

# Sermon Text for August 4, 2019

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## ***Exodus 16:1-3, Acts 13:38-52***

"The Squeaky Wheel Gets Passed Over"

We are taught that if you want something all you have to do is ask, for it over and over and over again, and eventually You'll get it. Constant complaint is the formula it seems in peoples' minds for results. You may think that I am talking about children who incessantly ask and ask hoping and praying that one parent will give in and if they don't then go ask the other parent and she definitely will give in. After all, the squeaky wheel gets the grease.

But we also find in Scripture the example of the widow who incessantly bothered the judge until she was able to get justice from her situation. He relented and gave in.

What we find here in Scripture today is the exact opposite effect where we see that those who ask too much, those who complain too much, get passed over. From the very beginning of time we see in Acts today, God's plan had been set, his kingdom laid out, and his purposes for you and me have been before us. If we don't pursue those plans, if we take time to question God, or even worse challenge or complain to God, well Scripture shows us we are going to get passed over.

Remember what Modecai told Esther when she said that it probably wasn't a good idea for her to enter unsolicited to see the king? He says: If you keep silence at such a time as this, relief and deliverance will rise for the Jews from another quarter, but you and your family will perish."

What are we going to ask ourselves today is do we feel as if we are being passed over by God or by others? If we do then God challenges us in Acts not to complain but to act and get involved in an even more fervent way so that we know and realize the purposes that God has laid out for us. The Kingdom of God is going to be realized, but if you are not involved then you will be passed over.

### **READ SCRIPTURE**

Our Exodus Scripture is a fairly well known one. We find the Israelites just escaped from Egypt. They are faced with what God has given them: freedom. God made miracles take place so that every single freed person could know that it was God who led them out, who delivered them, who provided them a new life. You would think in a setting such as this one, of freedom, they would take advantage of it.

There are two ways to act in this situation when you are faced with new found freedom. You can move forward experimenting and experiencing the freedom that we now face and that strange as it may be, we can ultimately enjoy.

Or we can complain because we are no longer in Kansas, that we are no longer back in our old environment. Even if the environment from which we come was far worse, at least it was one that we knew. Israel did not thank God for their new way of life, but complained about the food, God responded and gave them heavenly food. They complained about the water, and God responded and gave them water from a rock. They complained about their direction and security. God responded with a cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night.

Every time that they complained, God responded. But they couldn't see the meaning and significance of his response. They were so caught up by what they thought God should be doing, what they were entitled to, what they deserved, that they couldn't see what God was actually doing.

God finally said: enough is enough. The squeaky wheel is not going to get the grease, I am going to pass them over, every single one of them including their leader. For 40 years they will truly experience what it means to be abandoned, someone else is going to be able to enjoy the promises that I have for them. And sure enough that is exactly what happens.

In Acts Paul reminds his listeners that this event actually took place. He goes over the history of God working miracles and the people nevertheless turning their back on God. Paul and Barnabas continue on their first missionary journey preaching the Gospel. They find themselves in Pisidia where they are asked to share the Gospel. Some of you are pretty bright and you picked up that it said that they were in Antioch. Now, this is a different Antioch than the missionary sending town, it is the same name, but different town. You know, like Strasburg, PA and Strasburg VA. We pick up the story where Paul tells the listeners exactly what God's plan for them is. This is a message for us as well. He lays it out before them leaving it up to each individual how they would receive the message, how they would react to the message, and what difference that message is going to make in that person's life.

Here is the message that he gives to them: I want to see if you are going to allow this message make any difference to you. Are we so caught up in what is happening around us, are we so busy complaining about life being so unfair that we miss the greatest news we could ever be told and if we act and react to that news appropriately then everything, and I mean everything in our life will be changed.

Vs. 38 Paul says: Through Jesus Christ the forgiveness of our sins have been realized.

