

What Does the Bible Teach About Making Complaints?

Jeremiah 31:18-20

8/13/20 Thursday Indepth Bible Class
of the Trilacoochee church of Christ

Jeremiah 31:18-20

- “I have surely heard Ephraim bemoaning himself: 'You have chastised me, and I was chastised, Like an untrained bull; Restore me, and I will return, For You are the LORD my God. 19 Surely, after my turning, I repented; And after I was instructed, I struck myself on the thigh; I was ashamed, yes, even humiliated, Because I bore the reproach of my youth.' 20 Is Ephraim My dear son? Is he a pleasant child? For though I spoke against him, I earnestly remember him still; Therefore My heart yearns for him; I will surely have mercy on him, says the LORD.”

Ephraim Wept

- Of all of the tribes, Ephraim should have prospered, rejoiced, and served the Lord better than the others; they had a few advantages.

Gen. 48:15-20

- “And he blessed Joseph, and said: God, before whom my fathers Abraham and Isaac walked, The God who has fed me all my life long to this day, 16 The Angel who has redeemed me from all evil, Bless the lads; Let my name be named upon them, And the name of my fathers Abraham and Isaac; And let them grow into a multitude in the midst of the earth. 17 Now when Joseph saw that his father laid his right hand on the head of Ephraim, it displeased him; so he took hold of his father's hand to remove it from Ephraim's head to Manasseh's head. 18 And Joseph said to his father, Not so, my father, for this one is the firstborn; put your right hand on his head. 19 But his father refused and said, I know, my son, I know. He also shall become a people, and he also shall be great; but truly his younger brother shall be greater than he, and his descendants shall become a multitude of nations. 20 So he blessed them that day, saying, By you Israel will bless, saying, 'May God make you as Ephraim and as Manasseh!' And thus he set Ephraim before Manasseh. 21 Then Israel said to Joseph, Behold, I am dying, but God will be with you and bring you back to the land of your fathers. 22 Moreover I have given to you one portion above your brothers, which I took from the hand of the Amorite with my sword and my bow.”

Ephraim Wept

- Ephraim means “double fruitfulness.”
- They had the largest landholding; the blessing of material primogeniture came to him from Jacob
- Yet with all of those advantages, they went first and further into sin than any of the other tribes

Ephraim Wept

- On occasion, Ephraim remembered God and would repent and return
- Ephraim's grievance was based on repentance. He was grieving for his own sins.
- God embraced Ephraim as a dear son and promised mercy to him.

Ephraim Wept

- The Old Testament word for grieving can mean multiple things depending on the context
- “Nuwd” (nood) - “to nod, waver, to wander, flee, disappear; shaking the head in sympathy, to console, deplore; tossing the head in scorn, taunt; bemoan, mourn, move emotionally, take pity, shake, be sorry” (Strong's)
- Grieving often means deep sorrow or mourning, but occasionally it can mean “complain or bemoan”
- Ephraim complained to God about his condition in repentance

Ephraim Wept

- The Bible speaks of two kinds of complaints:
 - Those that are unwarranted or unrighteous
 - Complaints that are warranted or righteous
 - Understand the difference between them and consider their consequences.
 - Understand the role of repentance in complaints

Unwarranted, Unrighteous Complaints

- Murmurings - “Uttering complaints in a low voice or sullen manner; grumbling; complaining” (Webster).
- Murmurings usually involve complaining about matters from the perspective of personal opinion or individual judgment
- Usually they are born from discontent

Unwarranted, Unrighteous Complaints

- 1Cor. 10:10 - “Nor complain, as some of them also complained, and were destroyed by the destroyer.”
- Phil. 2:14-15 - “Do all things without complaining and disputing 15 that you may become blameless and harmless, children of God without fault in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world”
- James 5:9 - “Murmur not, brethren, one against another, that you be not judged: behold, the judge stands before the doors.” (ASV)
- Jude 16 - “These are grumblers, complainers, walking according to their own lusts; and they mouth great swelling words, flattering people to gain advantage.”

Unwarranted, Unrighteous Complaints

- Instead, we should take delight in doing good works
 - 1Peter 4:9-10 - “Be hospitable to one another without grumbling. 10 As each one has received a gift, minister it to one another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God.”

