

THANKS - GIVING?
Ben Kinchlow

This time I was getting really irritated...cut off in the middle of my cell phone conversation *again!* As we had been discussing office hours for the Thanksgiving weekend, I rang my party back and began to express, with righteous indignation, my *justifiable* irritation with the phone company. After all, I was paying good money for “bad service.” I was warming up for a real tirade when the voice on the other end cut in and said quietly, “You know, I’m not going to complain about my cell phone service anymore.”

“What?! I asked, “Are you going to change companies?” “No,” she replied, “I’m just not going to complain anymore.” Well, right away I knew I needed to get to the bottom of this because we used the same phone company, her charges were about the same as mine, and she had experienced some of the same disconnects, service drops, and poor reception. “Okay, why not?”

She paused a moment and then said, “Last week I was just about to complain about the fact that I had been cut off again when suddenly I remembered what it was like to be without a cell phone, so those few times that I lose contact now really don’t seem to matter all that much. The fact is, I am grateful just to *have* a cell phone and be able to communicate at will, so I decided I am not going to gripe about it again.”

This time the pause was on my end. I had a quick flashback of all the times I had said some not-so-complimentary things about my cell phone company (and other things) and it suddenly dawned on me; I, the minister, national figure and longtime Christian, had been doing exactly what a group called “the Children of Israel” had done for forty years in the wilderness.

But wait, I was not really *murmuring and complaining*. I was simply “expressing deeply felt, honestly held opinions” (although I am sure that someone “less spiritual” than me could misconstrue what I was doing as carping, griping or grumbling).

The pause continued; what kind of answers would the Children of Israel have given if I had asked about the nature of their complaints? Would they have had similar responses? After all, how did that old song go...“Manna in the morning, Manna in the evening, Manna at suppertime.” That could get old, even if they didn’t have to do anything but pick it up, cook it and eat it. “Hey, how bout some raisins in that manna!”

This, of course, led to what else (other than my phone) that I have “deeply felt, honestly held opinions” about - taxes, my job, my car, traffic, the weather, America’s faults, the president, congress, the people I work with, my spouse, my kids, church members, the other pastors, etc, etc. But that’s not really murmuring and complaining, is it? Well, some of *you* might be, but *I’m* certainly not. After all, when *I* comment or criticize, it’s because I have a “good reason.” Besides, it’s “the truth.” If I’m *critiquing* a fellow employee (out of their earshot), isn’t that just the way they really are? I’m only saying what “everybody knows.” And anyway, when I talk about not having what I should have, or commenting on what *they* have, or pointing out that I didn’t get the breaks *they* got, that’s not really murmuring and complaining, is it? I’m just telling it like it is, right? I’m simply expressing those deeply felt, honestly held opinions to which I am entitled. Right?

Back to the lady with the cell phone; we have continued doing business together now for years, and to the best of my knowledge she has never complained again about her cell phone service.

And oh yeah, what about me? Remember all those things I talked about earlier? Taxes, my job, my car, traffic, the weather, the president, congress, the people I work with, my spouse, my kids, church members, the other pastors, etc., etc. (and my cell phone)? Well, I've been thinking about them, too.

First and foremost, **I am so grateful that I live in America**...nobody's lining up to get out of *here*.

No job, no income? At least I have income to pay taxes *on*. My car and traffic? Well, I am not *walking*, like 2/3rd of the world's population. While I may not agree with the president, at least we have an opportunity to find a replacement (just four, no more) without guns and tanks. Church members and pastors? Well, at least we aren't being shot by radicals...yet. My cell phone? Well, it *is* a smart phone.

Perhaps instead of just not complaining, I should really try and be, what's the word...**grateful**. Thanksgiving is just around the corner, and since I know that the first Thanksgiving wasn't about the Pilgrims high-fiving the Indians for corn, perhaps I should truly and honestly get with the program.

Thanksgiving is **giving thanks**... and not just for turkey and pumpkin pie. It is real gratitude for so many things I take for granted. Like the other day; I came out of a restaurant with my carry out order and walked the short distance to my car. As I was pulling out of the parking lot complaining to myself that my knees hurt, I saw three people waiting to go into the restaurant, so I stopped and let them cross in front of me. I felt really skuzzy for complaining about my knees when one of the three turned out to be a young girl who had no use of her legs at all.

You know, maybe I don't have it all that bad after all.

But on the other hand...