

# THE ONLY CURE FOR SNAKEBITE

(No. 1211 – 11/1/21 – Sermon Online Zoom)

## I. INTRODUCTION

- A. **Num. 21:4-9:** *<sup>4</sup>They traveled from Mount Hor along the route to the Red Sea, to go around Edom. But the people grew impatient on the way [“became very discouraged because of the way” KJV]; <sup>5</sup>they spoke against God and against Moses, and said, “Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the desert? There is no bread! There is no water! And we detest this miserable food!”*

*<sup>6</sup>Then **the LORD sent venomous** [lit. “fiery” or burning] **snakes among them; they bit the people and many Israelites died.** <sup>7</sup>The people came to Moses and said, “We sinned when we spoke against the LORD and against you. Pray that the LORD will take the snakes away from us.” So Moses prayed for the people. <sup>8</sup>The LORD said to Moses, “Make a snake and put it up on a pole; anyone who is bitten can look at it and live.” <sup>9</sup>So **Moses made a bronze snake and put it up on a pole. Then when anyone was bitten by a snake and looked at the bronze snake, he lived.***

- B. The people became discouraged because of the way God was leading them—they sinned and tested the Lord, grumbling and complaining [see 1 Cor. 10:9].
- C. God’s remedy
1. The Israelites repented and confessed their sin.
  2. The people wanted God to get rid of the snakes, but He didn’t!
  3. Instead, God instructed Moses to make *another* snake (they already had enough snakes—God’s ways are often strange to us!)
  4. NOTE: The second commandment forbade making any image, but this was God’s idea! The Israelites continued worshiping this bronze serpent (calling it the god *Nehushtan*) until the time of King Hezekiah, who finally broke it into pieces [see 2 Kings 18:4].
  5. The only cure for anyone bitten by a snake was to look at the bronze snake on the pole.

## II. JESUS AND NICODEMUS (JOHN 3:1-21)

### A. Background

1. This meeting is recorded only in the Gospel of John, and the discourse contains vital revelations of the new birth and “God so loved the world...” found in none of the other gospels.
2. Here, Jesus explained the true meaning of the bronze serpent on a pole.

B. **John 3:1-12:** <sup>1</sup>*Now there was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a member of the Jewish ruling council. <sup>2</sup>He came to Jesus at night and said, “Rabbi, we know You are a teacher who has come from God. For no one could perform the miraculous signs You are doing if God were not with him.” <sup>3</sup>In reply Jesus declared, “I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again [Gk. anōthen = “from above”].’ <sup>4</sup>“How can a man be born when he is old?” Nicodemus asked. “Surely he cannot enter a second time into his mother’s womb to be born!” <sup>5</sup>Jesus answered, “I tell you the truth, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit. <sup>6</sup>Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit. <sup>7</sup>You should not be surprised at My saying, ‘**You must be born again** [“from above”].’ <sup>8</sup>The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit.”*

<sup>9</sup>**“How can this be?”** Nicodemus asked. <sup>10</sup>*“You are Israel’s teacher,” said Jesus, “and do you not understand these things? <sup>11</sup>I tell you the truth, we speak of what we know, and we testify to what we have seen, but still you people do not accept our testimony. <sup>12</sup>I have spoken to you of earthly things and you do not believe; **how then will you believe if I speak of heavenly things?**”*

1. Nicodemus could not understand the spiritual truth of being “born from above.”
2. Jesus proceeded to “speak of heavenly things” in vv.13-21, where He explained *how* a person can be born again:

C. **John 3:13-21:** <sup>13</sup>*“No one has ever gone into heaven except the one who came from heaven—the Son of Man. <sup>14</sup>**Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the desert, so the Son of Man must be***

*lifted up,* <sup>15</sup>that everyone who believes in Him may have eternal life. <sup>16</sup>For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, **that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life.** <sup>17</sup>For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through Him. <sup>18</sup>Whoever believes in Him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God's one and only Son. <sup>19</sup>This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but men loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil. <sup>20</sup>Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that his deeds will be exposed. <sup>21</sup>But whoever lives by the truth comes into the light, so that it may be seen plainly that what he has done has been done through God."

### III. JUST AS MOSES LIFTED UP THE SNAKE

- A. Before we can truly be born again, we **MUST** understand what Jesus is saying in John 3:14 before we jump to John 3:16!
- B. We have **ALL** been bitten by the serpent, the devil, and his poison of sin and death runs through our veins from birth (Gen. 3; Rev. 12:9; Rom. 5:12).

1. Before Paul told the Romans the Good News of salvation, he *first* told them the *bad news* about their sinful condition (**Rom. 3:10-18, 23**):

<sup>10</sup>As it is written: "There is **no one righteous, not even one**; <sup>11</sup>there is no one who understands, no one who seeks God. <sup>12</sup>All have turned away, they have together become worthless; there is no one who does good, not even one." <sup>13</sup>"Their throats are open graves; their tongues practice deceit." "The poison of vipers is on their lips." [NLT: "Their talk is foul, like the stench from an open grave. Their tongues are filled with lies. **Snake venom drips from their lips.**"] <sup>14</sup>"Their mouths are full of cursing and bitterness." <sup>15</sup>"Their feet are swift to shed blood; <sup>16</sup>ruin and misery mark their ways, <sup>17</sup>and the way of peace they do not know." <sup>18</sup>"There is no fear of God before their eyes." <sup>23</sup>for **ALL have sinned** and fall short of the glory of God.

