

Sunday Sermon 092423 Exodus 16:2-3, 8-15, Matthew 20:1, 8-16

“Because of You, Lord...”

It was one year while I was residing in the low desert of Borrego Springs, experiencing a scorching Wednesday afternoon in July. Just as I was about to move the trash bin, I was suddenly startled: a large, coiled rattlesnake was sleeping in the sand where the trash bin was. Despite feeling a bit guilty, I needed to dispose of the trash, leaving me no choice but to wake up the snake and ensure it moved away. However, I was not willing to get near it, so I used a water hose to squirt water and deter it, preventing a potential snakebite from its venom.

However, I heard that even many fatal poisons can be used as medicine if used properly. I have read that scientists are using natural poison from snakes and bees to find a cure for cancer and that they have been making some progress. Scientists in the U.S. are developing a technique that allows them to extract the medicinal effect from animal poison, put it in Nano capsules, and administer it selectively into the body to cancer cells.

The scriptures today, however, introduce a fatal poison that will never bring about any good effect—that is, the poison of complaining. When I refer to various versions, the same term is translated in many ways, such as complaining, grumbling, and blaming. The complaint has been working as a deadly poison between human beings with each other and between human beings and God for as far back as human history.

It was the same way in the Garden of Eden, between Adam and Eve, Cain and Abel, in the process of the Exodus of Israelites, and I am certain it is very prevalent in every aspect of our lives today, even our lives of faith.

As Euni and I grow older, I want to confess that there is one thing I can't stop complaining about. What do you think it is? I complain that the temperature inside the house or car is too high, and Euni complains that it is always too low. Whether Euni should wear one more outfit or I should take off another one, we still haven't made a definite decision as we come to the end of another summer.

But let's examine the reason why we complain so much and the solution to our complaints through the scriptures today. Of course, the contents I deal with won't be a psychological or medical approach but a biblical approach. However, I believe this methodology will have the most powerful and positive effects of any other solution.

First, shortsightedness produces the poison of complaining.

Are humans naturally inclined toward seeking instant gratification? Isn't that accurate? We want what we want as soon as possible, under the conditions that we want it. And as things such as technology progress, our impatience becomes more severe.

I remember when my son was in middle school, when people started using the Internet in their homes. Our internet was so slow. He tried to watch a music video by a popular artist back then. He waited 3 hours for the video to load. 3 hours! Now, he gets angry if a full 90-minute movie does not download in 10 minutes.

Can you think of any impatient people in the Bible? There are many. Were there any who were quick to forget God's blessings? I'm sure many of us are thinking about the Israelites and how God helped them escape from Egypt. The Israelites were the people who called on and relied on God in their slavery. Additionally, in the midst of the difficulties of escaping Egypt, God confirmed to them that they were His people, and He accompanied them through continuous miracles.

In spite of those, they fell victim to their shortsightedness again. The Lord told them, "You will not survive if you depend only on the world you can see." But he said, "You will live if you hold to the promise that I made with your ancestors."

Why do you dedicate the time and energy that you do to come here and worship repeatedly every Sunday? I know that is because you want to renew your heart and spirit and keep fellowship with the Lord. I hope that all of us have felt the power of the Lord at least once in our lives. Unfortunately, our weakness and this world make us forget about God's love for us. It is not God's presence that changes. It is us.

Sometimes, even when our circumstances and conditions stay the same, our mindsets change. This is human nature and weakness. Therefore, when we are constrained by shortsightedness, we boast and are corrupted when we are rich, or we are pessimistic and grumble if we are poor. We must pray for wisdom that brings dreams and visions of the future. That is, to live relying on God's promise in Christian faith. Even though the journey through the desert is long and hard, we need to focus forward on the land of Canaan, in the very place where God promised.

Second, lack of faith produces the poison of complaint.

Human complaints come from ignorance and not knowing God. The people of this modern generation are not concerned with knowing God; instead, they try to be like God. The prophet Hosea in the Old Testament exclaimed, "Let's know; let us press on to know the Lord."

According to pastor Rick Warren, our first step in spiritual growth is to start changing the way we think. Change always starts first in our minds. The way we think determines the way we feel, and the way we feel influences the way we act. The same principle can be applied to getting to know God deeply and to arm ourselves with strong faith.

