

10/03/24 Lent 4 – Numbers the Bronze Snake

***Then the Lord sent poisonous snakes among the Israelites. The snakes bit them. Many of the people died. ....The Lord said to Moses, “Make a snake. Put it up on a pole. Then anyone who is bitten can look at it and remain alive.” So Moses made a bronze snake. He put it up on a pole. Then anyone who was bitten by a snake and looked at the bronze snake remained alive.***

Numbers 21:4-9

The bit that gets me is that it was **“the Lord”** that sent the snakes among His *own people* and *many* of them died.

Young people, old people, husbands and wives all of a sudden confronted by snakes.

Hissing, biting snakes “sent by the Lord”.

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They say a snake bite is very painful - like an intense burning inside.

Depending on the snake when you're bitten your blood either, coagulates and thickens so thick that you just die, or your blood thins and becomes so runny that you just die.

We all know the fright of walking along and coming across a snake. As you know Australia is home to 21 species world's deadliest snakes. And they're not rare – there right here – down the creek and in the paddock.

It's almost certain that any of us here today would have a snake in the back yard – whether you live in town or out of town.

Would you agree?

Our snakes are everywhere – but we hardly ever see them – and we rarely ever get bitten.

Has anyone ever been bitten by a snake? Does anyone know anyone that's been bitten by a snake? The deadliest snakes in the world – in our back yards – and no body - or relatively nobody – get's bitten. It says that **many people died** when the Lord sent these snakes among the people of Israel. There must have been 1000s of snakes – a plague of snakes. AND the Lord sent them???

It makes you want to go to New Zealand or Ireland where there are no snakes just thinking about it. Any way we can't avoid the fact that it was the **“Lord”** who sent the snakes. But the “lord” only does “good” things doesn't he? The scriptures tell us loud and clear that he's a God of compassion and “delights in the death of no-one”.

Everything he does, no matter how weird, or how harsh it may seem to us, are always acts of kindness and mercy and love.

As Romans says (11): *Notice how God is both kind and severe. He is severe to those who disobeyed, but kind to you as you continue to trust in his kindness... Everything God “does” or “allows” leads to blessing, and joy, and salvation of His people.*

- **His ways** are not easily understood – there not meant to be understood.
- **His ways** are hardly ever appreciated by us, especially when we're hurting, or when a loved one dies or is killed senselessly.

Look at Job a book we struggle with because it says, very clearly, God allowed those terrible things to happen to Job: His family destroyed in a cyclone, his home and sheds destroyed in a bushfire, His nagging wife taunting him every day to curse God, His unhelpful friends. God allowed this to happen to Job. It's a strange story – is it just a story??

It's written for us to know what Job knew: ***that God was entirely trustworthy and God had Job's ultimate good and blessing at heart.***

Job says to his nagging wife: You so and: “You talk like a godless woman. Should we accept only good things from the hand of God and never anything bad?” Even if he kills me, I'll trust Him. (Job 13:15a)

So in the entire story Job never says anything bad about God. He consistently says right through the pain – God is with me and will bless me. (Job 2:9-10 NLT) What happened to Job was so we have those precious words: ***my redeemer lives and on the last day I will see him with my very own eyes.***

If those terrible things didn't happen to Job he never would have said: My redeemer lives. God's and Job was not understood or appreciated by anyone but Job saw through it.

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We can be sure the people surrounded by snakes had no appreciation of what God was doing.

We can see the big picture.

They were forced to turn away from open rebellion against God to trust in him.

They repented and asked Moses to ask God to take away the snakes.

**The story seems to get crueler by the minute**

*It says, The Lord didn't remove the snakes. Still snakes everywhere, in their homes, in their beds. They continued to be bitten.*

But God told Moses to make *bronze* snake and put it on a pole. The people were told that if they were bitten they should look at the bronze snake on the pole and they would be saved.

Is that what they were hoping for? What were their prayers? Please Lord take these snakes away? Now! Please! God's answer was a bronze snake on a pole. He says, "If you get bitten just look up to the bronze snake on the pole". Imagine – you're getting bitten down there and you're expected to look up there. You're supposed to take your eyes off the attacking snake and look up to the saving snake – that would take some faith.

***You know John reminds Jesus followers about this snake thing. "...as Moses lifted up the bronze snake on a pole in the wilderness, so I, the Son of Man, must be lifted up on a pole, so that everyone who believes in me will have eternal life.***

You know the world is *full* of snakes. God doesn't' take them away.

Psalm 23 – shadow of death – I am with you
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We have the privilege of knowing what heaven will be like from the scriptures – from Holy Communion – from those moment of confidence and peace. But this side of heaven we still live among the snakes.

It was the same for the people of old: They saw God at work saving them – in dramatic style – Ben Hur style; They saw victory after victory – Pharos murdering army drowned in the sea; They saw God himself day after day provide water from a rock and bread from the sky. Yet those same people still had to live among the snakes. It seems to me they had to live among the snakes to be able to see the saving snake on the pole which could save them.

Nothing else was going to make them trust in God.

It was the snakes that made them trust in God – a tough blessing!

It's the snakes in life that help us look for Jesus. What's so amazing, is that Jesus had to become a snake *Himself* on the pole, so that we can be saved.

1 Cor 5:21 <sup>21</sup> *God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.*

It takes a lot of faith to lift our eyes up from the snakes and problems of this world to Jesus on the cross – to leave our own efforts and trust in him.

It's the snakes in life that help us see Jesus for who he is.

Let's change gears – up a level.

Surely since Adam and Eve the snake represents evil and the devil. We know on the cross Jesus takes on the sin of the world. We know Corinthians: *God made him who had no sin to be sin for us*. What do we see at Easter? We see the soldiers laughing – ha! Ha! He is pathetic. Ha! Ha! Ha! He saved others but cannot save himself. We see all the evil of the world on Jesus. We see every misery in the world on Jesus. *God made him who had no sin to be sin for us*.

Can you see how Jesus becomes sin and evil – Is it too much of a stretch to see that Jesus becomes the snake on a pole.

John the Gospel writer saw it: Moses lifted up the snake in the desert. In the same way, the Son of Man must also be lifted up. Then everyone who believes may have eternal life in him.”

When Jesus cries Father why have you abandoned me – we know the Father turns his face away from the sin of the world – Jesus.

This is heavy – it is the heart of the gospel. Jesus takes our sin to the cross.

When you hear Jesus cry “it is finished” what do you see? What do you hear?

A man's dying words? It is Jesus announcement that evil is finished. It is Jesus saying the snake is dead?

Evil is finished - Jesus rises to life – death where victory, where is your sting?

Just as the people of Old looked to the Bronze Snake - We too look to Jesus and that act of faith saves us.

I like snakes in the bush – at home though it is war. And it almost always starts with a stick – a pole.

The snake wrapped around the pole is a dead snake – is a defeated snake.

The snake wrapped around the doctor's pole is a dead disease and defeated disease. It's no wonder Jesus on the pole hung his head and said it is finished.

It's hard to say it but in lent we must see the defeated, humiliated, abandoned Jesus on the cross – so we can also see our sin defeated, humiliated, and abandoned on the cross.

When we appreciate the hopelessness of the cross we have a chance to see the victory of the resurrection.

Until he returns we're here with the snakes – even in our back yard – but we are invited to look to the snake on the pole to be saved. Amen.