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For the Joy...
Pastor David Dykes

INTRODUCTION

Today we’re going to talk about how the children of Israel sinned against God. There are a lot of ways they sinned and rebelled against God, but let’s cover two ways they rebelled against God.

Numbers 21:4-9. They traveled from Mount Hor along the route to the Red Sea, to go around Edom. But the people grew impatient on the way; they spoke against God and against Moses, and said, “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!” Then the Lord sent venomous snakes among them; they bit the people and many Israelites died. The people came to Moses and said, “We sinned when we spoke against the Lord and against you. Pray that the Lord will take the snakes away from us.” So Moses prayed for the people. The Lord said to Moses, “Make a snake and put it up on a pole; anyone who is bitten can look at it and live.” So Moses made a bronze snake and put it up on a pole. Then when anyone was bitten by a snake and looked at the bronze snake, he lived.”

I. THE SINFUL REBELLION

1. The children of Israel denied God’s power

First, they denied God’s power. They didn’t believe God had the power to do what he said he could do. Now God told them two things. He said, “I’m going to lead you from the land of bondage, Egypt to Canaan,” and they didn’t believe him. And he said, “I’ll lead you and I’ll feed you. I’m going to provide for you with supernatural food.”

Let’s talk once again about manna. In the Old Testament manna was food that appeared supernaturally from the sky. In the morning when the children of Israel went out, the landscape was covered with manna just like dew on the ground. The women went out and gathered a certain amount of it and prepared it to eat. As I told you before the manna was amazing because if you tried to preserve it from day one to the next day, it would spoil and you couldn’t eat it, except on Friday. They gathered twice as much manna on Friday so on the Sabbath Day it was preserved and they would use it. This went on for forty years! Did you know the manna was a picture of Jesus? In the New Testament Jesus talked about being “the bread of heaven” that’s what they call manna, the bread of heaven; they called it “angel’s food.” How was Jesus like manna? You might want to think about it. The manna was round. A circle is a symbol of completion or perfection, the roundness of the manna represents the perfection of Jesus. The manna was white. That represents the purity of Jesus. Manna came down from heaven just as Jesus came down from heaven. Manna was on the ground just as Jesus humbled himself voluntarily. Manna was that which gave them life and the Lord Jesus is the one who gives life. I have made this reference before. Every day when you get into the word of God and every day when you have your quiet time and you pray, it’s like feeding on the heavenly manna. Did you know yesterday’s quiet time won’t help you today? Yesterday’s manna is no good for today. That’s why if you only have a sporadic, inconsistent quiet time, that’s why you go through times of spiritual malnutrition. Yesterday’s quiet time, yesterday’s manna is no good for today. You have to keep on doing it. It is a day-by-day experience.

Can you blame the children of Israel for just getting tired of this manna for forty years? How many ways can you fix manna? Baked manna, boiled manna, broiled manna, ba-manna bread... Men, can you imagine coming home for supper and you say, “What’s for supper?” “Manna, again?” God never intended them to have manna for forty years. He intended them to have manna for maybe 18 months or two years until they got to Kadesh-Barnea and then they could have gone in and they could have been enjoying the milk and honey and the fruit and the fullness of the land of Canaan. Forty years of manna represents the spiritual deadness and dullness of carnal Christians who have never moved on by faith to receive God’s best. What a sad thing it is to spend all of your life eating the same thing over and over again!

2. They defied God’s prophet

Number two they defied God’s prophet. Look at verse 5. It says, “They spoke against God and they spoke against Moses.” They said, “Why did you bring us out of Egypt to die in the desert?” Moses was the leader God placed in front of them to lead them to the Promised Land, but they did not follow his leadership and God considered that a sin against him! Someone said poets, pigs and prophets are never fully appreciated until they are dead! Moses was never really loved and appreciated by the Jewish people until after he was dead and buried. Now he is the hero of the Israelites, but when he was alive, they griped and murmured against him. One of the reasons God was not pleased was not only because they murmured against God, because God can probably take it, but they murmured against Moses too. So this was the sinful rebellion. You have to understand that in this scenario the children of Israel represent you and me, New Testament Christians. We are people who have been brought out of spiritual bondage, out of spiritual Egypt. Just as they passed through the Red Sea the Bible says that’s a picture of baptism and we had better be sure as believers we do not rebel against God and we don’t deny his power or defy his leadership in our lives.

