

Thought For The Week

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Behavior That Repulses God

What behavior repulses God? That was the question Steve set before the congregation on September 30, 2026, after the morning readings from Philippians 2:12-16 and 1 Corinthians 10:6-20. The answer sat in plain sight in the wilderness stories of Israel, and it sits in plain sight in the church, the workplace, and the locker room still. The behavior is murmuring.

Steve came to the subject by a path already opened the Sunday before. Sitting under a lesson on the brass serpent, he thought again of the word of Jesus: as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so the Son of Man must be lifted up. No one wants the bite of a rattler or a cobra. The pain is terrible, and the bite can kill. Sin is like that. We die from sin if we do not look to Jesus, because He has been lifted up. Those who look to Him may be healed. But something had brought the fiery serpents into the camp first. That something is what repulses God.

The Name of the Thing

Steve asked those taking notes to mark Numbers 14, 16, and 21. Those are the places where the behavior comes into the open and where God answers it. The name of the behavior is murmuring.

In the biblical sense, murmuring is grumbling, complaining, or expressing discontent, often in a subdued or secretive way. It is typically aimed at God or at the leaders God has appointed. It is not mere honesty about a hard day. It is discontent that has stopped trusting God's provision. God has long asked His people not to murmur. The trouble is that murmuring belongs to human nature. It can sound ordinary. It is not ordinary to God.

Fried Preachers and Appointed Men

Steve did not leave the subject in the ancient camp. He brought it to the dinner table after worship. The brotherhood, he said, will go home and have fried deacons, fried elders, or fried preachers. The sermon has ended. Then the family sits down, and the talk begins. The preacher is run down. The elders are run down. The song leader butchered the songs. Those who waited on the table did it poorly. That conversation is murmuring, and God hates it.

He hates it because the complaint is aimed at people He has appointed. The man who delivers the message is not a hired performer. The song leader, the elder, and the deacon are appointed among the people of God. To run them down is to murmur against the arrangement God has made. A Christian is not to be a murmurer. That is not a small rule for church manners. It describes the kind of person a disciple is not permitted to become.

The same pattern appears wherever people work under someone else's appointment. Around a desk the murmuring can be constant. That is a bad boss. Why am I being asked to do this? I could be a better foreman than he is. The Christian is told not to join that talk. Derogatory remarks about

those leaders reflect on the one who put them there. The boss will look for a way to reprimand or remove the murmurer.

Murmuring wrecks morale. Others listen and join in. People stop arriving on time, leave early, and stop giving their all. Murmuring is the enemy of teamwork. The same thing happens in a clubhouse. When the owner perceives a murmurer in the locker room, he trades him or fires him. The fans can tell that something is wrong. The team is not playing together. The cause is the same cause that emptied a generation into the sand: low talk that dissolves trust.

The Long Way around Edom

Numbers 21 is the chapter of the fiery serpents. Israel was already wandering and would wander for forty years. The serpents came because the people complained about the road. God would not let them pass through Edom. The detour made the journey harder. They had to forage for food and search for water, and difficulty became the occasion of murmuring.

God withheld the shorter road because He did not want them to fight yet. They were not ready. The people who came out of Egypt were former slaves, trained in brick and mortar, not in the sword or the shield. To send that company through Edom would have exposed them to a battle they were not prepared to fight.

That is one reason God had spent so long preparing Moses. Moses fled Egypt after he killed a man, left at forty, and lived in the wilderness until he was eighty. Israel had no leader, and God used those years to make one who knew the land. The congregation that complained about the road around Edom was complaining about a route chosen by the God who had prepared the man who knew the ground.

They complained about Moses and Aaron. They complained about the plan. God heard it and became angry. He was repulsed because the murmuring was not only against human leaders. It was against the plans God Himself had for them. God took it personally. Murmuring is never a private grievance against circumstances. It is a verdict on the One who governs them. Christians are asked not to murmur at all, under any circumstances, because God has intervention, providence, and preservation.

In His anger God sent the fiery serpents. They bit, and many died. Moses asked God to act. God told him to make a brass serpent and set it on a pole, so that whoever looked at it after being bitten would be healed. The healing was mercy. The serpents were the result of murmuring.

Why They Were in the Wilderness at All

The serpents were not the first answer to this sin. Steve asked why the people were wandering in the first place. That answer is in Numbers 14. After the exodus, God led them by fire at night and by cloud during the day toward Canaan. At the border twelve spies went in. Joshua and Caleb were two of them.

Ten came back with a demoralizing report. There were giants. Israel looked like ants in the sand. Joshua and Caleb said that with the help of God they could take the land. The spies had also brought huge and enticing fruit. The people listened to the ten. They murmured. Why had they been brought all this way? Were there not enough graves in Egypt to bury them? They talked of seizing

the leaders and going back.

