

Subject: *Christ Lifted Up for Sinners*

Scripture: *Numbers 21:4-9*

This Old Testament event is a clear picture of Christ being lifted up on the cross for our sins.

John 3:14-15 ¹⁴ *And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up:* ¹⁵ *That whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life.*

John 12:32-34 ³² *And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me.* ³³ *This he said, signifying what death he should die.* ³⁴ *The people answered him, We have heard out of the law that Christ abideth for ever: and how sayest thou, The Son of man must be lifted up? who is this Son of man?*

When Jesus spoke of being “lifted up” the people at that time knew what He meant. He would be lifted up in crucifixion. When the Jews executed criminals they threw them down and stoned them. But the Romans lifted them up and crucified them. The people who heard Jesus were confused (vs. 34). They could not accept that their Messiah would be crucified. The message that the Christ would be crucified was not only confusing, but it was offensive to the Jews. But for those who believe and are saved the truth that Christ was crucified for our sins is the power of God unto salvation. There is a drawing power and converting power in the death of Christ.

Jesus promised that when He was lifted up He would draw all men. This doesn't mean that all people will be saved, but people of every nation and every race, Jews and Gentiles, free men and slaves, men and women, young and old would be drawn to Him for salvation.

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.

In Numbers 21 we find one of God's great pictures of Christ in the Old Testament.

1. THE SINFUL COMPLAINING (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.

A. 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.

B. 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.

C. 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 (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.

A. 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.

B. It was a fiery punishment

The word "fiery" 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. The Bible speaks of the pleasures of sin, but it also brings pain. Yet pain is not a bad thing; it's actually a good thing because it makes us aware of a deeper problem. 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 two more snakes to bite his brothers, and send one more 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." Pain tells us something is terribly wrong and that something is sin.

C. It was a fatal punishment

The people not only suffered from the snakebites; 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 sin causes death: spiritual death, physical death, and eternal death. All kinds of people were bitten, but they weren't all bitten the same way. Some may have been bitten once, while others were bitten many times, but the result was the same.

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

The bronze serpent was a symbol of sin being judged and punished.

***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.*

***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.*

A. The cure seemed strange

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 their sins. God told Moses to make a bronze serpent and set it on a pole. That would at first seem foolish, but God in His wisdom had a plan. No one else would have thought of doing this, except God.

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 a bronze snake 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?"

***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.*

B. The cure was simple

God's plan was simple: "Look and live." The cure was not to ignore the problem, to fight the serpents, to apply first aid, or for the people to promise to stop murmuring and try to do better.

***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.*

C. The cure was specific

This was not one of many options. It was not the best cure; it was the only cure. Jesus is not the best way of salvation; He is the way of salvation.

***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.*

D. The cure was sufficient

God made a provision that was as great as the problem. Whosoever will may be saved (vs. 8, every one). The bronze 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.

Every person who looked at the bronze 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 instant 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. But best of all, when a person looked for himself, he knew he was healed.

1 John 5:10 *He that believeth on the Son of God hath the witness in himself.*

There is an interesting side note to this story. The Bible says in 2 Kings 18:4, that the Jews preserved this bronze serpent for hundreds of years and they made an idol out of it, and so King Hezekiah destroyed it so it would no longer be a problem. It is human nature to trust a physical object of something else instead of God. The power to save was not in that bronze serpent. 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."