The Israelites experienced hunger in the desert. We're all familiar with how hunger can affect us, right? There's a term people use today for this feeling—'HANGRY,' which is the anger stemming from hunger. I'm sure the Israelites were very hangry. However, no matter how hangry you become, you must never forget how God has delivered you. We can pass judgment on the Israelites, but we are no different today. They rejected the God who had parted the Red Sea for them, allowing them to escape death.

How often do we overlook God's blessings and salvation in our lives and just complain about what we do not have? We are just like the Israelites when they complain that they missed the time when they sat by the pots and ate their fill of bread in Egypt. They even said, "We wish that the Lord had killed us in Egypt." Can you imagine God's sadness in his heart when he heard the grumbling of the Israelites? When does he hear your grumbling? All that comes from complaining is despair.

Do you know that complaining is used mainly as an attacking tool by Satan? Jewish elders and leaders complained that Jesus brought shame on God. However, the book of Hebrews 5:7, 8 clarifies this, saying, "In his life on earth, Jesus made his prayers and requests with loud cries and tears (instead of complaining) to God, who could save him from death. Because he was humble and devoted, God heard him. But even though he was God's Son, he learned through his sufferings to be obedient.

Because Jesus believed in and knew the Father God, he did not complain against but rather obeyed the Father. Why do our thoughts and actions not develop and mature spiritually? We do not follow the biblical way of thinking; we just think and follow only up to where we want to, where it is comfortable and convenient for us. Church, believe, and rely on the almighty.

Third, forgetting God's grace produces the poison of complaint.

Let's go on to the scripture from the gospel of Matthew. This parable shows us the different ways of accounting between heaven and earth. Look at those workers who complain to the landowner. Of course, they worked hard with sincerity but were discriminated against. That was why they had legitimate complaints.

It is right for Christians to help those kinds of people and let them take their exploited money back. How could the landowner pay the same amount of money to those who worked for over 10 hours and those who worked just one hour? Would you be able to control your own complaining? I know I wouldn't!

The people of heaven need to live in accordance with the principle of grace. They should not forget that the fact that they were able to work was by the grace of the landowner. They will become the people of hell at the moment when they forget the principle of heaven. A lot of this comes from comparison. When we compare, it is so easy for us to compare ourselves and situations with those who seem to have it better than we do.

Of course, the workers in this story are reasonably upset because they were not treated fairly. The stress comes not really from the fact that they were paid less than expected, but from the fact that they were not paid the same as others. Do you know and believe in the way of accounting in heaven?

Hans Seyle was a pioneering endocrinologist and a master of psychiatry for stressors. He gave a farewell lecture at Harvard University and was stepping down the stairs from the platform. At that moment, a student blocked his way

and asked, "We are living in a stress-flooded era. Give us just one secret solution to this, please." Then he said exactly one word: "Appreciation!"

Church, our appreciation will overflow when we restore God's grace in our lives. Let us not be like those workers who complain because of what they did not get, but let us give thanks for every breath that we take and every beat of our hearts. Our very lives are things that we should appreciate because it is by God's grace that we draw breath. Let us not forget that!

Complaint is the terrible enemy for husband and wife, your family, between God and us, and the whole world and universe. What words do you want to add after "Because of you, Lord..." today? You are able to express your complaint or gratitude. But instead of focusing on just your circumstances, I hope that we can dig deep and just think about the most basic parts of our lives that we take for granted.

If you complain continuously, even in a situation like heaven, it will be transformed into hell. However, if you continuously express gratitude, even in a situation like hell, it will be transformed into heaven. When uncontrollable conditions of complaint surge, just rely on God and lift up all of them as the title of your prayer request. Do this, and I guarantee that God will bring you understanding, contentment, and faith. Let us be wise and ask for this from God. Amen.

****Reflection and Application for Today's Sermon:**

1)Of the three poisons of complaint (shortsightedness, lack of faith, and forgetting God's grace), which one are you most susceptible to? What alternative would you embrace to prevent that?

2)Have you ever harbored bitter resentment toward God or someone else? What consequences did you face because of that? What spiritual lessons have you learned?

3)Of all the gifts of grace you have received, what do you consider most precious? How does that gift energize your faith? (Reference: Ephesians 2:8–9)