

Small Group Guide: Look and Live

Based on Numbers 21:4-9

Opening Prayer & Icebreaker (10 minutes)

Icebreaker Question: Share about a time when you had to take "the long way" to get somewhere—either literally or figuratively. How did you feel during that journey?

Sermon Summary (5 minutes)

This sermon explores Israel's wilderness journey as a parallel to our Christian walk—from the joy of Palm Sunday, through the death of Good Friday, to the hope of Easter. The Israelites faced disappointment when forced to take the long route around Edom, leading to complaints against God. God's response was both judgment (fiery serpents) and mercy (the bronze serpent on a pole)—a powerful picture of Christ lifted up on the cross for our salvation.

Key Scripture

Numbers 21:4-9 (Read aloud together)

Discussion Questions

Part 1: The Why - Understanding the Journey (15 minutes)

1. **Context Matters:** The Israelites faced several disappointments before their complaining:
 - Miriam's death
 - Moses being told he wouldn't enter the Promised Land
 - Being forced to go around Edom (the long way)

2. How do accumulated disappointments affect your faith? When have you felt like you were "backpedaling" instead of moving forward spiritually?
3. **The Long Route:** God didn't allow Israel to fight Edom because of His promise to Esau. Sometimes God makes us take the longer, harder route.
Can you share a time when God didn't give you the "shortcut" you wanted? Looking back, what did you learn on the longer journey?
4. **James 1:2-4** talks about trials producing endurance. How does understanding God's purpose in difficulties change the way we respond to them?

Part 2: The What - The Nature of Complaining (15 minutes)

4. **Weaponized Words:** The Israelites didn't just complain—they spoke "against" God and Moses in a hostile, contemptuous way. They called God "Elohim" (distant deity) instead of "Yahweh" (covenant God).
What's the difference between honest lament (like in the Psalms) and contemptuous complaining? Where is the line?
5. **Three Accusations:** The Israelites said:
 - "You brought us here to die"
 - "There's no food or water" (despite God's provision)
 - "We loathe this worthless food" (the manna)
6. When we're tired and frustrated, we often forget God's past faithfulness. What are some ways we can remind ourselves of God's provision when we're in difficult seasons?
7. **Modeling Faith:** The younger generation was watching the older generation complain.
How does our response to trials affect those watching us (children, coworkers, friends)? What responsibility do we have as examples?

Part 3: The Who - The Bronze Serpent and the Cross (20 minutes)

7. **The Judgment:** God sent fiery serpents, and many died. This seems harsh.
How do you reconcile God's love with His judgment? Why is it important that we understand both aspects of God's character?
8. **Incomplete Repentance:** The people confessed their sin but asked Moses to pray that God would "remove the serpents"—they wanted

relief from consequences, not necessarily transformation.

Have you ever asked God to remove difficulties without asking Him to change your heart? What's the difference between wanting relief and wanting redemption?

9. **Look and Live:** God's remedy was simple—look at the bronze serpent on the pole and live. Jesus referenced this in John 3:14-15. **Read John 3:14-17 together.** What parallels do you see between the bronze serpent and Jesus on the cross?
10. **Individual Choice:** Every person had to make their own decision to look at the serpent. No one could do it for them. Why is salvation an individual decision? How do we sometimes try to rely on family heritage, church attendance, or good works instead of personally looking to Jesus?
11. **2 Corinthians 5:21** says God "made him to be sin who knew no sin." The bronze serpent represented their sin but contained no venom, just as Jesus took on our sin but was sinless. How does understanding that Jesus became your sin (not just bore your sin) impact your view of the cross?

Key Takeaways

- ✓ **The journey matters.** God often takes us the long way to build endurance, hope, and dependence on Him.
- ✓ **Complaining reveals our heart.** When we're frustrated, what comes out shows what's really inside.
- ✓ **Salvation is simple but personal.** Like the Israelites had to individually look at the serpent, each person must personally look to Jesus and trust in His finished work.
- ✓ **The cross is both judgment and mercy.** Our sin was judged at the cross, but God provided the way of salvation through Christ being lifted up.
- ✓ **Look and live.** Salvation isn't about our works or goodness—it's about looking to Jesus in faith.

Practical Applications

This Week's Challenge (Choose one or more):

1. **Gratitude Journal:** Each day this week, write down three ways God has provided for you, even in difficult circumstances. When you're tempted to complain, review your list.
2. **Model Faith:** Identify one person who might be watching your response to trials (a child, coworker, friend). Intentionally choose to respond with trust in God rather than complaining this week.
3. **Look to Jesus:** Set aside 15 minutes this week to meditate on John 3:14-17 and the bronze serpent story. Ask God to show you if you're truly looking to Jesus alone for salvation, or if you're trusting in your own goodness.
4. **Share Your Story:** The jailer asked, "What must I do to be saved?" and received a simple answer. Be ready to share the simple gospel with someone this week: We're all sinners, Jesus died for our sins, and we're saved by believing in Him.
5. **Examine Your Complaints:** When you're tempted to complain this week, pause and ask:
 - Am I speaking against God or to God?
 - Am I forgetting His past faithfulness?
 - What is my complaining revealing about my heart?

Closing Reflection (10 minutes)

Silent Reflection (3 minutes): Have each person consider: "Have I truly looked to Jesus and accepted His righteousness for my sin? Or am I still trying to earn salvation through my own efforts?"

Share (if comfortable): Would anyone like to share what God is speaking to them about today?

Prayer Requests & Closing Prayer:

- Pray for endurance in trials
- Pray for grateful hearts that remember God's faithfulness
- Pray for those who need to "look and live" — to trust Jesus for the first time or afresh

- Pray for Easter services and those who will attend who don't know Jesus

Looking Ahead

Easter Preparation:

- Invite someone to Easter services
- Pray for hearts to be open to the simple message: Look to Jesus and live
- Consider how you can serve on Easter (greeting, children's ministry, etc.)

Next Week's Study: [To be determined]

Additional Resources

- **Scripture Memory:** 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."
- **Further Reading:**
 - Numbers 20-21 (full context)
 - John 3:1-21 (Jesus and Nicodemus)
 - Romans 3:21-26 (righteousness through faith)
 - James 1:2-4 (trials and endurance)

"Turn to me and be saved, all the ends of the earth. For I am God and there is no other." - Isaiah 45:22