**God’s Remedy for Sin**

**Numbers 21:1-9**

February 10, 2019

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We’re going to be in Numbers chapter 21 this morning. This story is an amazing story from the life of Moses! We’ve been making our way through the life of Moses and highlighting a number of these actions of God where God intersects with man. This is one of those great stories that communicates the gospel. It’s an Old Testament story pointing us to the full message of the Redeemer who is coming. So let’s read this together.

***1*** *When the Canaanite, the king of Arad, who lived in the Negeb, heard that Israel was coming by way of Atharim, he fought against Israel, and took some of them captive.* ***2*** *And Israel vowed a vow to the LORD and said, “If you will indeed give this people into my hand, then I will devote their cities to destruction.”* ***3*** *And the LORD heeded the voice of Israel and gave over the Canaanites, and they devoted them and their cities to destruction. So the name of the place was called Hormah.*

***4*** *From Mount Hor they set out by the way to the Red Sea, to go around the land of Edom. And the people became impatient on the way.* ***5*** *And the people spoke against God and against Moses, “Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? For there is no food and no water, and we loathe this worthless food.”* ***6*** *Then the LORD sent fiery serpents among the people, and they bit the people, so that many people of Israel died.* ***7*** *And the people came to Moses and said, “We have sinned, for we have spoken against the LORD and against you. Pray to the LORD, that he take away the serpents from us.” So Moses prayed for the people.* ***8*** *And the LORD said to Moses, “Make a fiery serpent and set it on a pole, and everyone who is bitten, when he sees it shall live.”* ***9*** *So Moses made a bronze serpent and set it on a pole. And if a serpent bit anyone, he would look at the bronze serpent and live.*

May God encourage us through His Word today!

This past week, Kimberly and I received a handwritten letter from a neighbor whom we haven’t met yet. Few people write handwritten letters anymore, so I read this one with great interest. The letter reads, “Dear Neighbor, I am taking a moment to write to you as part of a volunteer ministry work. My purpose is to reach out to people in our community to encourage Bible reading and understanding. In this age of electronic media, news is plentiful. However, the reports aren’t always accurate. In order to make sound decisions though, we need trustworthy data. So where can we look to find reliable information? The enclosed tract discusses the answer to that question. I hope you will enjoy reading it. Sincerely,” And then they signed their name.

As I looked at the tract, I saw some key questions that it seeks to answer: “What is the meaning of life?” That’s an important question! “What happens when we die?” I was impressed by this neighbor’s letter because it was so very personal. It was handwritten. It was loving. I could tell that there’s a heart desire to bless the neighbors around her. It was relevant. These questions are important. “What is the meaning of life?” It was bold. She wasn’t afraid to talk about the Scriptures, talk about God. It was very direct. It didn’t beat around the bush. “This is the purpose of my letter.” All those things are lovely and beautiful. This neighbor likely wrote dozens and dozens of these letters. Unfortunately, the tract our neighbor gave to us was from the Jehovah Witnesses. Instead of pointing people to the answers to these big questions, the Jehovah Witnesses are an organization that denies Jesus as God of very God. They point people away from those answers. They point people to wrong answers; answers that have no healing power.

As followers of Jesus, we are a people who are sent out by our Lord Jesus to be fishers of men. We can’t allow our fears and our feelings of inadequacy, apathy or busyness, to keep us from getting God’s true message of salvation out to people whom we love. After I read this letter, I prayed, “Lord, you’ve made me an ambassador for Christ. That’s who I am. That’s who every believer is. Strengthen me by your Spirit to be more faithful to share the true gospel with my neighbors. Most of my neighbors do not know you and will perish without you. So Lord, make me more faithful.”

Every person that we meet needs to know the answers to these questions. They need to know the answer to the question: How can I know God? How can I spend eternity with Him, receiving His blessing forever and ever? If you are a follower of Jesus, you have the answer. We have the answers! I know we experience fear at Jesus’ call for us to be fishers of men. That’s true for every one of us. It was true even for the apostle Paul, as an amazingly bold man. And yet, listen to what Paul writes in Ephesians 6. He asks this church in Ephesus,

**Ephesians 6:19-20** and (pray) also for me, that words may be given to me in opening my mouth boldly to proclaim the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains, that I may declare it boldly, as I ought to speak.