II. THE SWIFT REWARD

Here’s the second episode. There was a swift reward for their rebellion. It’s not very pretty. Look at verse 21:6. “Then the Lord sent venomous snakes among them and they bit the people and many Israelites died.” I’ll tell you right now—I don’t like snakes, in any form or fashion. If there are any animal rights activists out there, I apologize to you right now, but I believe the only good snake is a dead snake. If I offended any of you for that, I am really sorry, but I do not care for snakes. Frankly, I don’t even like to think about them too much. To me the idea of a bunch of hideous, writhing serpents all together is about as disconcerting as anything I can think of. Can you imagine every morning they are going out and getting their manna and suddenly the landscape is filled with poisonous vipers? These snakes came into the tents and started biting people and the people started dying. You say, “Wait a minute! That does not square with my concept of God!” That’s part of the problem. You have conceived some idea of God in your mind when if you want to know what God is like, you let the Bible produce in you your concept of God. Don’t try to take some sentimental idea about God and impose it upon the scriptures and say, “I just can’t believe that about God.” Listen to what the Bible says about God. God is a God who loved these people, who led these people, who delivered these people, who provided a promised land for these people, but the Bible also teaches that our Father sometimes has to discipline his children. Maybe you have never thought about it this way, but did you know all

these people were doing anyway was waiting to die? God was just saying, "Well if that's all you're living for, I'll just help you along a little bit. Do you know what this was? This was a picture of Romans 6:23. "The wages of sin is death." This a very graphic picture and a very strong picture that tells us He hates sin!

What you have to understand though, is God also understands that sometimes when he sends affliction into our lives, it is that affliction that causes us to turn to God. Did you notice the response of the people there? Look at verse 21:7. When these snakes were going through biting the people, they said, "We sinned, we spoke against the Lord and against you. Moses, pray for us." It is a truth of the word of God that most of us are so hardheaded, sometimes God has to send affliction into our lives to get our attention. If you wonder if that is biblical, turn to Psalm 119. I want you look at one verse. Psalm 119 is a long chapter. It is an acrostic chapter, meaning that each section in Psalm 119 begins with the letters of the Hebrew alphabet—it was intentional. Look at 67. The psalmist says, "Before I was afflicted, I went astray, but now" meaning after having suffered affliction "I'll obey your word." Is it true in your life? I know it has been true in my life sometimes. Sometimes it is those periods of affliction, discouragement, disappointment the tough times the times when there are snakes released in my existence that I am driven to my knees; I am driven to fall on my face before God and seek his face. That's one of the reasons God sent these snakes and it worked! Many of them said, "We have sinned! We admit our sin!" You cannot sin and escape the chastisement of God.

III. THE SAVING REMEDY

1. It was symbolic

Let's go back to Numbers 21. I want you to see, number three, the saving remedy. I love what it says in verse 7. "Moses prayed for the people." That's a beautiful picture in the Old Testament of intercessory prayer. Moses went to God and said, "God, these are a wicked, rebellious, sinful people but, Lord, deliver them! Save them, somehow!" That's what we ought to be doing. We ought to be praying for people just like Moses prayed for these people. In verse 8, God gave them a strange remedy. "The Lord said to Moses, 'Make a snake and put it up on a pole; anyone who is bitten can look at it and live.'" There are two things about this remedy I want you to notice. First of all it was symbolic of something very, very important. We don't understand the point of the symbolism until we get to the New Testament. I told you this is a story about Jesus. Turn to John 3:14, just two verses before John 3:16. Jesus said this "Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the desert so the Son of Man must be lifted up." Later, Jesus said, "If I be lifted up from the earth, I will draw all people to myself."

Why a snake and not a lamb? If I had been doing it, I would have used a lamb, wouldn't you? Because Jesus is also the Lamb of God. Why not a beautiful piece of fruit or something? Why not something beautiful lifted up? Why did he make a bronze snake and put it on a pole and lift it up? Well when you think about it for a while, I think you can come up with the answer. From the very moment Satan slithered his slimy existence before Eve, there has been something sinister and sinful and scary about snakes! Did you know a snake is the symbol of sin? The reason God told Moses to put a snake on a pole is because we know that this pole being lifted up is a symbol of the Cross of the Lord Jesus Christ when he was lifted up on a cross. Sometimes we

want to look at Jesus on the cross and we won't to adore him as the Lamb of God who is dying and he was the Lamb of God. We worship him because he's our Savior; He's our Lord but sometimes we forget what transacted on the cross when the Lamb of God bore our SIN! He took my sin upon him; He took your sin upon him. The Bible says he bore in his body our sins on the tree. So, the reason I think Moses made a snake according to God's direction is because God wanted us to see what Jesus bore for us. The prophet, Isaiah said, "Surely he hath borne our sorrow. Surely he hath carried our grief." He took our afflictions upon him. God has laid upon him the afflictions of us all. 2 Corinthians says that he who knew no sin became sin. He not only just bore our sins, he became sin. So, that's why it was a snake. It was symbolic of Jesus carrying our sins.

