, moan and gripe all day long, do you like going to work? You might start hating a job that you used to love. If in your family there is constant conflict and complaining, it makes it miserable for the parents. At Grace Bible people complain sometimes. It makes life miserable for the staff.

Moses said to God – *Did I give birth to these people? How did I get saddled with them?*

- **Causes me to miss what God is doing now.** – If I live my life in constant complaint, I am actually missing what God is doing – even though I am there. It is like I am watching the parade but I don’t get to march in it. If I choose to be the one who is against everything, say in the progress here at

Grace Covenant, I will miss what God is doing here. I'll be here but I will miss it because I will be so wrapped up in my complaint that I won't see what is really happening. Or with regard to my family, I'll be so wrapped up in complaining that I'll wake up one day and my kids will be grown and gone.

Can you see in those stories I was telling you about the Exodus generation, they are so busy thinking about how good it used to be, and they are complaining about how bad it is now, that they are missing the fact that God provided food in on the ground every morning for 40 years. That is amazing!

Do you want to miss what God is doing now? If I want to be able to say, *Gosh, it would be great to be able to tell stories some day of what I got to be part of*, then complaining cannot be part of my vocabulary.

○ **Damages the very things God gives me to flourish.** – Think of the institutions that God made. He made the church, the family, and civil government.

In my own family, say I decide that I want to be the one against everything. What did God give me to get along better in life? A wife. So if I am constantly griping, what does life become for her? Difficult. What does it do to my marriage? Eroding it. I can fake myself out and say I am trying to make things better by bringing them to her attention. Is it working? God gave me marriage to make life better and when I gripe, I am burning down my own house.

In my church, if you are the constant source of complaint, saying you are against everything, you think you are helping because you are so great about bringing things to the pastor's attention. You are not helpful. You are harming the very thing that God gave to make this thing great, to catapult your spiritual life in a direction you have never seen before. This person might start their statement with: *I don't mean to complain but ...* - That is supposed to get them off the hook of being a complainer. You might walk out of here saying – *I don't complain.* – We all know we have to address our problems.

Have you noticed that everything those people said, there was no faith. They said – **we are out here in the desert to die.**

So complaining is essentially bringing problems up in a faithless way. Instead of saying to your wife, *You are a great wife. We do have one problem and we can work it through.* That is faith-filled. *I believe in you and I know you can do this. Let's work it out.* That is different than: *You are the same battleaxe you always have been. I don't think you will ever change. Where is my supper?* – That is damaging the whole situation.

What would life look like if I didn't complain?

Turn to Philippians 2. Think what life would be like if I didn't complain for one week. You might be thinking, what would life be like if I didn't complain between now and lunch. Think of our perceived future in our home, in our family, in our church.

Philippians 2:14 Do all things without grumbling or disputing ...

There are times that Darrell Bock writes on a passage from Luke and it is 18 inches long to explain Greek to you. But not here, this is not confusing. You don't have to parse anything in this verse. When it says "all things", it means all.

Why would I do everything without complaining or arguing ...

2:15 ...so that you will prove yourselves to be blameless and innocent ...

Do you mean I have to earn my salvation? No.

...children of God above reproach in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you appear as lights in the world, ...

Paul is describing two kinds of people: a crooked and depraved generation and then you have children who are without fault. Who are they? The ones who are not complaining. Now Paul will describe that further when he says "you appear as lights in the world holding fast the word of life". That is incredible.

When you leave the city limits and the city lights, you can really see the stars. They stand out just by virtue of what they are.

You may have thought to yourself for years that you have no input here. – *I don't have the gift of teaching. I am not an administrator. I can't sing. I can't play an instrument. Where do I fit? How can I have input in this church or in God's kingdom as a whole?* – Don't complain! Simply by not complaining, you stick out like a sore thumb. You shine like stars. People will notice because of the absence of complaint from you. In everything else at church, they say you need to practice, or you need to memorize something. You don't have to do anything here – just don't complain. And you will start looking good. People will start to see you differently because you don't complain. They may ask why you do not complain and you can give the reason for the hope that you have.

Can you imagine what your family would be like if this worked its way into the fiber of your family?

Can you imagine how much more excited you would be to invite guests to this church if you knew the rest of this church family was committed to not complaining?

When my little boy, Jack, was 4, we told him we would get a swimming pool. He was thinking a pool dug into the ground in the backyard. We are thinking a little plastic pool. I took him to Wal Mart and

we were out in front of the store where the pools were all displayed. I said he could have any one of them as long as it was not pink. He said: I want the red one. I agreed and started to walk inside the store to pay for it. Jack said: Daddy, why do we have to go inside to pay? I said to him: They will put us in jail if we don't pay. We are walking inside and about 30 seconds later, Jack said: Daddy, what kind of jelly will they put us in? – Jack was not about to say, *Daddy, I don't understand. Would you tell me what a jail is and why did you use that metaphor?* He just went with what he knew because it was easier. It is easier to go with what you know and make life fit into that.

You have heard about the origin of complaining, what it costs, and asked to consider what life would be like without complaining. It is going to be very easy for you to just go with what you know. It will take some dealing with the Lord, asking Him to search your heart and to reveal within you honestly what you are like. You don't want to go with what you know or make life fit this and make excuses.

Folks, I have heard nothing but great things about this congregation. I really believe that you will take this seriously. I cannot wait to hear the stories in the coming years about how life was changed, beginning now, when this body became a people who are committed to being free from complaining.

Heavenly Father:

Thank You for the very high privilege of sharing Your words with these people. I ask that You cause good things to happen in their lives as a church, that You provide for them the necessary finances to complete the jobs You have laid before them. I ask that You give them an increasing sense of unity as a church, that You would provide for them a cohesive staff who enjoy their time together and who lead well. I ask, Father, that You would bring them back here safely next week to worship in Your name together. Amen.