Maybe we didn't hear that. People of God, the forgiveness of our sins have been realized. Some of us have been too concerned with complaining, with our problems, thinking all that matters is what is happening around us. Listen to the good news of the Gospel: through Jesus Christ we have been forgiven.

Some don't want to hear this good news, can't believe it because they can't forgive themselves for what they have done so they complain and complain hoping for attention, hoping to deflect this good news of forgiveness for them and all people so that if they don't know the Good News they won't be held responsible to respond to this news.

We are told today, from the very start of these verses, that we are forgiven. What is there to complain about? What have we to worry and fear if our forgiveness in Christ is complete. Well, I don't want to live under rules and regulations, in a prison set up by religious doctrines and ancient customs and laws that I had no part in shaping.

Paul lays it out for us again. Every believer has been freed from being bound by the law and is now allowed to live for Jesus Christ. When we complain, we are saying we don't have enough. What we hear here is that Christ is sufficient. II Corinthians 12:9 tells us that God's grace is sufficient for us. What else do we need than God's grace? Knowing that the challenge is how do we respond to the sufficiency that we are provided by the Almighty.

If we respond as the Israelites did through complaint, God will pass us and our generation over. The complaints in Exodus led to a direct action by God of passing over them. In Acts the Jews hear the message and plot to kick out the messengers who say God's grace is sufficient. Well, instead God says I am going to pass you over and these gentiles who believe in me and aren't stuck on the past and have a hope for the future, I am going to give them the promises of eternal life and salvation. Notice the reaction of the gentiles is that they were ecstatic. The Jews were furious and complained even more.

God has already acted in Jesus Christ for our salvation. But the results have been limited by our complaints and our lack of thanksgiving. Have you noticed that the papers more often than not report the squeaky wheel. The one who complains, the one who is not able to see beyond their own personal gains and desires and so are only focused on the present and can't see how their actions affect the future of real people, how their actions affect nations, even the entire world.

Often we feel entitled to certain things without recognizing the responsibilities that come with the promises which God has already laid before us. The disciples told the Israelites we are going to hold you to a higher standard, we are going to ask you to perform, you have to follow

and be loyal and give up your old ways, open your eyes to that which you are called to do. The Israelites felt entitled and grew lazy. They had their jobs for generations and were used to doing it a certain way and that way was far less than what should have been done. Now someone was actually making them work, they didn't like that.

You know how it is, years of not being held accountable makes you think you can get away with anything. It can happen in the world at the workplace, it can happen in the church. You get your feelings hurt if the pastor or a supervisor asks you a tough question or challenges you and you think that I've been a believer forever, no one has a right to challenge me. Inevitably you complain instead of looking to see if they are right. The easiest thing to do is drive the messenger, the one who is now holding you accountable, away. Or just retreat and not deal with it head on.

The good news today is that the squeaky wheel that the paper may report or that you hear in the halls of a church or an office, often get passed over. It may seem that they have all the attention and that everyone sees and believes that complaining cog and that in the short run they have won, but Scripture tells us in Psalm 30:5 that weeping may linger for the night, but joy comes in the morning. Right now it may feel like nighttime and that the morning may never come. Maybe it takes days, weeks, months, even years but joy will come in the morning.

So our response to the good news is not to complain but as the gentiles responded with joy and thanksgiving. You know we are called to discipleship as a response to the good news. Discipleship that allows more and more people to come to know Christ. You know Paul would not know what to do with a church no longer in the business of making more disciples. Sometimes as church membership goes down in some churches they say they are consolidating and focusing on growing the church spiritually and so the church has to decrease.

Our mission is not strictly focused on more growth, but it certainly is not other than growth. We are not called to decline. Paul teaches us that any church bold enough to preach the Word, which is convinced of the truth of its message, which is willing to suffer for the truth, will grow.

Brothers and sisters God has given us the confidence in Jesus Christ to shake the dust off of our feet in the face of complaints and squeaky wheels and to go on in our lives as the disciples did full of joy and the Holy Spirit. Amen.