



# THE STORY OF *Everything*

LUKE 24:27

In *The Last Battle*, C.S. Lewis's final book of the Chronicles of Narnia, Aslan the Lion brings everyone to the New Narnia. It's a place of beauty, light, where the grass is greener, the fruit is more luscious, and every creature sings for the sheer joy of the Creator. Everything is just so real that the sight of a flower takes your breath away and makes weep with joy.

But, in the midst of all of this beauty, the children with Aslan see a group of dwarves huddled together convinced that they are sitting in the stench of a barn – a place so dark that they cannot see their hands in front of their faces. One of the children, Lucy, begs Aslan to help them to see. Aslan replies, “Dearest Lucy, I will show you what I can do and what I cannot do.” Aslan then shakes his golden mane and a delicious feast appears instantly in front of the dwarves. Each dwarf is given a plate heaped with juicy meats, glistening vegetables, plump grains of rice, and a goblet brimming with the finest wine anyone could every imagine.

But when the dwarves dive in and begin eating, they start gagging and complaining. “Doesn’t this beat all,” they lament. “Not only are we in this stinking stable but now we’ve got to eat hay and dried cow dung as well!” When they sip the wine, they sputter, “And look at this now! Dirty water out of a donkey’s trough!” The dwarves, Aslan explains to the others, had chosen suspiciooun instead of trust and love. They were prisoners of their own minds. They could not see the gift of the new Narnia, and so Aslan leaves them alone to their blind unbelief.

In a similar way, Numbers 11-14 picks up these same themes. In the first 10 chapters of Numbers, God is preparing his people to enter a new land promised to them. After spending a year at Mount Sinai, the presence of the Lord picks up and begins to move. After being counted in a census to prepare them for their military conquest of the land, God’s presence goes up and leads the people to Kadesh. And each time God’s presence would go, Moses would pray and the people would follow. Moses would pray two things, as summarized in Numbers. 10:35-36: “Arise, O Lord, and let your enemies be scattered!” and “Return, O Lord, to the countless thousands of Israel.” In other words, Moses was asking God to fight for Israel and be with Israel. We are on the verge of God’s promises to Abraham being realized and enjoyed by his descendants who have been fruitful and multiplied.

But like the dwarves who have come to the new Narnia, all Israel can do is grumble and complain. What went wrong?

The sin that underlies all other sins is a simple one. It began in the Garden of Eden, and it continues today. It is the sin of unbelief. Instead of believing what God has said to be true, we believe what our eyes see and we stumble and falter into sin. So how does unbelief happen?

## Watch out for Grumbling (Numb. 11-12)

**The Story of Everything: Unbelief – Numbers 13-14**  
CBC Illderton

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The presence of God is not a blessing if you grumble about him and his provisions. In chapters 11 and 12, Israel complained to the Lord three times. In 11:1-3, the people complain about the hardships and troubles. Then, tired of the Lord packing the same thing in their lunch every day, they complain about the food, wishing they could go back to Egypt and eat fish, cucumbers, melons, leeks, onion, and garlic. So the Lord gave them so much meat that they got sick of it (11:19-20). Finally, even Moses' siblings complain about him and his leadership (ch. 12). They're tired of hearing Moses complain about leading Israel (11:10-15).

Grumbling has become the way of life for Israel. But what is striking about their grumbling is that it is not just a complaint about the hardship of life, about their food, or about their leaders. Under all of these complaints is their unbelief in the goodness of God. They don't want hardship! They've had enough in Egypt. Now they want the land of rest. They don't want manna bread. They want the Egyptian diet. And they don't like Moses speaking for God, so they criticize Moses' family. The complaining and grumbling isn't a lament that the world isn't quite right; the complaining and grumbling is rooted in unbelief that God is not good.

In the Bible, lament is the acceptable complaining. It looks at the world and believes that God is good and sovereign and expresses confusion at what he is doing. But grumbling looks at the world and thinks that God is not being good, and that somehow he owes you something. I'm tired of these hardships! I don't want to suffer Lord, and I don't deserve to suffer because you've promised me a land of abundance and rest! We can grumble about anything, and that grumbling is a dangerous thing. When you're praying for God's presence to be with you and then you grumble about him, his presence is anything but a blessing!

So we watch our lives. Do we get into the pattern of murmuring and complaining? Do we grumble when we are asked to serve, help, or feel put out? Can we learn to say "No" without grumbling about people? Are we thankful? Do we consider it pure joy when we face trials of many kinds, knowing that the testing of our faith produces perseverance, character, and hope (Jas. 1:3-4; Rom. 5:3-5)? Do we rejoice always, pray continually? For this is God's will for us in Christ Jesus (1 Thess. 5:16-18).

### **Keep Your Heart & Hear His Voice (Numb. 13-14)**

After murmuring and complaining, the dangers now outweigh the blessings. Israel is on the verge of entering her new homeland, and Moses commissions 12 spies, one from each of the tribes. We are told in 13:3 that they were all leaders of the Israelites, and they were sent to do two things: check out the military power of the people and bring an agricultural report.

For six weeks, these leaders scope out the land. And when they return, they bring good news and bad news. The good news: the land is amazing! The air is clean, the water is pure, the food is abundant, the produce is huge! The bad news: the people who eat this food are also huge; they're not going to give up the land without a fight.

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While they bring back the facts, there is one thing that they fail to mention: the promises of God. They simply announced the view that “after reviewing the data and examining the facts on the ground, the task seems impossible.”

Instead of leaders asking, “What has God promised?” they asked, “What is manageable?” Instead of reporting to Moses, they distribute their report to the people. Instead of bringing back facts, they made recommendations.

