Welcome to City Life… and Happy Thanksgiving.

Our culture rushes from holiday to holiday and celebration to celebration.

In our culture we are masters or anticipation… but man are we are poor at sustaining celebration.

The second you close your eyes to sleep, you wake up the next morning and the next holiday is saturating the commercials and shelves.

The greater liturgical calendar is structured around the seasons of Advent, the Epiphany, Lent, Easter, and Pentecost, and each celebration and meditation on its meaning takes weeks and months.

But you won’t find Thanksgiving on the Church calendar. Thanksgiving isn’t in the Bible. It isn’t even across the globe. It’s American. Based on American history.

But the *concept* of thanksgiving is one that is thoroughly Biblical and celebrated in the Bible.

Some call it the password into God’s presence as the Bible says in Psalm 100 says to enter with thanksgiving.

So all our prayers should be full of thankfulness then, right? *Wrong.*

As we rush out of Thanksgiving I want to look at what you could call **The Anti-Thanksgiving.**

It is remembered not in American history, but Israel’s history.

At Mt. Sinai God effectively meets with the Israelites for the first time to introduce Himself and give His plan for them as His people. He says in Exodus 19 that the Israelites would become a kingdom of priests and a ***holy nation.*** When you look at the Promised Land, the land God promised to place his people in, it was geographically nestled in between all the prominent civilizations of that day. They were called to settle down and show those nations the glory of God and his heart for His people as well as the world by being a holy nation, set apart.

So they’ve been wandering through the wilderness on their first trip to the Promised Land when we get to **Numbers 11:1-15 & 31-34**

**“Graves of Gluttony”**

Before the gluttony came craving, and at the source of that craving was complaining.

Griping. Grumbling. The opposite of Thanksgiving.

**Quail** – are in the same family of heavy, ground living birds as turkey.

Like the Pilgrims in New England, the Israelites roughing it in a relative wilderness.
Quail was their Un-Thanksgiving meal.

The Israelites had experienced miracle after miracle.

Chief among them: **Manna –** a substance that would gather on the ground for them to gather each morning and eat daily. Numbers 11 says it was like coriander seed and looked like resin.

It was sustaining and sufficient. But it was far from exciting.

Eventually – here in Numbers 11 – we get the first complaining in the entire book.

It escalates to the point that they were saying they’d rather be back in Egypt.

* Enslaved. Their bodies whipped and beaten as they slaved daily.
* Oh but we had meat tho…
* How quickly complaining and a negative spirit can snowball into a complete loss of perspective! And ultimately these Israelites lost more than just their perspective.

God hears. And he airmails quail like some sort of Blue Apron shipment. But for a household of a million. It says he air mails it with a literal wind that blows them in from the sea. The inclusion of homers as a measurement in verse 32 gives us a rough estimate that there were roughly 105 million of these birds. And that’s a conservative estimate.

It says they eat it for weeks and weeks until they have it coming out of their noses.

This could be figurative, a lot of us had turkey *“coming out of our ears”* at Thanksgiving.

But as they were struck with a plague which no doubt included food poisoning, it’s quite possible the statement is a literal one as well.

The quails ultimately flew into the camp not as a delicacy but like Kamikazes.

The Israelites wanted gravy and ended up in*“graves of gluttony”*

Why would God do this?

Numbers 11 is more than a simple craving for meat.

God looks upon the complaining in Numbers 11 as a rebellious refusal to trust Him.

What’s sobering is the fact that there is not one trace of complaining or a bad attitude before this in the entire book of Numbers.

How does it spiral so fast?

Can that happen to us?

The Apostle Paul would answer yes.

The word used for complaining in Old Testament scripture is “grumbling”

It only occurs sparingly in the New Testament, and only once in the writings of Paul.

**Philippians 2:14-15 -** *Do everything without complaining and arguing, so that no one can criticize you. Live clean, innocent lives as children of God, shining like bright lights in a world full of crooked and perverse people.*

Paul doesn’t leave “being a light” vague – he gets REAL specific.

