

The title of this morning's sermon is, *"God Might Give Us What We Want to Our Detriment."*

Please open your Bibles to **Numbers 11** and stand with me for the reading of God's Word.

Numbers 11:1 And the people complained in the hearing of the Lord about their misfortunes, and when the Lord heard it, his anger was kindled, and the fire of the Lord burned among them and consumed some outlying parts of the camp. **2** Then the people cried out to Moses, and Moses prayed to the Lord, and the fire died down. **3** So the name of that place was called Taberah, because the fire of the Lord burned among them. **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." **7** Now the manna was like coriander seed, and its appearance like that of bdellium. **8** The people went about and gathered it and ground it in handmills or beat it in mortars and boiled it in pots and made cakes of it. And the taste of it was like the taste of cakes baked with oil. **9** When the dew fell upon the camp in the night, the manna fell with it.

Go ahead and skip to verse 18...

Numbers 11:18 And say to the people, 'Consecrate yourselves for tomorrow, and you shall eat meat, for you have wept in the hearing of the Lord, saying, "Who will give us meat to eat? For it was better for us in Egypt." Therefore the Lord will give you meat, and you shall eat. **19** You shall not eat just one day, or two days, or five days, or ten days, or twenty days, **20** but a whole month, until it comes out at your nostrils and becomes loathsome to you, because you have rejected the Lord who is among you and have wept before him, saying, "Why did we come out of Egypt?"'

You may be seated. Let's pray.

On Sunday mornings we have been working our way through Luke's gospel verse by verse, but we encountered something at the beginning of the parable of the prodigal son that I thought was so important I wanted to elaborate on it by showing you a few other examples in Scripture.

Let me remind you what we read and then I will explain why I wanted to flesh this out...

Luke 15:11 And he said, "There was a man who had two sons. **12** And the younger of them said to his father, 'Father, give me the share of property that is coming to me.' And he divided his property between them.

As we talked in our sermon on these verses, the son's request was incredibly rude and disrespectful. The listeners in Jesus's day would've expected the father to:

- Reject the son's request
- Rebuke him for his disrespect
- Remove him from the family
- Slap him across the face
- Announce that the son should be viewed as dead
- And then hold a funeral for him

Instead, we read...

Luke 15:12b And he divided his property between them.

The only thing more outrageous than the son's request was the father's response.

One commentator wrote, *“For a father to do this...would cause [people to] gasp. Rather than strike [the son] across the face for his insolence, the father grants him what he wants.”*

Jesus’s listeners would never believe a father would respond this way and give his selfish, immature, rebellious son his inheritance.

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And you don’t have to live in Jesus’s day to know that a reasonable father wouldn’t do this in our day. What father, if he knew his son was going to waste the money, would give him lots of it?

No earthly father would do this, which begs the question why the father in this parable did it.

The answer is the father in the parable doesn’t represent any earthly father. He represents God the Father:

- The father in the parable extends freedom that will be taken advantage of and used sinfully, because he represents God the Father who extends freedom that can be taken advantage of and used sinfully.
- The father in the parable gives the son what he wants – even to the son’s detriment – because he represents God the Father who might give us what we want to our detriment.

To make this very simple, the beginning of this parable represents God the Father giving the sinner freedom to sin.

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Some people have a mistaken notion about God...

They think that if God doesn’t want them doing something, that He will prevent them. There are people who engage in sin and their defense is, “God hasn’t stopped me, so He must be okay with it. He didn’t close the door, so it must be okay that I walked through it.”

But it doesn’t work like this.

God hasn’t created a bunch of robots. We are free moral agents able to make sinful decisions, such as rebelling against a loving father...which is the point of the beginning of the parable.

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And I wanted to show you other examples of this in Scripture...

In the last sermon we saw God let Moses take Aaron with him.

In this sermon we will see two more examples.

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The first example is in **Numbers 11**. We will read through the first few verses quickly. Look with me at **verse 1**...

Numbers 11:1 And the people complained in the hearing of the Lord about their misfortunes, and when the Lord heard it, his anger was kindled, and the fire of the Lord burned among them and consumed some outlying parts of the camp. 2 Then the people cried out to Moses, and Moses prayed to the Lord, and the fire died down. 3 So the name of that place was called Taberah, because the fire of the Lord burned among them.

We could have another sermon entirely just on complaining. God doesn’t like complaining, and he definitely didn’t like the Israelites complaining after everything he had done for them up to this point:

- He unleashed plagues on Egypt to get them released from their captivity
- He parted the Red Sea to deliver them from the Egyptians who were chasing them
- He led them with a cloud during the day that protected them from the sun
- He was a pillar of fire at night that kept them warm
- He gave them water from the rock
- He gave them bread they could walk outside their tents and pick up off the ground

Yet they're complaining.