And the results were disastrous. “The land will kill you!” (13:32) they told the people. Like the story about the fish that got away, the tales get a little taller each time. But Caleb of Judah tells them to take the land (13:30) and Joshua joins him in reminding him that God has promised this land (14:6-9).

Here is a nation who has witnessed the power of God. They have seen his TEN mighty miracles that delivered them out of Egypt. They’ve walked through the waters of the Red Sea and seen the Lord fight for them by crushing the Egyptian army. They are on the verge of entering their new homeland. They here a little bit of tough news. And what do they say? “We wish we had died in the land of Egypt or in the wilderness!” (14:2). TEN times they test the Lord. So what will the Lord do? You want to die in the wilderness? Then in the wilderness you will die (14:29-30). And 14:22 makes it clear why: their grumbling led to a hard heart that would not hear the voice of the Lord and obey it. They have sinful, unbelieving hearts (14:11).

This is what happens to grumblers: first, they complain. Then they forget the promises of God. Once they have neglected God’s word, they only have eyes to see what’s in front of them, and unbelief has taken hold of their hearts.

This pattern continues today. Someone has a bad interaction with a youth leader at youth group. Or the elders make a mistake. Or another key Christian acts in a hypocritical way. And what happens? The Church hurt me. The Church let me down. The Church is full of hypocrites. Like the ten spies, we see some unsettling things and we turn them into giants of such frightening magnitude that the eyes of faith are eclipsed by what is seen, not by what is unseen. A little grumbling. The promises of God forgotten. And the gift of God is no longer an inheritance of life, but only has threats of giants and land that will devour you.

The hardness of heart starts with grumbling and complaining. It hears 10 words of bad news and forgets the two reports of the promises of God. And instead of entering into rest, the soul becomes anxious, troubled, fearful, and fixated on what is seen.

And all of these things are examples to us, Paul tells us in 1 Cor. 10:6 so that we would not desire evil as they did, but that we would...

## See the Glory of Christ

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God promises rest for all who will come to him. He will bring them into a new and better land where they will see that the Lord fights for them and dwells with them. But grumbling, complaining, and forgetting the promises of God by fixing our eyes on what is seen rather than on what is unseen will always lead to a hard heart. For this reason, Psalm 95 would remind a later generation of Israelites to make the worship of God a top priority, to commit and resolve to following and obeying the Lord by hearing his voice and not letting their hearts go astray (Ps. 95:7-10).

But maybe you struggle with grumbling and complaining. Maybe you're tired of the sufferings, the hardships, the trials. You're just done. You feel like you don't want to go on. The writer of Hebrews wrote to Christians who felt this way. They had suffered persecution. They felt like they were losing their rights – their property was being taken away, they had people from church thrown into prison. So the writer of Hebrews reminds them that Moses was faithful (3:5). Even with a grumbling people, Moses kept speaking the truth about the things that would come later on. Moses kept his eyes on the future promise of God, serving faithfully in God's house as a servant.

But we have someone who has been more faithful than Moses. Jesus, the Son of god, has been faithful over God's house – and that house is you and me (Heb. 3:6). He serves us to keep us from falling and stumbling, to hold fast our confidence and hope (Heb. 3:6b).

However, just because Jesus holds you fast doesn't mean that there's nothing left for you. Jesus has been faithful to enable you to be faithful. Jesus perseveres with you in your failings and struggles and weaknesses and offers mercy to you not so that you will keep on grumbling and complaining, but that you would trust him by hearing his voice. That is why the Holy Spirit says, "Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion" (Heb. 3:7).

We guard our hearts because Christ has guarded us. We press on in the face of struggles and hardships, resisting grumbling and complaining because we know the danger that grumbling leads to – a sinful unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God.

Because Christ is faithful and perseveres and loves to show you mercy, we do two things:

First, we encourage each other. Church, you're tired. You're weary. You're fighting discouragement. And you're pressing on by the grace of God! You can do this because you have been doing this! We cannot over-encourage one another! Encouragement isn't flattery, but the real reminders that we see God working and holding on to us during these trying days. So encourage one another more as Hebrews 3:12-13 says.

Second, don't harden your heart because it's hard. Don't let grumbling take root. Hear God's voice and know that God's rest is for you by taking up the sword of God, the Word, and remind yourself of his promises. And as you do, you might discover something glorious – that the present hardships are bearable because the promises of God are certain!



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At the end of C.S. Lewis's *The Last Battle*, the children who have been with Aslan are following Aslan's directions to go further up and further in. As they follow Aslan's words, they discover that the colours are so much more vibrant and the world so much more beautiful than they had imagined. What they had experienced was a shadow and a copy of the real Narnia. As Lewis describes it:

"It is as hard to explain how this sunlit land was different from the old Narnia as it would be to tell you how the fruits of that country taste. Perhaps you will get some idea of it if you think like this. You may have been in a room in which there was a window that looked out on a lovely bay of the sea or a green valley that wound away among mountains. And in the wall of that room opposite to the window there may have been a looking glass. And as you turned away from the window you suddenly caught sight of that sea or that valley, all over again, in the looking-glass. And the sea in the mirror, or the valley in the mirror, were in one sense just the same as the real ones: yet at the same time they were somehow different – deeper, more wonderful,, more like places in a story: in a story you have never heard but very much want to know. The difference between the old Narnia and the new Narnia was like that. The new one was a deeper country: every rock and flower and blade of grass looked as if it meant more. I can't describe it any better than that: if you ever get there you will know what I mean" (chapter 15, *The Last Battle*).

And this is what lies in store for all who look not at their present circumstances and grumble and complain, but who hold fast to the confidence and hope that God's word will bring us to the rest our souls have forever longed for.