2. Just as the Israelites were bitten by "fiery" serpents, so we all have been pierced with Satan's "fiery darts" [see Eph. 6:16].

### C. Significance of the serpent made of bronze

1. Bronze often speaks of judgment or sacrifice for sin:
  - a) God warned the Israelites that if they were disobedient, He would make both the sky above and the ground beneath them like bronze (Lev. 26:19; Deut. 28:23)
  - b) The bronze altar of sacrifice in the Tabernacle and in Solomon's temple (Ex. 27:1-8; 1 Kings 8:64).
2. Just like the bronze serpent on the pole, Jesus would be lifted up on the Cross where God brought His full fury and judgment for sin.
3. NOTE: Jesus often spoke of His being "lifted up" in reference to His death on the Cross (**John 12:31-33**):

*<sup>31</sup> "Now is the **time for judgment** on this world; now the prince of this world will be driven out. <sup>32</sup> But I, **when I am lifted up** from the earth, will draw all men to Myself." <sup>33</sup> **He said this to show the kind of death He was going to die.***
4. **Rom. 8:1-4:** *<sup>1</sup>Therefore, there is now **no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus**, <sup>2</sup>because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life set me free from the law of sin and death. <sup>3</sup>For what the law was powerless to do in that it was weakened by the sinful nature, **God did by sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful man to be a sin offering.** And so **He condemned sin** in sinful man, <sup>4</sup>in order that the righteous requirements of the law might be fully met in us, who do not live according to the sinful nature but according to the Spirit.*
5. **2 Cor. 5:21:** ***God made Him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God.***
6. **Rom. 3:23-26:** *<sup>23</sup>For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, <sup>24</sup>and are justified freely by His grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. <sup>25</sup>**God presented Him as a sacrifice of atonement**, through faith in His blood. He did this **to demonstrate His justice**, because in His forbearance He had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished—<sup>26</sup>He did it **to demonstrate His justice** at the present time, so as **to be just and the one who justifies** those who have faith in Jesus.*
  - a) God presented Christ as a sacrifice of atonement

- b) In order for God to remain just and, at the same time, justify sinners, justice had to be served—the death penalty for sin (pronounced centuries before in the Garden of Eden) had to be executed!
  - c) God demonstrated both His love (Rom. 5:8) and His justice on the Cross by making His Son the sacrifice for the sins of the world.
7. Who punished and killed Jesus? The answer might surprise you! (**Isa. 53:3-10**):

*<sup>3</sup>He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows, and familiar with suffering. Like one from whom men hide their faces He was despised, and we esteemed Him not. <sup>4</sup>Surely He took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows, yet we considered Him **stricken by God, smitten by Him, and afflicted.** <sup>5</sup>But He was **pierced** for our transgressions, He was **crushed** for our iniquities; the **punishment that brought us peace was upon Him**, and by His wounds we are healed. <sup>6</sup>We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and **the LORD has laid on Him the iniquity of us all.** <sup>7</sup>He was oppressed and afflicted, yet He did not open His mouth; He was led like a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is silent, so He did not open His mouth. <sup>8</sup>By **oppression and judgment** He was taken away. And who can speak of His descendants? For He was **cut off** from the land of the living; for the transgression of My people He was stricken. <sup>9</sup>He was assigned a grave with the wicked, and with the rich in His death, though He had done no violence, nor was any deceit in His mouth. <sup>10</sup>**Yet it was the LORD's will to crush Him** ["it pleased the Lord to bruise Him – KJV] **and cause Him to suffer, and though the LORD makes His life a guilt offering, He will see His offspring and prolong His days, and the will of the LORD will prosper in His hand.***

- a) We haven't really grasped the purpose of the Cross until we understand that God Himself was punishing His own Son in our place—smiting and crushing Him for our iniquities.
- b) The Father made Jesus a guilt offering to atone for the sins of the world.

#### IV. SO THAT EVERYONE WHO BELIEVES IN HIM MAY HAVE ETERNAL LIFE

- A. Just as the Israelites had to look at the bronze snake in order to be healed, so we must fix our eyes on Jesus with real faith, understanding that He took the judgment and punishment for our sins on the Cross.
- B. We must “behold” Him as God’s sacrificial Lamb who takes away the sin of the world (John 1:29).
- C. God didn’t send His Son into the world to condemn the world—He sent Him to condemn the world’s sin IN HIS SON and save the world through Him!
- D. HOWEVER, Jesus made it very clear in the verses that follow John 3:16 that anyone who does not believe in Jesus is “condemned already,” and many will refuse to come to Him because they love darkness and evil more than His light (John 3:18-21).

#### V. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

- A. Like the Israelites in the desert, we have all been bitten by the fiery serpent called Satan, and his venom of sin and death has been in our veins since birth.
- B. Just as Moses’ bronze serpent healed the Israelites of their snakebites, God lifted His Son Jesus up on a pole called Calvary to save the world.
- C. Salvation and New Birth can only come when we look to Jesus in faith, understanding that He took the punishment for all of our sins (**John 3:16**):

*For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life.*

- D. Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the Author and Finisher of our faith—He is God’s sacrifice for sin—the Savior of the world!
- E. THE CROSS IS THE ONLY CURE FOR SNAKEBITE!