Paul wants them to pray that He might open his mouth with wisdom and boldness. Paul is writing from prison. He says, “I’m an ambassador for this gospel, for this Christ.” He’s suffering for Christ and he knows the temptation toward timidity, the temptation toward withdrawal, because there is such a cost to proclaiming God’s gospel boldly. And so he says, “Pray for me.”

Friends, we can’t afford to be isolated from one another. We need one another. We need each other’s encouragement. We need to pray for one another. Without relationship in our own local church family, we won’t be praying for each other. We won’t be talking about these things that have eternal value. For the sake of God’s name, for the sake of our purpose in life, we need to bond together and talk with each other and ask each other to pray for boldness with the gospel.

Many of Jesus’ ambassadors feel completely inadequate to share God’s message. They think, “Well, I just don’t know what to say.” I certainly understand the feeling of inadequacy. It often flows over me. But if you know Jesus as your Savior, you know some of what to say. At times I have had the joy of interviewing children for baptism. We’re going to have two young people being baptized in the second service this morning. I ask them, in my interviews with children, “Imagine a friend of yours from school or your neighborhood asks you, ‘How can I have a home in heaven?’ What would you tell your friend?” I have to tell you that some of the clearest, most precious, most biblical answers come from 6 year olds who simply love Jesus. They’re not confused about what to say. The gospel is full, but it’s also, at it’s roots, a simple, basic message. They’ve learned of Jesus from their parents, from Sunday School, from the Spirit of God that is giving them spiritual understanding. I don’t want to make light of our need to grow in understanding how to witness, but witnessing for Jesus is not as hard as the devil would make it. With that said, my aim this morning is to help us to know what to say to unbelievers with whom we work and live and play, so that we might be equipped with the Gospel; we might be equipped to know what to say. That’s what I want to draw from this story in Numbers 21.

I can’t think of a story in all the Old Testament that points us to the Messiah and communicates the basic message of the Gospel more clearly than this one here in Numbers 21. The central idea that flows from this story is simple. It is that our sins are killing us. They are killing us in every way! We must look to Jesus in faith in order to live! If we are to avoid a very exceedingly painful death, we must look to Jesus. And when we look to Him, we know the joy of life.

Remember the context. For 40 years, this people have been wandering in the wilderness. Now is the time that God is bringing them into this land of promise. In Numbers 20, the thirsty people experience God once again providing water from the rock. The first time in Exodus 17, some 38 years earlier, God provided water from a rock in the desert. But there, He told Moses to strike the rock to bringwater that they needed to nourish their bodies. Moses obeys that command and the people are nourished from the water. This time, 38 years later, the people also are thirsty once again. But this time, God tells Moses to speak to the rock. And this time, Moses disobeys. He strikes the rock twice. Water still gushes from the rock, but then God sends a discipline upon Moses, saying that he won’t ever be able to enter into the Promised Land that he had been longing to enter for all those years.

You see, God designed for this rock, both the first one in Exodus 17 and the second one in Numbers 20, to be a picture of His Messiah, of His Son who would come into this world and spiritually provide for God’s people. He would spiritually provide living water. He is the Bread of Life, bread from heaven. At the crucifixionof Jesus, God the Father strikes the Rock. The Rock is Jesus. He strikes His own Son. And in being struck by God, smitten by God for our sins, taking the curse of sin and the punishment of sin upon Himself, Jesus then is enabled to provide Living Water to sinners. He is enabled to forgive sins, to still maintain His righteousness, His justice, and yet bring forgiveness. From that point forward, all people everywhere need only to speak to the Rock in order to receive water. The Rock doesn’t need to be struck more than once. That’s the message of Numbers 20.Moses is guilty of miscommunicating God’s glory and God’s gospel in striking the rock twice at Kadesh.