How does *he* want God’s people to be a light? Don’t complain. And don’t argue.

His use of the Greek word for “grumbling” points back to the Old Testament text.

Paul doubles down on the emphasis, using the same language of what’s known as the

***“Song of Moses”*** at the end of Deuteronomy, as Moses says in **Deuteronomy 32:5**
*“They are not his children, [but] a crooked and perverse generation.”*

He’s saying look – your fulfillment of your calling is at stake, the same way it was for the Israelites.

It’s why in 1 Corinthians 10 Paul gives an extensive account of the ways the Israelites stumbled before having their bodies scattered in the wilderness.

He says in verses 10 & 11

***Don’t grumble as some of them did, and then were destroyed by the angel of death. These things happened to them as examples for us. They were written down to warn us who live at the end of the age.***

**MSG:** *these are all warning markers—danger!—in our history books, written down so that we don’t repeat their mistakes. Our positions in the story are parallel—they at the beginning, we at the end—and we are just as capable of messing it up as they were. Don’t be so naive and self-confident. You’re not exempt. You could fall flat on your face as easily as anyone else.*

Our call is the same as these Israelites.

Our weakness and ability to fall flat on our face is the same as the Israelites.

We should take heed of their warning markers.

Numbers 11 and its escalation from complaining’s introduction to the complainers destruction should give us serious pause.

***WHAT SHOULD WE HEED?*** A couple lessons in complaining…

***Complaining often overshadows something we could be thankful for.***

Think about the Israelites in Egypt.

Slaves being whipped and beaten and oppressed. Their young boys were killed in a genocide.

They couldn’t complain to their slave drivers – you’d only be beat worse and driven harder!

They were set free by God… *even free to complain!*

Their own complaining about the conditions of their new freedom was indicative of the new freedom.

Some of us need to stop lamenting the responsibilities and count our blessings that our complaints overshadow.

We get the platform we asked for and then stress about the weight of it.

We get the blessing we prayed for and then complain about responsibilities.

Our big complaints are often overshadowing big blessings.

*So never complain then, only give thanks, right? Otherwise keep it shut?*

Not exactly…

Sure, David says *“enter his courts with Thanksgiving.”*

Again, I’ve heard people say Thanksgiving is the key that unlocks the door into God’s presence.

But… ACTUALLY… Jesus did that at the cross, and he left the door open for us.

He doesn’t lock us out every morning, and we have to unlock it through our own efforts.

Show me the Thanksgiving in Moses’ prayer in Numbers 11.

He says I’m AGGRAVATED!!

The same David that wrote enter his courts with Thanksgiving also writes in

Psalm 142:2 – *“I pour out my complaint before Him.”*

David complains.

**In Numbers 11 Moses complains.**

**In Numbers 11 the Israelites complain.**

The LORD shows compassion on Moses.

The LORD strikes down many of the Israelites.

Why the different responses? What gives?

Moses came to God with his raw emotion.

He let’s all his steam off.

If he was a kettle he’d be screaming. (He may have been screaming)

And God doesn’t tell him *watch your tone.*

God doesn’t tell *him get a grip.*

God doesn’t say *“ye of little faith.”*

God isn’t fazed in the least! In fact he answers his prayers and equips leaders to HELP HIM.

Be honest and real with God.

So many of us have been trained to either go to God the right way or don’t go to God at all.

Somewhere in my decade of following Christ I was first introduced to the acronym - **“ACTS”**

Adoration –GIVE to God our praise. Confession –ASK for forgiveness for your sins.

Thanksgiving – GIVE God thanks. Supplication – ASK for provision.

There’s nothing inherently wrong with this. Jesus asks us to ask, seek and knock. He asks us to be persistent in it. It’s absolutely part of our reason for praying.

