

# KING OF KINGS LUTHERAN CHURCH

Numbers 21:4-9

Look and Live



The journey of the Children of Israel from Egypt to the Promised Land is in many ways a symbolic picture for our spiritual journey through life. The Exodus began with the Passover, when the Children of Israel killed a lamb and put the blood on their doorposts. The blood served as a sign that someone had died in that house — a substitute — and the angel of death would pass over those houses. The event foreshadowed Jesus who would be **“the lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world”** (John 1:29). Upon leaving Egypt the Israelites arrived at the Red Sea. There they passed through the water to escape slavery and death. Paul writes in 1 Corinthians that this miracle pictures baptism, when we pass through water to escape sin and death (10:2). Daily manna and quail remind us how God provides for us throughout our lives. Water from a rock — twice! — reminds us that God solves our problems and that he nourishes us with Christ (1 Corinthians 10:4). The covenant established at Mt. Sinai is filled with symbolic images. The sacrifices pictured Jesus’ sacrifice for sins. The high priest and the tabernacle pictured Jesus as the mediator between God and sinners. And then there was the forty years of wondering the wilderness waiting to reach the Promised Land. They picture where we are right now — wondering in the spiritual wilderness of sin, looking for our real home in heaven.

As the final leg of the Exodus began, we see another picture. The forty years of wondering were over. They had set their sights on the Promised Land. Miraculously, after forty years, their shoes hadn’t worn out! For forty years, manna and quail had been available in the morning and evening. In the chapter before our text, water had come out of a rock. God was providing for his people!

But there was a setback. To get north to the Promised Land, they would have to travel south to go around Edom. The king of Edom denied

them passage through his land, so the journey was going to be longer. With this setback, the blessings faded from memory and the grumbling began. **“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!”**

God’s goodness to us is as certain as the daily manna and quail were for the wondering Israelites. Yet we rebel against God also. When God doesn’t give us what we want, solve our problems like we want, or lead in the direction we want, we are tempted to complain. We sometimes think that God is wrong, as if we were the ones who possessed all knowledge and knew what was always the right path. Our grumbling takes a variety of forms. Sometimes we openly complain like the Israelites did. Other times we complain about God indirectly: *I don’t have the right people in my life! Or the right skills. Or the right job.* In our lack of contentment we silently accuse God of being wrong. Other times our lack of faith is a complaint against God. Are his promises not reliable? But could we cite an example of him not keeping a promise? Isn’t our doubt a slap in the face of God?

There were consequences for the Israelites’ grumbling. Snakes! They came into the camp and people started to die. There was no cure for the venom.

Our sins bring a spiritual poison into our lives. Left untreated, this venom will lead to spiritual death. God warns over and over in the Bible that sinners will not stand in his presence. Instead, those who fail to measure to God’s standard of perfection will suffer punishment in hell.

But often, the spiritual poison of sin is felt long before death. Sin brings problems and misery. Stay away from God’s Word and faith begins to fade. Tell a lie and trouble always follows. Give in to a sinful desire and relationships are damaged and guilt begins to gnaw at the heart.

Indulge your selfishness or laziness and your boss will become difficult to work with. Talk back to your parents and you will find yourself punished.

But God provided a cure for the snake venom — an odd cure. He had Moses make a bronze snake and put it on a pole. He then made a promise: **“anyone who is bitten can look at it and live.”** The bronze snake didn’t have any power. God’s promise saved the people who trusted him. Implied in the story is that some may not have looked. Perhaps they didn’t think it made sense or that it was too easy. But Moses records, **“when anyone was bitten by a snake and looked at the bronze snake, he lived.”** God kept his promise!

In our Gospel Lesson, Jesus said, **“Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the desert, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life. 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”** (John 3:14-16). Jesus is our “bronze snake.” When we look to him, we live. He removes the poison of sin by taking our sins onto himself. He took the punishment that our sins deserved. He suffered God’s anger and he died. When we look to the cross, we find full forgiveness.

The venom is gone! Jesus didn’t put a band-aid on your sins; he didn’t numb the wound so that you don’t feel the effects of sin. He took your sins away. You are cured by divine forgiveness.

Lent is a time to renew our spiritual life. That renewal comes from realizing what Jesus did for us. He has freed you from sin’s bite. Recommit yourselves to your Savior and his Word. Recommit yourself to living your faith by acts of kindness and charity. As a Seminary professor once said, “God kills us to life.” A time of repentance hurts. Pondering our sins isn’t pleasant. But God is ready to lift us up . . . always! With story after story and verse after verse in the Bible, God pictures renewal for you. You are restored and forgiven!

You are free from the curse of sin — you will not die as an enemy of God. You will live as his child in heaven. You are free from sin’s power — you don’t need to be controlled by sin any longer. Live as one who has found the antidote for sin — Jesus Christ! Look to him and live. Amen.

Lent 3  
March 15, 2015