As Numbers 21 now opens, the people are still at the cusp of entering into the land, and the people encounter their first hostile enemy. It’s the king of Arad. This happens again 38 years earlier at the very same place. Remember, the spies enter through this very same land, the territory of this king, the king of Arad. They enter successfully and they return successfully. It’s likely that the king of Arad understood that these spies entered the land and they escaped. And this nation is frustrated by that; as any nation would that allows spies from a foreign territory to come into it, freely roam about it, and then they exit. And so they established their own CIA; the Canaanite Intelligence Agency. (Laughter!) The CIA tells the king of Arad, “Do you remember that people 38 years ago?” It’s not been that long ago. “38 years ago, they sent 12 spies through our land and they left. We don’t even know what happened from that, but we’ve been terrified ever since, because they are some 2,000,000 people. And now they’re gathering at our southern border.” And so the king of Arad decides to make a preemptive strike. He says, “I’m going to tell them they better not enter through here, again.” He does so, and he is victorious. We’re not told exactly what kind of battle, but it’s the kind of battle where Israelites lose and a whole bunch of them are taken captive.

The irony here is, where did they come from? They came from Egypt, where they were captives. They were slaves. And now, just on the cusp of entering into the Promised Land, where are they? They’re up at Kadesh, but they’re captives. A number of them are slaves now. “What was the whole point of this 40 years, if this is what is going to be our lot?” So the people respond with faith. They cry out to the LORD in faith.

***2*** *And Israel vowed a vow to the LORD and said, “If you will indeed give this people into my hand, then I will devote their cities to destruction.”*

So with one voice, they people of Israel cry out to the LORD and they vow basically to say, “God, we’re going to obey You completely. We need Your mercy. Would You give us victory?” And God does. The spiritual principle we learn is that daily consecration to the Lord places us in a position to receive God’s gracious provision. So what they were doing is they were saying, “Now is the time for us to completely dedicate ourselves, all of our lives, over to the LORD.” Now, our daily consecration to God is notour bartering with a reluctant God in order to gain His favor. Don’t misread this story. Consecration is opening our lives to a generous God to receive the blessing that He has already promised us through His Word. So this was a blessing that God had already promised. They said, “God, we want to be completely open. We don’t want to be close-hearted by hardness, by resistance, by disobedience. We want to receive all Your promised blessing as we open up our lives to faith.” They’re not bartering with God. They’re not saying, “If we do this, will you do that?” No. They’re saying, “God, we know you are a gracious God. We need your mercy. Help us.”

Jesus said this in Luke 9:

**Luke 9:23-24** And he said to all, “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will save it.”

He should consecrate himself and be willing to lose everything. Again, it’s the message of the basic Christian life. The Christian life is a message of daily consecration and taking up our cross. “God, there’s nothing that I’m holding to myself because You are the source of all life. Everything is all in with You every day. I’m going to trust You. I’m going to trust You that that will yield the kind of results that I long for my life to receive, the kind of blessing that is filled with life and joy and meaning and purpose.”

So then in verse 4, after that victory time, God leads the people on a very indirect, roundabout route to get to the Promised Land. They checked their I-phones. They looked at the Google map and they thought, “What in the world is God doing, here? Google tells us that this is the most direct route. The route we’re going on is going to take way long. God, what are You doing? We’ve been wandering for 40 years. You tell us it’s ready. We’re consecrated. We’re ready to go. And You move us all the way around in the wrong direction. It’s the exact wrong direction; south and west instead of just straight up north right into the Promised Land. What are You doing?” And the text tells us that they became impatient. Impatience is simply discontent with God’s timing and His provision. They became impatient.

All through Scripture, again, a principle of the Christian life that is pretty basic is that God asks us to trust Him with the path of His choosing. I know we have a path that we would choose in order to receive blessing from God. We can make our plans, but God establishes the path. And He says, “Trust Me. If it seems like My path is the worst path possible to get you to the ultimate destination of life, joy, meaning, trust Me. Trust that My path will actually get you there and that your path won’t.” And so He’s asking the people to trust Him with something that is very, very difficult after they’ve been waiting 40 years. Now it seems like God is taking the long way around.