To teach them a lesson he unleashed fire that burned parts of the outside of the camp.

Unfortunately, they didn't learn. Look at **verse 4**...

Numbers 11:4 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."

Apparently, the manna wasn't good enough for them. They wanted meat.

Keep two things in mind:

1. First, they're in the wilderness. They don't have established farms and vineyards. Food isn't the easiest thing to come by. But now, all they have to do is walk outside their tents and pick the manna up off the ground. But that's not good enough for them, so they complain.
2. Second, the manna is a picture and type of Christ, the true and greater bread from heaven, so criticizing the manna could have been like criticizing Christ.

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Now considering God just sent fire through the camp because of their complaining, what would you expect from Him at this moment?

I would expect him to be even angrier and unleash an even worse judgment.

Instead, He looks like the Father in **Luke 15**. He gives the Israelites what they want. Look at **verse 18**...

Numbers 11:18 And say to the people, "Consecrate yourselves for tomorrow, and you shall eat meat, for you have wept in the hearing of the Lord, saying, "Who will give us meat to eat? For it was better for us in Egypt." Therefore the Lord will give you meat, and you shall eat.

The sounds good at first, doesn't it? God is going to give them meat.

But I want you to notice in the following two verses that it's described in an incredibly unpleasant way...

Numbers 11:19 You shall not eat just one day, or two days, or five days, or ten days, or twenty days, **20** but a whole month, until it comes out at your nostrils and becomes loathsome to you, because you have rejected the Lord who is among you and have wept before him, saying, "Why did we come out of Egypt?"

God was going to put them on a keto diet. They were going to go from all bread – the manna – to all meat. They're going from high carb to no carb.

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Notice God said the meat would become **loathsome** to them...and this brings us to lesson one...

God might give us what we want but later (Lesson One) we might not want it.

The Hebrew word for loathsome is *zārā'* (pronounced zaw-rah). This is the only place it occurs in Scripture and it means nauseating.

The meat they previously wanted would become detestable to them. They would hate the meat than they hated the manna:

- In **verse four** they said, “Oh that we had meat to eat,” but they would begin to say, “Oh that we have to eat meat again.”
- In **verse six** they said, “There is nothing at all but this manna to look at,” and they would begin to say, “There is nothing at all but this meat to look at.”

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 God said they would eat meat **until it [came] out [their] nostrils**.

They wouldn't eat meat just one, two, five, ten, or even twenty days. They would eat meat thirty days in a row.

What day do you think they would reach before they started hating meat and wanting bread again?

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 I don't care what your favorite food is, it is going to become disgusting if you have to eat it for 30 days.

I wrestled with this part of the sermon for a while...

I think even popcorn could become disgusting if you had to eat it for 30 days straight. Four or five days in a row sounds like a dream come true, but when you're getting to the 20th day – say nothing about 30th day – just the sight of it is going to take away your appetite.

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 Now to be clear, this is like what we looked at a few weeks ago when God let Moses take Aaron with him...

God gave give Israel what they wanted to their own detriment.

Why is that?

It wasn't God's will for them to have meat, so He wouldn't let it bless them. Instead, He let it be a curse.

The application for us...

If God lets us have something, but it's not His will for us to have it, He won't let it bless us. He will let it be a curse.

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 And just to make it clear that God is not happy with Israel, look at the following verses, starting with **verse 31**...

Numbers 11:31 Then a wind from the Lord sprang up, and it brought quail from the sea and let them fall beside the camp, about a day's journey on this side and a day's journey on the other side, around the camp, and about two cubits above the ground. 32 And the people rose all that day and all night and all the next day, and gathered the quail. Those who gathered least gathered ten homers. And they spread them out for themselves all around the camp.

They were so excited to have meat that they gathered it **all day and night and the next day**.

And it says those who gathered the LEAST gathered 10 homers. We don't deal in homers, so let me explain...

One homer is about 2.7 pounds. So, the person who gathered the least gathered 10 homers, or 27 pounds of meat. This is an incredible amount of meat.

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 Listen to what God said when they gathered the manna...

Exodus 16:16b You shall each take an omer, according to the number of the persons that each of you has in his tent.”

They could take one omer of manna, which is about 5.5 pounds.

So, they went from gathering 5.5 pounds of bread to 27 pounds of meat.

Numbers 11:33 While the meat was yet between their teeth, before it was consumed, the anger of the Lord was kindled against the people, and the Lord struck down the people with a very great plague. 34 Therefore the name of that place was called Kibroth-hattaavah, because there they buried the people who had the craving.

Kibroth Hattaavah means, “*Graves of Craving.*”

This is a strong judgment. God struck down many of the Israelites because of their craving.

It reminds me of...

Philippians 3:19 Their end is destruction, their god is their belly.