2. It was sufficient

The second thing we can say about this remedy is that it was sufficient. In other words, it was all they needed. Did you notice the Lord said in verse 8, "Make a snake, put it on a pole" and the next word is "*anyone* who is bitten" whether they are young, whether they are old, whether they are good, whether they are bad—anyone who has a problem all you have to do is do what I say! Look at that snake and you can live! We have to continue to preach the message that the gospel is for *everyone*! The good news is for anyone who will come to Jesus Christ. Do you really believe with all your heart that there is not a sinner in Smith County too bad for God to save? There is nobody too bad for God to save! Anybody who comes to Jesus Christ by faith, ANYONE can be saved!

IV. THE SIMPLE REQUIREMENT

1. It was easy

There is one final thing I want you to see: The simple requirement. What did God say to do with that snake on a pole? He said, "Lift it up. Then just tell the people to look and live!" First, this requirement was so easy. He didn't say, "Bow down before the snake!" He didn't say, "Bring an offering to the snake!" "Bring a sacrifice to the snake!" All God said was "Look at the snake!" I am sure Moses lifted that snake on a pole tall enough that wherever you were in the Israelite camp, you could look over and see that snake on a pole and all they had to do was look and live! You say, "What's the point you are trying to make there, pastor?" The point I'm trying to make is that the requirement to become a Christian is easier than most people think. The beginning first step into the Christian life is as simple as looking unto Jesus and you can live trusting in Jesus Christ putting your faith in Jesus Christ. Do you know why I know it's easy to become a Christian? Because I became a Christian when I was 9 years old and I couldn't do anything difficult when I was nine. When I was 9 years old, I looked to Jesus. I believed in Jesus and ever since that day I have been living spiritually. Did you know it was so easy to become a Christian? Because it's not something you do or I do. It is something God does by his grace. Salvation is by grace, not by works.

Somebody sent me a story over the e-mail the other day. A man had a dream and he and the Lord were watching a baseball game. The Lord's team was playing against the devil's team and the Lord's team was at bat. The score was tied zero to zero and it was the bottom of the ninth inning

with two outs. Love came up to bat and Love swung at the first pitch and hit a single because "love never fails!" The next batter up was Faith. Faith also got a single because "faith works well with love!" The next batter was Hope. Satan wound up and threw the first pitch, but Hope doesn't swing at Satan's pitches. Ball one! Three more pitches and Hope was on with a walk the bases are loaded! The Lord turned and said he was going to bring up his star player! Up to the plate stepped Grace. No one recognized him and he sure didn't look like he could do much! Satan's team relaxed as he wound up and he fired his first pitch thinking he had this game won! To everyone's surprise Grace hit the ball harder than anyone had ever seen it hit before! But Satan wasn't worried because his center fielder, "The Prince of the Air" had never let any ball get by him! He leaped up to catch the ball but it went right through his glove hitting him in the head and knocking him to the ground and the Lord's team won! Then, the Lord asked the man if he knew what had happened. Why Love, Faith and Hope could only get on base but they could not win the game! The Lord explained "If your love, faith and hope had won the game, you would think that you had done it by yourself, because you can love you have faith you have hope. The truth is love, faith and hope will only get you on base. Only my grace can bring you home!"

2. It was essential

It is so easy to become a Christian, because it's not something we do! It's something we receive. It's as easy as looking at something and believing in it. The second thing you have to understand is it was absolutely essential—it was not optional. If you had been bitten, you had to look at that snake and you had to receive God's only way of healing! If anybody had said, "Well, I'm just not going to do that, they died!"