Unwarranted, Unrighteous Complaints

- Strife or dissension - “A complaint that is expressed with anger designed to cause discomfort, disagreement, or discord among disciples” (Smith’s Bible Dictionary)
 - 1Tim. 6:3-5 - “If anyone teaches otherwise and does not consent to wholesome words, even the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to the doctrine which accords with godliness, 4 he is proud, knowing nothing, but is obsessed with disputes and arguments over words, from which come envy, strife, reviling, evil suspicions, 5 useless wranglings of men of corrupt minds and destitute of the truth, who suppose that godliness is a means of gain. From such withdraw yourself.”

Unwarranted, Unrighteous Complaints

- 1Cor. 3:2-3 - “I fed you with milk and not with solid food; for until now you were not able to receive it, and even now you are still not able; 3 for you are still carnal. For where there are envy, strife, and divisions among you, are you not carnal and behaving like mere men?”
- Rom. 13:13 - “Let us walk properly, as in the day, not in revelry and drunkenness, not in lewdness and lust, not in strife and envy.”

Unwarranted, Unrighteous Complaints

- Gal. 5:19-21 - “Now the works of the flesh are evident, which are: adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lewdness, 20 idolatry, sorcery, hatred, contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions, heresies, 21 envy, murders, drunkenness, revelries, and the like; of which I tell you beforehand, just as I also told you in time past, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.”

Warranted, Righteous Complaints

- From illness
 - Job 10:1 - “My soul loathes my life; I will give free course to my complaint, I will speak in the bitterness of my soul.”
- From desire for children
 - 1Sam. 1:16 - “Do not consider your maidservant a wicked woman, for out of the abundance of my complaint and grief I have spoken until now.”
- From adverse circumstances
 - Psalm 64:1 - “Hear my voice, O God, in my complaint: Preserve my life from fear of the enemy.” (ASV)

Warranted, Righteous Complaints

- From persecution
 - Rev. 6:9-10 - “When He opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain for the word of God and for the testimony which they held. 10 And they cried with a loud voice, saying, How long, O Lord, holy and true, until You judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?”
- From pervasive immorality
 - 1Cor. 5:1 - “It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and such sexual immorality as is not even named among the Gentiles--that a man has his father's wife!”

Warranted, Righteous Complaints

- From false doctrine
 - 1Kings 18:21 - “And Elijah came to all the people, and said, How long will you falter between two opinions? If the LORD is God, follow Him; but if Baal, follow him. But the people answered him not a word.”
- From division
 - 1Cor. 1:10-11 - “Now I plead with you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment. 11 For it has been declared to me concerning you, my brethren, by those of Chloe's household, that there are contentions among you.”

Warranted, Righteous Complaints

- Warranted or righteous complaints usually come from love for persons making a mess of things, or love for truth, or from the strong desire for it to be followed everywhere by everyone.

The Fruit Of Complaining

- Bad fruit
 - Num. 11:1-10, 18-20
 - Num. 14:1-5, 27-30
 - Mark 14:4-6 - "But there were some who were indignant among themselves, and said, Why was this fragrant oil wasted? 5 For it might have been sold for more than three hundred denarii and given to the poor. And they criticized her sharply. 6 But Jesus said, Let her alone. Why do you trouble her? She has done a good work for Me."
 - 2Cor. 7:10 - "...the sorrow of the world produces death"

The Fruit Of Complaining

- Good fruit
 - 1Sam. 1:17-18 - " Then Eli answered and said, Go in peace, and the God of Israel grant your petition which you have asked of Him. 18 And she said, Let your maidservant find favor in your sight. So the woman went her way and ate, and her face was no longer sad."

The Fruit Of Complaining

- 1Kings 18 - The prophets of Baal were slain over Elijah's complaint about their false teaching.
- Acts 6:1-7 - Grecian widows received much needed support
- 2Cor 7:8-11 - Godly sorrow produces repentance

The Fruit Of Complaining

- Two things determine whether our complaints are warranted or unwarranted, righteous or unrighteous:
- What is the cause of the complaint: my opinion or the truth?
 - If your complaint is based on your opinion, keep it behind your teeth and pray to God to forgive you for your bad attitude
 - If your complaint is a matter of truth, find a way to express it that will be edifying and not hurtful; otherwise keep it behind your teeth until you are mature enough to speak to others as a Christian should

The Fruit Of Complaining

- What is the fruit of my complaint: good fruit or bad fruit?
 - If it is bad fruit, repent
 - If it is good fruit, don't be ashamed and apologetic