Friends, let’s know that any time we are impatient with God’s path, temptation to sin is knocking on the door of our heart. Look at circumstances of your life where you’re impatient; impatient about anything. Maybe you’re impatient in your family life, impatient with your children, impatient with your career, impatient with schooling, impatient with sports, impatient with anything. Know that Satan loves to use our impatience as a means to turn away from the Lord, rather than toward Him. So the people don’t trust God in their impatience. In fact, they turn against Him. Look at verse 5.

***5*** *And the people spoke against God and against Moses, “Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? For there is no food and no water, and we loathe this worthless food.”*

That’s the first time, I believe, in the narrative of Moses, that it actually says they spoke against God directly. If you’re taking notes, we’re going to first look at

**The seriousness of our sin**

It’s the first part of the message of the Gospel that we must communicate as we talk to our friends and family.

In eight previous occasions over the last 40 years, the people were said to speak against Moses. So eight different times, if you follow Exodus and Numbers, eight times, they spoke against Moses. In every one of those times, because they were speaking not just against the man, but they were speaking against the mediator God chose for them, they really were speaking against God. And that was His point in all of these narratives of disciplining them for speaking against Moses. But, here, it’s the first time it says that they actually spoke against God. And it seems like the point is, they’re speaking against God very directly now. They’re no longer kind of going roundabout, kind of complaining to God by really focusing on Moses. Now, they’re just whole on saying, “Lord, You have done us wrong! Lord, You’ve led us out to this place to die in this wilderness.”

Remember who they are speaking against. They’re speaking directly against the God who delivered them out of slavery in Egypt, who parted the Red Sea so they could walk across on dry ground, who gave them manna every morning, who gave them water from rocks in the wilderness, who led them by a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night, who made an unconditional covenant with them to bless them with a land and a future. This is the God who just recently, not long ago, heard their cry and defeated the king of Arad after the king of Arad showed himself a very formidable enemy and had defeated them. God supernaturally shows up and gives them the victory. This is the God of whom they are speaking against!

Note how little and how small they thought this sin of dishonoring God by speaking against Him. Notice again, in our own lives, the parallel. The specific complaint that they bring against God is “Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in this wilderness?” They are saying, “God, Your plan is lousy! Your intentions are not loving. You’re doing it all wrong.” They feel like they need to justify this ridiculous accusation against God, and so they say

*For there is no food and no water, and we loathe this worthless food.”*

Do you notice the irony? (Laughter!) Anyone of us who have parented teenagers understands exactly what is happening here. One of my children was blessed during one of the weeks we went away on vacation when they were in junior high or early teens, to spend time with a family here at church. And that family treated him like he was a king. They had all this abundance of food and abundance of just activity and joy. So he thought this was great! It was fantastic! And he comes home to old mom and dad. He looks in the cupboard and says, “Dad, we don’t have anything to eat.” I said, “What do you mean?” He said, “There is nothing to eat!” And so I go over to the cupboard and I show him a loaf of bread and I show him a jar of peanut butter and I show him a couple varieties of jelly. And do you know what? He was not pleased with my suggestion. “There is nothing to eat!” Well, it’s not that there’s nothing to eat. They ate manna that very morning. There was nothing that they wanted to eat, is the idea. It wasn’t meeting their expectations, their desires.

Can we all look at the Israelites and agree that there are circumstances in our life in which we sin this way? Isn’t it understandable a bit by way of our experience that this would happen? Are we really so shocked when we really consider our own life? Keep in mind that they really had only manna. Now manna is a wonderful food. It’s the “bread of angels,” Scripture says, but it’s manna every day for 40 years. It’s understandable to us why they’d say, “There’s no good food to eat. There’s nothing to eat around here.” It’s understandable to us, but not excusable. That’s the point. It’s understandable because we’re like them. This is where our heart is as well. God takes very seriously our sin; even sin as light as what we would consider of grumbling.