In other words, they were struck down – or destroyed – because of their bellies – or craving.

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They didn’t even get to finish eating, before God started punishing them...and this brings us to part two of lesson one...

God might give us what we want but later (Lesson Two) He might punish us.

This can seem confusing...

Why would God give people what they want, but then punish them when they get it?

Because he never wanted them to have it.

God was angry with Israel for eating meat He gave them...because it was never meat He wanted them to have...even when He gave it to them!

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This is very sobering...

It reveals that if we want something and we push for it, God might let us have it...but then punish us later for having it.

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We get more insight into this situation in the Psalms. Turn to **Psalm 78:26.**

Psalm 78:26 He caused the east wind to blow in the heavens, and by his power he led out the south wind;

This is the wind that blew the quail into the camp.

Psalm 78:27 he rained meat on them like dust, winged birds like the sand of the seas; 28 he let them fall in the midst of their camp, all around their dwellings. 29 And they ate and were well filled, for he gave them WHAT THEY CRAVED.

Notice the way this is worded. It says God **gave them what THEY CRAVED** or desired. Not what God desired for them.

Psalm 78:30 But before they had satisfied their craving, while the food was still in their mouths, 31 the anger of God rose against them, and he killed the strongest of them and laid low the young men of Israel.

There is an interesting irony when you contrast two phrases:

- **Verse 29** says **they ate and were filled**
- **Verse 30** says **before they had satisfied their craving**

They ate enough to be full...but it never satisfied them!

This describes so well what happens when we get what we want, but it's not what God wants for us...

He gives it to us, but He might remove any satisfaction we receive from it.

Take your mind back to the Prodigal Son: he got what he wanted, the inheritance, but it didn't satisfy him.

It's like eating junk food.

Have you ever eaten lots of junk food? How do you feel, besides guilty?

You're full...but you're not satisfied.

Spiritually speaking, getting what we want when it's not God's will for us is like eating lots of junk food. We can be full but satisfied.

Sometimes we think certain things will...

- Finally make us happy...
- Fix all our problems...

But if it isn't God's will for us:

- It won't satisfy us.
 - It can even make our lives worse.
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Spurgeon said, *"The Lord shewed them that he could 'provide [meat] for his people,' even enough and to spare. He also shewed them that when lust wins its desire, it is disappointed... Consider that there is more real satisfaction in mortifying lusts than in making provision for them or in fulfilling them: there is more true pleasure in crossing and pinching our flesh than in gratifying it; were there any true pleasure in sin, hell would not be hell, for the more sin, the more joy. You cannot satisfy one lust if you would do your utmost, and make yourself never so absolute a slave to it; you think if you had your heart's desire you would be at rest: you much mistake; they had it."*

Go ahead and turn to **Psalm 106:12**.

The situation is later described here. Look at **verse 12**...

Psalm 106:12 Then they believed his words; they sang his praise. 13 But they soon forgot his works; they did not wait for his counsel.

This is referring to Israel being delivered from Egypt, singing God's praise, but forgetting what He had done for them. They moved quickly from thankfulness to rebellion. One minute they were praising God for all He had done, and the next minute they were complaining.

The application for us...

When we start suffering, how quickly do we forget what God has done for us and start complaining?

I know this is a temptation for me!

Notice it says **they did not wait for his counsel.**

When we want something, do we wait for God's counsel...or do we rush ahead?

I know this is a temptation for me!

Boice wrote, *"Is it that way with you? You see God's miracles, but at the first sign of any new opposition you forget what God has done and are soon rebelling against what you suppose to be your hard and painful life? Then, when God saves you again, you sing his praises but soon forget even that deliverance? That is exactly what you and I are like."*

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The NIV says **they did not wait for God's plan to unfold.**

When we want something, do we wait to see how God's plan will unfold...or do we rush ahead?

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Basically, they were impatient!

They remind me of the prodigal son. Take your mind back to him for a moment...

Was he going to get his inheritance?

Yes!

So, what was his problem?

He was impatient.

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This is very applicable...

If we get what we want, because:

- We won't wait.
- We are impatient...
- We rush ahead of the Lord...we do **not wait for his counsel...**we do **not wait for God's plan to unfold...**

It doesn't usually go well for us.

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Look at **verse 14...**

Psalm 106:14 But they had a wanton craving in the wilderness, and put God to the test in the desert;

This is referring to Israel wanting meat, and notice this...

Psalm 106:15 he GAVE THEM WHAT THEY ASKED, but sent a wasting disease among them.

This is exactly what we've been talking about...

They got what they wanted, but it wasn't a blessing. It was a curse:

- God gave them the meat, but He also gave them a disease.
- They got more meat than they could imagine, but it caused them to waste away.

Could you imagine eating, but the more you eat the more you waste away?

