Lesson for March 10—The Bronze Serpent

**Open the Conversation**

What is the sickest you have ever been? Did someone help you get better? Who?

How did you feel about yourself when you were well again? Had your perspective on life changed? If so, how?

How did you feel toward the person who helped you get better?

**Introduction**

When talking about His mission on earth, Jesus said, “The healthy don’t need a doctor, but the sick do. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance” (Luke 5:31-32). As the Great Physician, Jesus offers the solution to the spiritual sickness every person has: His forgiveness and grace. At the same time, Jesus cares for the total person, as evidenced by His healing of the sick in the Gospels. Many years earlier, Moses’ actions in the desert pointed toward the healing power of God, that Jesus would bring to completion.

You might recognize the symbol of the bronze snake up on a pole as a worldwide symbol of healing. This picture for healing has endured for thousands of years and comes from the Scripture passage we are studying today. Today, the logo of the American Medical Association continues to feature this image. God still used physical healing to bring people to Himself.

**Read Numbers 21:4-9**

* What complaint did the Israelites raise against God and Moses?
* Verses 6-9 describe God’s response to the people and the people’s eventual repentance of their sin. What surprises you or stands out to you from God’s initial response and his conditions?
* What role did Moses play in this exchange?

Read Psalm 78:8-11, and verse 22.

* From this psalm, what do we learn were the root issues with Israel, beyond just their dislike of the manna God provided?

Read John 3:14-16.

* In these verses, Jesus helps us understand the greater significance of the bronze snake on the pole. What did the snake on the pole ultimately represent?
* With both the snake on the pole and Jesus on the cross, how do God’s people experience healing?

Look at Numbers 21:7-9 again.

* In addition to the physical healing of Moses’ day and the spiritual healing Jesus brings, how else did Moses imitate Jesus in the Numbers 21 reading? Read Romans 8:34 to help you answer.

**Wrap Up**

**Are there areas in your life where you find it easier to complain against God than to trust Him with the situation? Spend some time today praying about these things out loud to God, or on paper. Write down truths about His faithfulness to help reframe your view.**

**What areas of your life need healing? What can you do today to turn your attention to Jesus and trust Him in a greater way?**

**Pray for our church family’s global workers serving in medical missions.**

**Ask God what He wants you to understand from today’s study and spend some time “listening” with your heart.**

**Jesus’ blood payment for our sin when He was lifted up on the cross, and His resurrection and victory over death is the only possible healing for the spiritual disease of our sin. Placing total faith in Him—trusting that He is who He says He is, and does what He says He does-- brings complete spiritual healing for this life and for eternity.** **Pray, thanking God for His loving provision. If you are realizing your need to give your life to Christ in faith today, tell God in prayer, and tell your leaders so they can celebrate with you.**

**Extended Cut**

**Summary--**When the children of Israel are tested by the hardship of their circumstances, they suffer the sting of being bitten by poisonous snakes. God instructs Moses to create a bronze snake to hold up: for the people to live, they had to look at the remedy God provided. We, too, have all been bitten with the deadly poison of sin and the only remedy for us is to respond in faith to Jesus, who was lifted up on a cross for us.

**Looking at the heart of things--**The Israelites openly expressed their dissatisfaction to God and Moses about the monotonous diet of manna they had been eating and the lack of water during this lengthy journey through the deserts—for the 7th time. They described their food supply as “miserable,” thereby deploring and degrading that which God had so graciously given to them for some forty years. The psalmist described this generation of Israelites as “stubborn and rebellious . . . a generation whose heart was not loyal and whose spirit was not faithful to God.” The problem was not that the Israelites didn’t like the food God gave them; the problem was that they failed to trust and obey Him. All people had, and still have, a tendency to feel sorry for themselves when things seem hard. We need God’s perspective in these times. We can choose gratitude and reliance on God no matter the circumstances.

**When a person’s heart is intent on rebellion and full of discontentment,** even the best of gifts from the Lord can lose their savor; nothing will fully satisfy until the heart is made right. In response to the people’s uprising, the Lord sent forth “fiery serpents,” whose poisonous venom soon resulted in death to the many who were bitten.

In Numbers 21:8-9, the **Lord directed Moses to make a snake image** and mount it on a pole as an antidote for those who had been bitten by these snakes. Those who looked at this snake image would be healed by faith in God’s provision, not by faith in the graven serpent. Because it was God who graciously did the healing, it was neither idolatry nor magic. John’s Gospel cited Jesus’ use of this imagery as a metaphor for His crucifixion. Just as those in Moses’ time looked upon this snake and were healed, those who look in faith to the Christ who was lifted up on the cross will be healed of their sins. Those who looked upon Him and believed in Him would have eternal life (John 3:14-16).

Unlike previous rebellion accounts, the **Israelites respond with repentant hearts**, confessing their sinfulness in speaking out against God and Moses. Though driven in part by the desperate circumstances of facing death by snake bite, they seem to have realized genuinely the seriousness of their sin. Having experienced several times through their history in the wilderness that the prayer of a righteous man like Moses holds great power, they appealed to their divinely appointed leader to intercede with God on their behalf. Moses responded to their pleas with an equally humble heart and prayed on behalf of the people. The Lord graciously responded to the pleas of Moses and the people by giving instructions for preparing an antidote for the snakes’ venom. That antidote had much more significance than the people could have ever known.

**One of Moses’ responsibilities as spiritual leader** of the people of Israel was to represent them before God. Throughout Moses’ story, we often read about him approaching God with Israel’s sins, asking God to show mercy, and communicated God’s judgments back to the people. In much the same way, Jesus intercedes on our behalf before God the Father. Romas 8:34 tells us, “Who is the one who condemns? Christ Jesus is the One who died, but even more, has been raised; He also is at the right hand of God and intercedes for us.” Because of Christ, we can confess our sins before God and know with confidence that Jesus is interceding on our behalf.

In our day, we see a lot of media containing things that look real but aren’t. It’s important to remember that the miracles of God we encounter in the Bible were real, supernatural things God did to illustrate something about who He is to people so they could know Him better. They aren’t magic, special effects, or intended for entertainment, so we need to think about them differently. The records we have about these happenings are kept for us by God in Scripture for the same reason—to help us see Him and His purposes accurately.