Faith in God rejoices in His kind provision. It rejoices in His physical provision, in His emotional provision, in His social provision, in His spiritual provision. If we are believers, followers of Jesus, we must be aware of the seriousness of the sin of opening the cupboards of our life and saying, “There’s nothing here to eat.” It could be the social cupboard. “Man, I wish I had more friends. There’s nothing here to eat!” It might be the emotional cupboards. We want some happiness. We want a bit of joy. We want a bit of peace. “There’s nothing here to eat!” It might be the spiritual provision. “There’s nothing to eat.” It’s a grave, serious assault against God’s character. The truth is that unbelief is not able to enjoy the blessings that God provides for us. It just simply isn’t. They’re there to be enjoyed, but it’s unable. Unbelief is blinded by its own unfulfilled expectations, and so it refuses to give thanks.

Now we look at what God does and we get a little disturbed because we think they just said some words. They’re not doing anything in disobedience to God. They’re not creating another golden calf. They’re not being violent and murdering each other. They aren’t putting on these wild, drunken parties where there was all kinds of sexual impurity going on. They’re not stealing from one another. All they’re doing is complaining. It’s just words. God created all of us. He created our tongue so that we would have an instrument to use to praise Him, to give Him thanks. And when we use this instrument to speak against Him, to act in disobedience to Him, we sin gravely. Our words matter because our words reflect the condition of our heart. That’s true of our actions and it’s true of our words. It shows what really is in our heart. God is not like man. He doesn’t look on the outside of people. He looks at our heart. Here’s what Jesus says about our words in Luke 6.

**Luke 6:44-45** for each tree is known by its own fruit. For figs are not gathered from thornbushes, nor are grapes picked from a bramble bush. The good person out of the good treasure of his heart produces good, and the evil person out of his evil treasure produces evil, for out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks.

What kind of tree are you? Look at the fruit and you will be able to tell. If you’re a tree that has apples growing all over you, you’re an apple tree. It’s a simple principle. So if our mouth is speaking words of complaint and accusation against God, what does that say about the heart? What kind of tree are we? God says you’re an evil tree. It’s a very sobering thing because what God is going to say further is that y’all are born as evil trees. Can’t you see that? Can anyone be justified by their words or by their actions? The answer is no one.

This story points us to our most basic problem in life, and to see that problem. It’s a sin problem. It’s a spiritual problem. The story points us to see how serious it is before the Lord. Our tongue often betrays us. In our worst moments we speak words of anger, words of deceit, words of bitterness, words of gossip, words of lust, words of cursing. And then as we reflect upon our words, in wanting to justify ourselves, we say, “Well that really wasn’t me. I had a bad moment. It was a bad day. It was a bad week. It was a momentary lapse. But Jesus says, no. Those words don’t come from a good heart. The only way those words would ever come from a heart is when that heart is evil. So recognize the problem. It’s out of the heart, your heart, that your mouth spoke.

What is the Gospel message? The first part of the Gospel message offends us sorely because we’re self-righteous. We want to justify ourselves by our actions. We want to say that we’re basically good people. And the first part of God’s Gospel messagepoints us to this problem. It’s the defilement of our own hearts as our number one problem. Our main problem in our life is spiritual. It has to do with the condition of our heart. This is what God says to the people later, when Jeremiah is going to come on the scene.

**Jeremiah 17:9** The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it?

In other words, it fools us. The heart tells us it’s righteous when really, it’s not. It convinces us of being more noble, of being good, of being obedient, of being trustworthy. It deceives us. One of the metaphors used about sin is this issue of disease. I think it’s the metaphor that we’re going to trace through with the snakes biting with poison and people dying. But he says if we look at our heart, what is its condition? It’s desperately sick. Who can even begin to fathom how sick it is?

**Jeremiah 17:10** I the LORD search the heart and test the mind, to give every man according to his ways, according to the fruit of his deeds.