CONCLUSION

I want to finish by doing something a little unusual. Push the rewind button in your mind and go back 2,000 years 3,000 years 4,000 years. I want us to go back and I want us to walk in that camp when those poisonous snakes are slithering everywhere biting people. I want you to think about what it must have been like in the camp of the Israelites. I want you to think about it in terms of people that we encounter every day in Tyler, Texas. For instance here's a man who has just been bitten by a snake and you walk up to that person and you say, "Hey. I see you have been bitten. Don't you know that there is a cure? Moses has put a snake on a pole and if you will look at that snake, you can be healed!" The man says, "Well, yeah! I'm bitten. but you know what? I'm not bitten any worse than anybody else around me. In fact you have folks down there at your church who are bitten worse than I am. I don't believe any of that snake business!" Did you know there are a lot of people who will never come to Jesus Christ because they say, "I'm no worse than anybody else!" Then, you come up to somebody else and this guy still has a snake attached to his arm. You say, "I see you have been bitten. You have a problem there!" He says, "Yeah. I have a problem. I admit it but you know what? I'm just going to shake this thing off myself. I've been able to handle every other problem in my life and I think I can handle this one too." There are a lot of people today who, when they experience sin in their lives and they realize they are a sinner, they say, "Well, I'm just going to do better! I'm going to improve myself!" That guy would die! Here's another fellow who is sitting outside his tent with his leg all swollen from a snake bite and you say, "Hey, I see you have been bitten. Don't you know there is a cure?"

Moses put a snake on a pole and if you will look at that pole, you will be healed." The guy says, "Yeah. I've heard about that. I'm pretty interested in that, but I just have to tell you, I'm waiting on a healing feeling! I'm going to wait until I feel like I just ought to do it but you know when I feel that feeling when I get that healing feeling, I'm going to look!" It's so sad that there are people who know they are lost and need Jesus, but they say, "I'm just going to wait until I have the right feeling!"

Evangelist Sam Jones said, "Waiting for a feeling to be saved is like a man standing beside a pile of firewood that is not split and he's just standing there waiting. Somebody says, 'Hey, what are you waiting on?' He says, 'Well, I'm waiting to start sweating before I start chopping!'" Sam Jones said, "Oh, no! You start chopping and then you'll start sweating!" That's like a person who says, "I'm waiting on a feeling before I get saved!" Oh, no. You trust Jesus Christ and I guarantee you will have a feeling but it comes later. Don't wait on a healing feeling!

Here's another fellow. He has been bitten by a snake and it is so bad that he is in his tent on a mat. He's reclining because he doesn't even have the strength to get up. His dear wife has just heard there is a cure. She rushes in to the tent and she says, "Sweetheart! Sweetheart! I know you have been bitten, but, sweetheart, I have good news for you! There is a cure! There is a way you can be healed! Moses put a snake on a pole and God said, 'All you have to do is look at it!' Honey, let me pull you over here to the opening in the tent. I want you to just look at that snake. If you will just look at that snake and believe God, you will be healed!" That man says to his wife "Are you talking about the snake on the pole theory? That old myth? Would you explain to me rationally how looking at a bronze snake on a high pole could improve my condition?" "I can't explain it but just look and live!" The man says, "I'll have none of that superstitious mess!" 1 Corinthians 1:10 says, "For the preaching of the cross is foolishness to them that perish."

A lost person says, "What are you talking about? Just believe in Jesus look to the cross be saved? Explain to me how the blood of a man who died 2,000 years ago can forgive my sins." You can't explain it but it's true! Here's a mother and she is piling up the stones burying her husband who has died from snakebite. She hears a cry and she looks and there's her little 11-year-old boy, Joseph, he has just been bitten by a snake! She says, "Oh, Joseph! Joseph! Not you too." Already his temples are beginning to pulse and his leg is beginning to swell. She takes him up in her arms and she rushes him to her tent and lays him down and gently takes a wet, moist cloth and wipes his forehead. "Oh, no, Joseph! Not you!" Then somebody comes to the door of the tent and they say, "Listen! There's a cure! There's a cure! Moses put a snake on a pole and if you just look at it and believe God, you'll be healed!" The woman says, "How can you say that?" The person at the door of the tent says, "Because I was bitten and I looked and I am healed!" You see every one of us ought to be proof of the evidence of changed lives. So, the mother picks up her little boy and carries him over to the door of the tent and says, "There it is, honey. Look just look!" and the little boy looks at the snake in the distance and when he looks I can't explain it to you but it happened! But he looked and believed God and immediately the swelling goes down! The color goes back into his skin and before long he is running around happy, healed and delivered. That's exactly what happened to us! Whatever age you came to know Jesus Christ, all you had to do was look at the cross of the Lord Jesus and believe God. Immediately from the inside God brought about a spiritual healing.

OUTLINE

I. THE SINFUL REBELLION

The children of Israel sinned against God when they:

1. Denied God’s power
2. Defied God’s prophet

II. THE SWIFT REWARD

III. THE SAVING REMEDY

1. It was symbolic
2. It was sufficient

IV. THE SIMPLE REQUIREMENT

It was:

1. Easy
2. Essential