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Interestingly, there's a good chance this isn't speaking physically, but spiritually. Other translations say...

God sent leanness into their soul.

What does this mean?

- They were growing physically while they ate, but their soul was wasting away.
- They were satisfied physically but starving spiritually.

It would be better for us to deny our physical cravings, but enjoy a fat and happy soul.

Next turn to **Numbers 22**. This is a familiar account, so we'll go through it quickly.

Look at **verse 2**...

Numbers 22:2 And Balak the son of Zippor saw all that Israel had done to the Amorites. 3 And Moab was in great dread of the people, because they were many. Moab was overcome with fear of the people of Israel.

Balak, the king of Moab, is terrified, because he sees the Israelites traveling through the wilderness destroying their enemies...enemies who previously defeated them. In other words, Balak is about to face the people who defeated the people who defeated them. He knows he doesn't stand a chance, so he comes up with a plan. Look at **verse 6**...

Numbers 22:6 Come now, curse this people for me, since they are too mighty for me. Perhaps I shall be able to defeat them and drive them from the land, for I know that he whom you bless is blessed, and he whom you curse is cursed."

Balak wants Balaam to curse Israel to weaken them.

Because Balaam wanted the money, he did something absurd. He asked God if God wanted Balaam to curse Israel...His own people!

Not surprisingly, look at **verse 12**...

Numbers 22:12 God said to Balaam, "YOU SHALL NOT GO WITH THEM. YOU SHALL NOT CURSE THE PEOPLE, for they are blessed."

But Balaam really wanted the money, so he kept asking. Look at God's shocking response in **verse 20**...

Numbers 22:20 And God came to Balaam at night and said to him, "If the men have come to call you, rise, go with them; but only do what I tell you." 21 So Balaam rose in the morning and saddled his donkey and went with the princes of Moab.

This is a very sobering situation that further emphasizes what I consider to be one of the heaviest truths about our relationships with God...

If we keep pushing, there could be a point that He says, "Fine, you can have it."

It makes me wonder how often I do this?

Do I get an answer through the Holy Spirit's conviction, but continue to push until God lets me have it...to my own detriment?

Perhaps you have been guilty of this too.

And not only might God give us what we want, He might even be angry when we get it!

And this brings us to Lesson Three...

God might give us what we want but later (Lesson Three) He might be angry.

Look at **verse 22**...

Numbers 22:22 But GOD'S ANGER WAS KINDLED BECAUSE HE WENT, and the angel of the Lord took his stand in the way as his adversary. Now he was riding on the donkey, and his two servants were with him.

One of the obvious difficulties with this verse is it looks like God changed His mind...but many times in the Bible it says God DOESN'T change His mind.

Briefly look one chapter to the right at **Numbers 23:19**...

Numbers 23:19 God is not man, that he should lie, or a son of man, that HE SHOULD CHANGE HIS MIND. Has he said, and will he not do it? Or has he spoken, and will he not fulfill it?

If God does not change His mind, how do we explain Him telling Balaam not to go and then letting him go?

God didn't change His mind:

- He never wanted Balaam to go...even when he let him go.
- It was never God's will for him to go...even when he went.

When Balaam went, he was following Balaam's will. God let Balaam have his will...to his own detriment.

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Think about it like this...

Balaam knew he shouldn't curse Israel, but he did so at the first opportunity because he wanted the money.

He wanted to disobey God, and he did as soon as God let him.

We would expect that to anger God like it did!

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If you're a parent, you know what this is like...

Maybe you've had kids who keep asking to do something. You give in...but you're mad when they do it...even though you told them they could do it...because you didn't want them to do it!

That's what happened with Balaam.

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We will look at a few more examples next week, but because we are out of time, let me conclude with this...

It is important to know that if we push God, He might let us have what we want...even to our own detriment.

And let's understand there's something else that happens every time we insist on our will:

- Our hearts become a little harder...
- We become a little less receptive to God's will...
- It gets a little easier next time to seek our will instead of God's will.

So I just want to encourage all of us, myself included:

- Let's be surrendered to God's will and what He wants - and doesn't want - for our lives.
- Let's make sure we don't insist on having what we want. If we do we can end up:
 - Like the prodigal son when he got his inheritance
 - Like Moses when he got Aaron
 - Like the Israelites when they got meat
 - Like Balaam when he got to go with Balak

Whenever we insist on having our will, we remove ourselves from God's perfect will...and our will is always going to be tougher than God's will.

Meyer said, *"Oh, do not seek to impose your will on God; do not insist on anything with too great vehemence; let God choose. Whenever you make request for things, which are not definitely promised, ask God not to grant them, except it be for the very best."*

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I will be up front after service, and if you have any questions about anything I've shared, or I can pray for you in any way I would consider it a privilege to speak with you.

Let's pray.