But sometimes I need acts to stand for:

A – anxiety

C – complaints

T – tantrum

S – sulking

That’s what Moses was seemingly operating from:

anxiety – *How can I carry them to the land you swore to give to their ancestors?*

complaints – *Where am I supposed to get meat for all of these people?*

tantrum – *If this is how you intend to treat me, just go ahead and kill me!*

sulking – *What did I do to deserve the burden of all these people?*

But most of us wouldn’t dare pray like this. Because we’ve been taught we start with thanksgiving and preface our requests with “father God.”

So we get superficial.

*God can only ever meet you were are you are.*

*Not where you pretend to be.*

If we can take the bait on this lie that we have to have it all together to come to God in prayer it cripples our prayer life. And to have a crippled prayer life is to have a crippled faith.

We don’t know why the Israelites didn’t take their copmlaints to the LORD.

It says the Israelites complained *in the hearing of the LORD.*

News flash – all of your complaining is within earshot of God.

So why not bring it to God?

***If you don’t pour out complaints to God***

***they will spill out in ugly ways somewhere else.***

A prayerless people is a grumbling people.

In Exodus and beyond we see it multiple times:

The Israelites complain to each other and God gets angry.

Moses complains directly to God and it’s totally cool.

Notice: *Moses has a prayer life.*

The lesson?

***Complain vertically.***

Our impulse is complain horizontally.

And in the social media age - *we complain digitally.*

Paul’s explicit command in Philippians – don’t complain or argue.

Can you imagine if he came back in the flesh and saw Facebook?

He’d write a new letter called right after Colossians called Americans

And he’d tell the American Church in Americans 1:1 *– “get a grip.”*

We’re supposed to be a LIGHT horizontally.

Instead we gripe horizontally.

And if we as Americans look at Philippians we’ll see it’s not some small hiccup.

It’s robbing us of our witness. We’re compromising our calling.

What’s good medicine?

Remember the blessings already received.

The miracles overshadowed by the complaints.

Complaining robs us of energy and focus.

Gratitude feeds me energy. It’s like manufactured momentum.

Grace sustains us.

Gratefulness strengthenes us.

Have that Thanksgiving practice - where you go around the circle and everyone gives something they are thankful for. Only do it with yourself. Each morning.

*Journal* - Some folks don’t have a journal. They have Facebook. And it shows. Every aggravation. Every inconvenience. Every headache. Unfocused complaining that spills here and there and everywhere. Unfocused complaining denies the fact that God cares about each and every aspect of our well being.

Journaling for me is a way for me to pour my heart on a page so I can hold it up to God and say… here.

*“Trust in him at all times. Pour out your heart to him, for God is our refuge.”*

Whatever helps you do this… do it.

People can help with this pouring out. Have people you can bleed on. That you can process with. You can complain to. You can cry on their shoulder.

But keeping it real with God is still the end game. It’s the foundation. It keeps life balanced.

If you aren’t taking your emotions to God, there’s a good chance those relationships will end up out of balance.

**If we don’t talk out our emotions with God**

**We will take it out**

 **…on ourselves.**

 **…on others.**

We bury our complaints.

We’re just putting those complaints and negativity at our roots.

We become cynics.

And it’s not just poetic.

But it’s also physical.

Headaches. Upset stomach. Elevated blood pressure. Chest pain.

All of this can come from simply burying our stress and the hard things in life.

Our bodies and spirits aren’t meant to digest it.

Grace is meant to sustain us.

Gratitude strengthens us.

**Manna = a type of Christ.**

The manna was a daily miracle.

A miraculous bounty of sustenance for a people that would have otherwise starved.

We want miracles. We want signs and more.

What do we fill ourselves with instead of Him?

Only he brings life and not death.

Joshua – the manna stopped when they crossed into the Promised Land.

The Israelites were *one* chapter away from their arrival in Numbers 11.

Complaining took a period for the Israelites and made it permanent.

It took a stage and made it a state.

God’s goal – for his people to step into the Promised Land and be a light.

It’s the same goal He has for us.

Let’s be that light.