

Part 4: *Snakes on a Plain*

(Part 20 in the continuing series "Jesus by John")

APPETIZER – Climbing Mount Nebo

Deuteronomy 32:48-50, 34:1-5

MAIN COURSE – Christ's Death Means Our Life

John 3:14-15

- "Son of Man" = See **Daniel 7:13-14** and **Mark 14:62**
- "Lifted up" = Exalted (as in Matthew 23:12). If the cross is the coronation of our king, what does his kingdom look like?
- "Wilderness" = a place of purging, purifying, and preparation
- "Believes" = active trust
- "Eternal life" = Unlimited life: infinite in quality as well as quantity

WHAT LESSONS CAN THE SERPENT TEACH US ABOUT JESUS?

- God's judgment is our primary problem.
- God may respond to our prayers by partnering with people (including us) to provide a solution. We want God to work a miracle. He wants us to work with him.
- Jesus removes God's judgment.
- We are responsible to look to Jesus, to trust he is true.
- As a snake without venom was put on a pole, so a man without sin was put on the cross.
- We look at death in order to receive life.
- Jesus reads the Old Testament through a Christocentric lens.

THEOLOGICAL NOTE: This picture of the Atonement is less "Penal Substitution" and more "Penal Healing" – we are healed from the venom of God's wrath (but it is not sent to the bronze serpent in our place).

2 Kings 18:1-4

TAKE OUT – Unlimited Life

John 10:10



Home Church Questions...

HANGOUT [Warming Up to the Topic]

1. Snake or spider? If you had to hold one, what would you prefer?
2. Take time to review Sunday's message. What stood out to you?

HEAR [Listening to God through Scripture]

3. Read **John 3:14-15**.
 - a. What verse or idea from the text stands out to you? Why?
 - b. Jesus speaks of his crucifixion as him being "lifted up" (or exalted) and "glorified" (**John 12:23 and 13:31**). If the crucifixion of Jesus is our King's coronation/exultation (also see **John 18:36, 19:1-3, 19**), what does this tell us about the nature of this Kingdom of which we are citizens?
 - c. Why do you think God wants our faith to be a part of our salvation, our spiritual healing? Why not just save everyone through the cross? Why make the whole "that everyone who believes" business necessary?
4. Read **Numbers 21:4-9**.
 - a. What stands out to you the most?
 - b. The Israelites were able to learn a valuable lesson that day. But not all of them. Some died from the snake bite first, before any healing was provided. That doesn't seem fair. What do you think happened to them after they died?
 - c. Why do you think God didn't answer the prayers of the people the way they wanted – by taking away the snakes?
 - d. Summarize (without looking at your notes): In what ways is this story a prototype for Jesus?

HUDDLE [Making It Personal and Praying Together]

5. In last week's Sunday service we talked about taking time every day to mediate on who we truly are in Christ. Did you try that this past week? Talk about it.
6. While in the wilderness, the Israelites were a grumbly bunch. They tended to feel like they deserved better and complained about having so little. They were rarely blown away with gratitude to God for their rescue out of Egypt and for the chance they had to simply live free and live together as family. Is there an area in your life where you tend to be more grumbly than grateful? Don't wait for snakes. Confess it and pray together for healing.

Quotes...

The Israelites grew impatient with the long journey, and they began to speak against God and Moses. "Why have you brought us out of Egypt to die here in the wilderness?" they complained. "There is nothing to eat here and nothing to drink. And we hate this horrible manna!"

So the Lord sent poisonous snakes among the people, and many were bitten and died. Then the people came to Moses and cried out, "We have sinned by speaking against the Lord and against you. Pray that the Lord will take away the snakes." So Moses prayed for the people.

Then the Lord told him, "Make a replica of a poisonous snake and attach it to a pole. All who are bitten will live if they simply look at it!" So Moses made a snake out of bronze and attached it to a pole. Then anyone who was bitten by a snake could look at the bronze snake and be healed!

~ Numbers 21

Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the wilderness, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, that everyone who believes may have eternal life in him.
~ Jesus (John 3:14-15)