And then he says in Jeremiah 6…he’s speaking now to the prophets and the priests. They’re all false. They’re not representing God clearly. They’re wanting to give a message that is, we’ll say, “seeker sensitive.” They want people to hear it and say, “Oh, that was a good message. I feel good. It lifted me up.” And that’s what they’re doing. And he says this is a problem.

**Jeremiah 6:14-15 (NIV)** “They (false prophets and priests) dress the wound of my people as though it were not serious. ‘Peace, peace,’ they say, when there is no peace. Are they ashamed of their loathsome conduct? No, they have no shame at all; they do not even know how to blush.

They say, “You guys are okay with God and God is okay with you.” But that’s not true. There’s no peace between you and God. Don’t they look at their lives and say, “We’re repenting in sackcloth and ashes?” No. They don’t even know how to blush.

Imagine you’re in the ER and you see some guy being wheeled in and you hear that he has gunshots to the gut and the chest. The doctor rushes over and he says, “Get out the box of bandaids.” You would say, “Did I just hear that right?! This guy has gunshots in his gut and chest, and I just heard the doctor say, ‘Let’s get out the box of bandaids.’ He’s supposed to be a doctor. I can tell you that there needs to be more than that.” And that’s what he’s saying to these priests and these prophets. They’re coming in with gunshots and they’re getting treated like “You know what? It’s okay. It’s not that bad. If you just patch a little bit, just change a little bit, just tweak it, you’ll be okay.” Do you see why that is a message without hope? You end up dying on the table.

The Gospel is being distorted right here at the root. The message often given is, “Don’t be too troubled by your own sin. We’ve all made mistakes. Your heart is good in nature. God surely understands our missteps. Given our circumstances, our sin is understandable. Simply say a few words in prayer and all will be erased.”What do I say as an ambassador for Christ? Here’s the message we have to give.

1. Your sin is killing you.

**The severity of God’s righteousness**

So what does God do?

***6*** *Then the LORD sent fiery serpents among the people, and they bit the people, so that many people of Israel died.*

This hearkens back…Do you remember the plagues 40 years earlier? Now, there are snakes all over the desert. People get bitten. It’s just part of the desert. But this is directly designed by God. These snakes are sent to this people by God. Just as the frogs were sent, just as the gnats were sent, these fiery serpents were sent as an act of God upon this people in judgment. And the judgment is severe.

Imagine for a moment being with that company, and how scary it would be. You’re walking through the desert and you see the person to your left, step right on a snake. He falls down. You make it through the day safely. You get in your tent. Your children are playing. It’s right before the sun sets, and two of the children go down. You run out to gather up your little girl. You get there and you pick her up. She’s just screaming in agony. It’s fiery. That talks about the sensation people feel in their bodies. It’s like their whole bodies are on fire. I’ve never been bitten by a poisonous snake. I hope to avoid that before I finish this worldly life. From what I understand, it’s miserable. It’s like fire is just injected in your blood. That’s what is happening. You’re picking up your daughter, and there’s nothing you can do as you carry her back to your tent. There’s nothing you can do to ease her pain. You know that it’s not going to get better tomorrow, but that she’s going to die in the night. That’s the reality.

What is God’s response to sin? God’s judgment upon sin is infinitely more terrible than what we think is just. God’s judgment upon sin is infinitely more terrible than what *we* think is just. Why is that? It’s because God’s righteousness is infinitely more pure than ours. Is this judgment too severe? From our human standpoint, we think it is. Yet the reason for this distance between our response to sin and God’s response to sin is not because of a flaw or imperfection in God. It’s because of a flaw or imperfection in our sense of justice and our sense of righteousness. What do I say as an ambassador for Christ to communicate God’s Gospel?

1. Your sin is killing you.

2. God’s judgment upon your sin is sure and severe.

Now these are hard messages. But they’re necessary words in order to be awakened to the solution.

**The solution of God’s grace**

God would be just to leave us in our sin and to die in agony by the serpent’s bite. He’d be just to do that. But He is merciful. In His wrath, He remembers mercy.