God said they would not enter His rest. He rejected that generation even after they realized they had made a mistake. He told them He was not with them. They tried to go in anyway and were beaten back. God vowed that those people would never see the promised land. They would wander until they dropped in the desert, which is what they themselves had asked for. That is why they were in the wilderness: they murmured. God is repulsed by murmuring, and He will act on it.

The Line in the Camp

Numbers 16 brings the same sin into a different shape. Korah and Dathan complained that Moses and Aaron had taken the leadership. They took offense at Moses' wife because she was not a Jew and not a Nazarite. They were sure they could do better. They also said Aaron had taken the priesthood on himself. He had not. God had the leaders place their staffs before the ark, and the next morning only Aaron's staff was budding. God had marked the man He wanted.

The murmuring was against men God had appointed, and therefore against the God who appointed them. Korah gathered people to overthrow Moses and Aaron. God heard it and said He would destroy them. Moses stood in the breach. God told the congregation to separate from Korah. Steve compared the moment to the line in an old Western. Those with Moses came to his side. Those who stayed with Korah stayed as God's enemies. The earth opened and swallowed them. Murmuring does not only wound a leader's feelings. It splits a people, drains courage, and invites judgment.

Lights in a Crooked Generation

Steve then returned to the readings of the morning. Philippians 2 does not treat murmuring as a minor irritation. "Do all things without grumbling or disputing," Paul writes, so that the church may prove itself blameless and innocent, children of God above reproach, in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation. Among that generation they are to appear as lights in the world, holding fast the word of life. If they live that way, Paul will know that he did not run or toil in vain.

First Corinthians 10 says the same thing with the wilderness still in view. Those events happened as examples, written for those upon whom the ends of the ages have come. The church is not to crave evil things, not to act immorally as some did when twenty-three thousand fell in one day, not to test the Lord as some did and were destroyed by the serpent, and not to grumble as some did and were destroyed by the destroyer. "Do not grumble" is another way of saying "do not murmur." God does not like it.

The warning is sharp because the sin is easy, whether in an office under a foreman or on a team under a manager. Steve said the church is the worst place to find it, because in the brotherhood it demoralizes in a peculiarly destructive way. Nothing so empties a people of strength. He asked the congregation to reflect on their work, their teamwork, and their life together, and then left them with the charge: stop murmuring.

The Look That Heals

The sermon did not end with the warning alone. The same God who sent serpents also provided a pole and a look that healed. Steve closed by speaking to anyone outside of Christ, in need of the forgiveness of sins and reconciliation. God offers that through the gospel. The offer is received by

accepting Jesus as Lord and Savior, becoming His disciple, and becoming a member of His church. Jesus sent His people into all the world to teach and to baptize in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved." The response God requires is to acknowledge Jesus as Lord and to be baptized for the remission of sins. The water and the garments were ready.

Murmuring is not a small habit with small consequences. It is discontent aimed at God and at the people God has set in place. It cost Israel a generation, a camp full of the dying, and a hole in the earth. It still costs congregations their peace. The opposite is the life Philippians describes: children of God, above reproach, holding fast the word of life, shining like lights in a crooked generation, looking to the One who was lifted up.

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Behavior That Repulses God:

What behavior repulses God? Last Sunday Steve answered from Philippians 2:12-16, 1 Corinthians 10:6-20, and Numbers 14, 16, and 21. The answer is murmuring: grumbling, complaining, or expressing discontent, often in a quiet way, against God or the leaders He has appointed. It is not mere honesty about a hard day. It is discontent that has stopped trusting God's provision.

Steve brought the wilderness into the dinner table after worship. The brotherhood, he said, will go home and have fried deacons, fried elders, or fried preachers. The song leader butchered the songs. The Lord's table was poorly waited on. That talk is murmuring, and God hates it because it is aimed at people He has appointed. The same pattern wrecks an office and a locker room. Others join in. Morale falls. People stop giving their all. Murmuring is the enemy of teamwork.

Israel learned that at terrible cost. In Numbers 14 they refused Canaan after ten spies gave a demoralizing report; they asked why they had not died in the wilderness, and God gave them what they asked. In Numbers 16 Korah rose against Moses and Aaron, and the earth swallowed them. In Numbers 21 they complained about the road around Edom. God sent fiery serpents. Mercy came only when a brass serpent was lifted up, and those who looked were healed.

Paul will not treat this as a small habit. "Do all things without grumbling or disputing," he writes, so that we may shine as lights in a crooked generation, holding fast the word of life. Steve said the church is the worst place to find murmuring, because nothing so empties a people of strength.

The same God who sent serpents also provided a look that heals. Jesus has been lifted up. Those outside of Christ may still come: believe, confess Him as Lord, and be baptized for the remission of sins.

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