

Subject: *God's Cure for Snakebite*

Scripture: *Numbers 21:4-9*

Last Wednesday night Roger preached about Paul when he was bitten by a poisonous snake on the island of Malta, and last Sunday morning I preached from John 3 where Jesus said that he must be lifted up on the cross just as Moses lifted up the snake in the wilderness. We are going to look a bit further at that story found in Numbers 21. A popular movie came out a few years ago called, "Snakes on a Plane." I agree with the person who said there are two kinds of snakes he didn't like: live ones and dead ones. Somebody else said there are three kinds of snakes he didn't like: big ones, little ones, and rubber ones.

This is one of God's great object lessons in the Bible. An object lesson is a vivid way to learn and remember spiritual truth. It's easier to understand something spiritual if you can relate it to something physical. This story is one of the most powerful pictures of Christ in the Old Testament.

1. THE SINFUL COMPLAINTS OF THE PEOPLE (vs. 5)

God had been very good to them. He protected them and met all their needs, but they still complained a lot. Does that remind you of anybody you know? God had just given them a great victory over the Canaanites (vs. 3), and yet they murmured and complained.

- They complained about God and His prophet

Ever wonder what would have happened if God and Moses got mad on the same day? They suffered from what have you done for me lately syndrome. Moses went from hero to zero real fast. People never complain about leaders now, but they did then.

- They complained about God's promise

They doubted if God would bring them into the Promised Land and thought they were going to die in the wilderness. Remember what God did for them in Egypt and how He led them out with a mighty hand? Unbelief is the mother of all sins.

- They complained about God's provision

They were sick and tired of manna and so they murmured. This reminds me of the boy who went off to summer camp, and then wrote to his parents to come and get him. He said "I'm tired of this place. All they serve here is breakfast, lunch, and supper."

Paul reminds us of this event and the sinful murmuring of the people in his list of horrible sins in 1 Corinthians 10:5-11. In that passage he says that the people tempted God or put God to the test.

2. THE SERIOUS CONSEQUENCES FOR THE PEOPLE (vs. 6)

The people had sinned against God and against each other. All sin has consequences. God sent deadly snakes that bit the people and they suffered and died.

- It was a fitting punishment

God has the right to punish sin. All sin will either be punished in hell or pardoned in Christ. The Bible speaks of the law of sin and death. Just like the law of gravity, we cannot overturn or avoid this law.

- It was fiery punishment

The word “fiery” has nothing to do with their appearance, but it describes the pain and suffering from their venom. Suffering always follows sin like night follows day. Proverbs 13:15 states “The way of transgressors is hard.” Sin is like a toll road. It takes you farther than you want to go; it keeps you longer than you want to stay; and it costs you more than you want to pay. Sin brings pleasure but it also brings pain. But the pain of sin is not a bad thing. The suffering of sin has a purpose. If there was no pain we would keep hurting ourselves. It’s like someone getting burned on a hot stove. The pain of sin and its consequences tells us something is wrong and we need help.

There’s a story about an old boy named Junior who got bit by a rattlesnake. He had two brothers, Jake and Joe. The boys and their daddy were known for their sinful ways. But when Junior got bit, they called for the preacher to come and pray for him. The preacher came and he prayed: “Lord, I pray for Junior, and ask you to spare his life and heal him, and Lord, I ask you to send another snake to bite Jake and one to bite oe, and send another big old snake to bite their daddy. Amen.” Maybe we ought to do more of that kind of praying, “Lord, use this suffering and pain so they will turn to you.” C. S. Lewis said: “Pain is God’s megaphone to rouse a deaf world.”

- It was a fatal punishment

The people not only suffered from the snake bites; they were dying. Sin brings death. The Bible says, “The soul that sins, it shall surely die.” **Romans 6:23** *The wages of sin is death.* **James 1:15** *Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin, and sin when it is finished, bringeth forth death.* The Bible says that sins brings forth death: spiritual death, physical death, and eternal death. All kinds of people were bitten, but they weren’t all bitten in the same way. Some may have been bitten once, while others were bitten many times. Some were badly bitten, while others were barely bitten. But the result was the same.

3. THE SAVING CURE FOR THE PEOPLE (vs. 7- 9)

The brazen serpent was a symbol of sin being judged and punished. **Galatians 3:13** *Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us.* **2 Corinthians 5:21** *For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.* **Isaiah 53:4-6** ⁴ *Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows: yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted.* ⁵ *But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed.* ⁶ *All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the LORD hath laid on him the iniquity of us all.*

- It was a strange cure

The people said: “Pray unto the Lord, that he take away the serpents from us” (vs. 7). They were more concerned about the snakes than they were about their sins. God told Moses to make a brass serpent and set it on a pole. No one else would have thought of this remedy.

1 Corinthians 1:18 *For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us which are saved it is the power of God.*

- It was a simple cure

God’s plan was simple: “Look and live.” The cure was not found in ignoring the problem, fighting the serpents, applying manmade medicine, or promising to do better in the future.

Isaiah 45:22 *Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth: for I am God, and there is none else.*

- It was a specific cure

This was not one of many options. It was not the best cure. It was the only cure. **John 14:6** *I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me.*

Acts 4:12 *Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved.*

- It was a sufficient cure

God’s provision was as great as the problem. Whosoever will may be saved (vs. 8, every one). The brass serpent was not kept in a remote location for a few privileged people. It was lifted up in the middle of the camp so all could look on it and be saved.

- It was a sure cure

Every person who looked at the brazen serpent lived. Every person who looks to Jesus for salvation will be saved. **Acts 16:31** *Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved.* Healing was instantaneous and complete. How did the dying person know the cure would work? First, he had the assurance of God’s Word. Second, he could see what happened in the lives of others. Finally, when a person looked for himself, he knew he was healed. The Bible says in **1 John 5:10** *He that believeth on the Son of God hath the witness in himself.*

There were probably some who refused to look at the brazen serpent. I can hear them saying, “That just doesn’t make sense to me. How could looking at that silly snake ever help me? I’m too far gone. And still today people have their reasons for not believing. Would you rather die in your sins or look unto Jesus and live?”

There is an interesting side note to the brass serpent story. The Bible says in 2 Kings 18:4, that the Jews preserved this brass serpent for hundreds of years and they made an idol out of it, and for this reason King Hezekiah broke it in pieces so it would no longer be a problem. It is human nature to trust a physical object instead of trusting God. The power was not in the brass serpent, but it was God’s power that saved them and it is God’s power that saves us (Rom. 1:16).

Can you imagine anyone being healed of snakebite and not telling others how they could look and live? What would you think of someone who found a cure for cancer and wouldn’t tell anybody? The Bible says, “Now is the accepted time. Behold today is the day of salvation.”