***7*** *And the people came to Moses and said, “We have sinned, for we have spoken against the LORD and against you. Pray to the LORD, that he take away the serpents from us.” So Moses prayed for the people.*

They’re broken. This is a genuine confession, now. They named the sin specifically. They’re looking to the mediator, the one God provided to mediate for them to the Lord in His holiness. And you know, the Lord did more than simply take the serpents away. They thought anybody who got bit at this point, it was just tough! But God does more.

***8*** *And the LORD said to Moses, “Make a fiery serpent and set it on a pole, and everyone who is bitten, when he sees it shall live.”* ***9*** *So Moses made a bronze serpent and set it on a pole. And if a serpent bit anyone, he would look at the bronze serpent and live.*

Anyone who is bitten, regardless of the condition that they look at that bronze serpent, anyone who is bitten and who looks, lives. It’s not like a 99.9% cure rate. It’s a 100% cure rate. There’s not one person who looks in faith and who then dies of a snake bite. There’s not one of them. On the other hand, it’s a 100% fatality rate. It’s not like 100 people get bit and 99 of them die, but 1 just happens to live. No. Everyone who gets bit who doesn’t look, they die. Everyone who gets bitten and they do look, they live. That’s God’s solution.

Does any solution defy human logic more than this one? What is God doing here? He tells Moses to make the image of this horrid thing that undoubtedly just appalled them, that poisoned them, and to raise that image up on a pole so everyone can see it. There’s no human explanation as to how this solution would work. There’s no explanation here as to why God chose it. God is giving a solution that defies human logic so that the people would hear the message, “Trust Me. Do you trust Me? Do you believe Me? Are you looking to Me in dependence?” God’s solution to our problem requires faith in His provision. This is the way God designs it.

But still, we say, why? Do we have any understanding of that? Thankfully, we do. Skip forward 1400 years. The Messiah comes. He’s speaking to a guy by the name of Nicodemus. Nicodemus is a religious leader who is very moral. He is very upright. He is very respected, but he is lost. He’s without a solution to the problem. Jesus said, “Nicodemus, you must be born again. Unless you are born again, you can’t enter the kingdom of heaven.” And then He says this to Nicodemus:

**John 3:14-15** And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life.

Jesus teaches us that this story is pointing to Himself. It’s pointing to His work upon the cross. It’s pointing to His incarnation. It’s pointing to His saving power. Now, all of the Old Testament points to Jesus as the Messiah. But the attention is even drawn, honed in to this story even more. Jesus says, “I am the serpent on that pole and I’m going to be lifted up. And everyone who looks to Me when I am lifted up, will be saved.”

There are four ideas about the bronze image to keep in mind as we think about this parallel in this picture. The first is that the image of the snake was given by God, not man. The second is that the image of the snake represents God’s judgment upon sin. That’s what the snake represented. Third, the image of the snake had to be lifted up in order to help the people. They had to be able to see it. Fourth, the image held all healing for those who looked and no healing for those who refused to look.

Just as the image of the snake was given by God, so the Son was sent by the Father. He is a divine solution; not a manmade solution to this problem.Jesus was not born by natural means, but was conceived in Mary of the Holy Spirit. So this Person being lifted up is given by God, not man. Just as the serpent is a symbol of the curse that God sent to respond to man’s sin, so too, Jesus became a curse for us. It was in His cursed state on the cross that we look to Him. We look to the cross still. And on the cross, He became a curse for us. He bore our sins in His body. Without the cross, the one who created the world would have no power to forgive sin. He had to bear our sin, or He couldn’t forgive our sin. His justice required the cross.

Just as the image held all power to heal those who look, so Jesus’ death provides forgiveness for every sin. No person can say, “My bite is already so advanced. It’s too late!” No. Everyone who looks will be made whole. On the contrary, no one can say, “I don’t think my bite is really that serious. I don’t need to look.” Every person must look to be saved. And every person who does look will be rescued. God’s provision is greater than our problem. God does the impossible through a means that seems so foolish to us.

What do I say as an ambassador for Christ?

