

"The Highest and the Lowest: Looking at the Serpent" | Rev. Tim Frickenschmidt | March 14, 2021

Old Testament Reading: [Numbers 21:4-9](#)

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.

Epistle Reading: [Ephesians 2:1-10](#)

And you were dead in the trespasses and sins 2 in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience—3 among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind. 4 But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, 5 even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved—6 and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, 7 so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. 8 For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, 9 not a result of works, so that no one may boast. 10 For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.

Gospel Reading: [John 3:1-5, 9, 14-19](#)

Now there was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews. 2 This man came to Jesus by night and said to him, "Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher come from God, for no one can do these signs that you do unless God is with him." 3 Jesus answered him, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God." 4 Nicodemus said to him, "How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born?" 5 Jesus answered, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one

Introduction

During Lent, it is time to ask of our spiritual situation without God, "How bad is it?" God's people complained about what God had given them after he gave them manna. Then, when faced with deadly serpents, they cried to God and confessed their sin. When they were called to look on a bronze serpent and did so, they were healed. Likewise, when we realize we are spiritually dead in our trespasses and look to Christ because we can do nothing to help ourselves, God gives us life.

Background

1. **Complaint: Israel complains.**

- Food is never just food in the Bible; food represents the entire world. One tree was forbidden for food, and Adam and Eve ate of it anyway (Genesis 2-3).
- God gave his people manna, but they complain about it, saying, "[W]e loathe this worthless food" ([Numbers 21:5](#)).
- Daily food represented God; they were saying they loathed God. Sin makes us loathe God.

2. **Cry: Israel cries out that they have sinned.**

- Venomous snakes, "fiery serpents," killed many people of Israel; their bites and the results of them were a picture of what was happening within God's people ([Numbers 21:6](#)).
- "We have sinned," the people of Israel cry ([Numbers 21:7](#)).
- We easily become dissatisfied. What we have is never enough, and we move on. The more success we have, the quicker we become bored or desperate ([Jeremiah 2:13](#)). We don't see what is killing us until we start to die.
- Don't ignore what your troubles are telling you.

3. **Call: Israel is called to look.**

- Our situation before God and others is spiritually dead, not living yet till we look on Christ.
- We can do nothing.
- The call is to *look*. Look at the image of what's killing you and live ([Numbers 21:9](#)).
- Jesus identifies with humanity: "I thirst" ([John 19:28](#)). He took the venom of sin's power.
- There's no use looking to yourself. Look to Christ. Look and live, trust, and be grateful.

Discuss

- What do we loathe that we used to celebrate as the people of Israel came to loathe the food God provided?
- What are our troubles telling us?
- What should our response be when we look rightly on what's killing us? What should our response be when we look on Christ? ([Psalm 107:17-22](#))
- How can we remind others to look to Christ? What is a time someone has reminded you to look to Christ?

Conclusion/Application

When we look at what's killing us, we are forced to consider our spiritual situation without God, which is spiritual death. We can do nothing. When we realize this and look to Christ, we live, thankful for his taking the venom of sin's power and giving us life.

Prayer

Dear Father,
Thank you for showing us our sin and sending Christ because of your great love. Let us look on our troubles to see our desperate need, and let us look to Christ to heal and give life. Let us not loathe you by complaining of your gifts; help us rather thank you for the immeasurable riches of your grace which you showed in kindness toward us in looking upon us that we may look to Christ and honor him. Amen.

is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.”

9 Nicodemus said to him, “How can these things be?”...

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

16 “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. 17 For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. 18 Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God. 19 And this is the judgment: the light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light...”