

Subject: *The Savior's Life-Giving Death*
Scripture: *John 3:14-16; Numbers 21:4-9*

The week leading up to Easter Sunday is called Passion Week and it includes the day of Christ's suffering and death known as Good Friday. In our text Christ referred to his death in connection with an historical event when Moses led Israel through the wilderness. It was to be a perfect picture of what He would do on the cross when He suffered and died for sinners. It was a picture of Christ giving eternal life to sinners who are dying in their 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.* When Jesus spoke of being "lifted up" (3:14), the people at that time knew what He meant. He would be lifted up in crucifixion.

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 the Jews executed criminals they threw them down and stoned them. But the Romans lifted them up and crucified them. There is a picture of Christ in the Old Testament book Numbers. Turn to ***Numbers 21:4-9***. This is an historical account of something that happened when Moses and the Jews were in the wilderness. It is a story about sin, snakes, and salvation.

1. The sinful complaining (Num. 21:5)

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

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?

C. They complained about God's provision

They were sick and tired of manna and so they murmured. Manna was fresh bread that God sent down from heaven six days every week for forty years! 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 (Num. 21:6)

All sin has consequences. God sent deadly snakes that bit the people and they died. Many people are scared by snakes, even if they are small and harmless. But these snakes were deadly, and God sent them into the camp, among the people. Snakes in the wilderness are one thing, but these snakes were among the people. The consequences of sin were horrible.

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** *the way of transgressors is hard.* The Bible speaks of the pleasures of sin, but it also speaks of the pain of sin. But pain is not a bad thing; it’s a good thing because it makes us aware of the root problem. The painful consequences of sin remind us that something is wrong and we need help. C. S. Lewis said: “Pain is God’s megaphone to rouse a deaf world.” Pain tells us something is terribly wrong.

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.”

The Bible says that sin causes death: spiritual death, physical death, and eternal death.

Romans 6:23 *For 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.*

3. The saving cure (Num. 21:7-9)

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 what to do. He was to make a serpent (snake) of bronze and put in on a pole for everyone to see. When the people who were bitten by the deadly snakes looked, they lived! It was as simple as that. The cure was a reminder of the punishment for their sin. Now we understand the significance of that bronze snake on the pole. It was a picture of Christ on the cross. Jesus died on the cross to take the punishment for our sins. He bore the curse of our sins. The Bible makes it plain.

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.*

Here are a few ways the bronze serpent was a perfect picture of Christ on the cross:

A. It seemed like a strange cure

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. And still today people have their reasons for not believing. Is it better to die in your sins and be in the torment of hell forever or look unto Jesus, trust Him only and have eternal life?

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.*

1 Corinthians 1:23-24 ²³ *But we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumbling block, and unto the Greeks foolishness; ²⁴ But unto them which are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God.*

B. It was a simple cure

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. It was a specific cure

Looking at the serpent on the pole not their best option; it was their only hope. Jesus is not the best source of eternal life; He is the only source of eternal life.

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. It was a sufficient cure

God made a provision that was as great as the problem. Whosoever looks on the serpent will be saved (vs. 8). 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.*

Every sinner who puts their faith and trust in Jesus will receive eternal life.

Romans 6:23 *For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.*

Christ gave His life for us on the cross, so that we might have eternal life. Look to Him and live forever.