1. Your sin is killing you.

2. God’s judgment upon your sin is sure and severe.

3. God loves you. He gave His Son to die in your place so that you could live. Jesus is able to make you whole.

**The salvation of repentant sinners**

Everyone who looked, lived. This look of faith upon this image on a pole is so simple that a child can understand it. It is so personal that you couldn’t look for your son or daughter. You couldn’t look for your mom or dad. Every person personally had to look in order to receive its benefit. It is so humble. It would have been favorable to our own pride if God would have said, “Run around the camp 20 times.” Everybody would say, “Oh, I can do that!” But all you have to do is look. You are so helpless that the only thing you contribute is an upward look of need. That it! That’s all God desires from us. That’s all He requires of us. That’s the only thing He will receive from us. It’s just simply a needy look of faith. God provided a saving means that is within reach of the weakest and lowliest. God made a way that the proud would refuse, but the needy would receive. In Isaiah 45:22, God says

**Isaiah 45:22 (NKJV)** “Look to Me, and be saved, All you ends of the earth! For I *am* God, and *there is* no other.”

Beloved, pause for a moment and look to Jesus Christ. See Him on the cross dying in your place, bearing your sins. See His blood spilled for you. See Him in resurrected power inviting you to come and receive His righteousness, His wholeness, His life. See Him seated at God’s right hand in power. He is glorious and worthy of worship and trust. Set your eyes upon Him and never ever look away.

What do I say as an ambassador for Christ? I tell my friends and my neighbors

1. Your sin is killing you.

2. God’s judgment upon your sin is certain. It’s unavoidable and it is severe. It’s horrible!

3. God loves you. In mercy, He sent His Son to bear your sin, to bear my sin, so that we could be forgiven, so that we can be healed.

4. Look to Jesus and live!

You’re carrying your little daughter. She’s writhing in pain. What do you do? Don’t you do everything in your power to get close enough to that serpent on that pole and set her up and say, “Look, Daughter! Look!” And if she says, “No, Daddy! I’m too scared of the snakes. I don’t want to look.” We say, “Daughter, little girl, look and you’ll live!” And we use everything in our power. We can’t make her look, but we can plead with her and we can call her. We can tell her, “You must look! It’s the only solution! It’s the only way!”

Friends, I have to tell you that with our family and our friends, let us not be blind to the spiritual condition of people all around us. They have been bitten by a serpent and the searing pain is far worse than what these folks experienced. It’s searing now by the troubles in their soul, and it’s searing forever and ever if they would die without Christ and be separated from Him forever. We are ambassadors for Christ and we have a simple message. I know that many will turn away from that message. Many will mock us. Many would set us aside. But for the love of God and His glory and for the love of the people around us, we have to call them to look and live.

I want to close with some applications. I have just three real simple ones.

1. Look to Jesus.

If you’ve never placed your faith in Jesus Christ, God says, “Look to Me and be saved.” He doesn’t say to go to a prayer meeting. He doesn’t say to sing a song. He doesn’t say to get involved in ministry at church. He doesn’t say to feed the hungry. He doesn’t say to give a whole bunch of money to advance His cause. In order to be healed, He simply says, “Look!” None of those other things will help us one bit. All of those things flow out of a life that has been made whole, but they do nothing for a person who still is bitten and is in need of being free from that curse. Look to Jesus!

2. Lift up Jesus.

Let’s lift up Jesus to friends and family so that they can see Him. We need to lift Him as high as we possibly can. If we have a short pole, we say, “I’ll lift up that short pole. Here I am in my witness. It’s not very big. I don’t know that much, but here’s what I can do.” And then while we lift up the short pole, we think, “If I could just get that up higher. Lord, what are some ways that I can get that pole higher so more people can see it?” That’s the passion of a person who understands this simple gospel.

3. Keep looking to Jesus.

We are walking amid snakes. We are still bitten by sin. The answer to walk safely through this life all the way to the end is to look to Jesus and keep our eyes fixed on Him. He is our Savior. What a Savior we have!