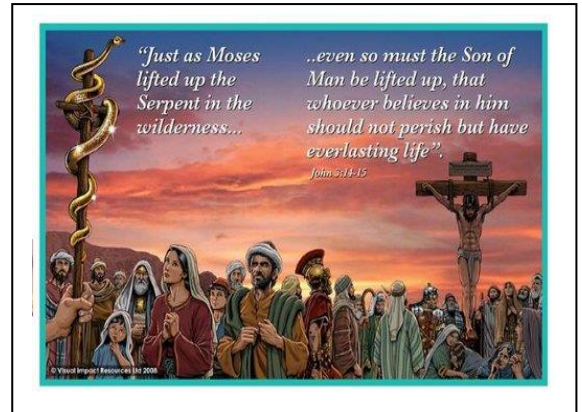


SUNDAY 4th February 2024

The Judgement of Sin and the Cross of Christ.

Scripture: Numbers 21:4-9 and John 3:13-15



God brought judgement on the people of Israel – these were the 2nd generation of those who escaped from Egypt. The 1st generation had died out. It seems that they had not learned from their ancestors, because they were doing the exact same thing. Moaning and groaning which led to God’s judgement.

Judgement is necessary because we all can harden our hearts. God’s judgement is to open our hearts, to crack the shell of our self-sufficiency so that we can experience His grace, love, and compassion. The kindness and judgement of God leads us to repentance. Both are the means to the same end – to bring us to God, the source of our forgiveness, our healing, our wholeness.

We all remember the Covid pandemic – we experienced loss of freedom, fear, sickness and so many deaths – it continues to infect. But Covid is not what we should be worrying about in today’s world – we are all infected with a deadly disease that will ultimately take our lives. This disease is called sin. This pandemic will not only claim our physical lives but will also doom us in eternity if we don’t receive the cure. This sermon will inform all of us what that cure is.

Let's go back to what was happening to this 2nd generation of Israelites who were complaining. What were they whingeing about – their spirits were not faithful to God; they refused to obey God's laws and they forgot the miracles God had done for them.

Our complaining often has its roots in one of these thoughtless actions and attitudes. If we can deal with the cause of our complaining, it will not take hold and grow in our lives.

Because the people disobeyed and lashed out at both Moses and Almighty God, God sent a plague of snakes to punish them for their rebellious attitudes. Those doomed to die from snakebite could have been healed by obeying God's commands.

The people finally 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 and received this reply from God: "Make a fiery serpent and set it on a pole, and everyone who is bitten, when they look up at the serpent on the pole, they shall be healed."

Does God's punishment in this passage seem unfair and drastic? Adam and Eve took fruit that God forbade them to eat. By doing so, the whole world fell into sin. Might God have overreacted? Sin is not just doing something bad but disobeying and disbelieving our Creator–God. Sin isn't just about what we do, but Whom we do it against.

Notice a few things: (1) The serpent on the pole was not to prevent people being bitten – it was for the bitten people.

(2) The poison is within the people – not from the environment or conditions and without divine intervention they will die.

(3) The snakes did not just crawl into the camp on their own – the Lord sent them. The wrath of God is on the people for their sin of ingratitude and murmuring and rebellion.

(4) The means God chooses to rescue the people from His own curse is a picture of the curse itself – the snake.

(5) All they must do to be saved from God's wrath is look up at the elevated bronze snake and by believing that God would heal them if they did.

In John's Gospel, Jesus said that He must be lifted up, just like the serpent in the wilderness, so that whoever believes in Him will have eternal life. The cross was a moment of both judgement and mercy – redemption for those who accept its offer and judgement upon those who do not.

If we believe in the death of Christ as He was lifted up on the cross for our sin, we will be spiritually healed from the disease of death. Jesus literally became the curse for us.

The Israelites looked up and saw a serpent on a stick, but it was really the power of God behind it that saved them. Those who stood around the cross of Jesus, looked up and saw the infirmity of a man crucified – in truth, it was the power of God. Just as it took eyes of faith to look at a bronze serpent and hope for healing, so we must look beyond the visible crucifixion to see the reality of redemption.

Five Observations

1. Jesus Is the Son of Man who was lifted up on the cross the way the snake was lifted up. He identifies himself as the Son of Man when He healed a man. He asked the man; do you believe in the Son of Man?'. The man replies – who is He sir that I may believe in Him. Jesus said to him, 'You have seen Him, and it is He who is speaking to you.' When Jesus speaks of the Son of Man being lifted up, He is talking about Himself, and His own crucifixion.

2. Jesus Is the Source of Rescue and source of healing in the place of the snake. Saving us from the poison of sin, and the wrath of God. Jesus is the source of eternal life. Moses lifted up the snake, but Moses is not the rescuer in the way Jesus sets up the comparison. Who lifts up the Son of Man on the cross? "The Son of Man must be lifted up" — by whom?

There is only one place where the lifters are identified in John's Gospel – 8:28 – they are the Pharisees. Jesus said to them, 'When you have lifted up the Son of Man, then you, the Pharisees will know that I Am He.' In Numbers, the one who saves is God by means of the snake. And in John, the one who saves is God by means of Jesus.

3. Jesus Is Portrayed as a Curse in the place of the snake, portrayed as evil and a curse. This is what is so shocking. The snake is evil. The snakes were killing people. The snake on the pole is a picture of God's curse on the people. So it was with Jesus. Paul said in 2 Corinthians 5:2 "For our sake God made Him

to be sin who knew no sin, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God.”

And in Galatians 3:13 he said, “Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us.” In becoming like the snake, He was the embodiment of our sin, and the embodiment of our curse. And in becoming sin and curse for us, He took ours away.

4. Jesus Gives Eternal Life when He is lifted up and we believe in Him. When our sin and God’s wrath are taken away, God is for us totally. And if God is for us, we will never die, but live forever with Him in joy. The only way to deal with guilt, get rid of shame and be forgiven of all wrongdoing is through Jesus – we simply look to Jesus, who died for all of our sin, rose from death and now reigns as King.

5. Jesus Crucified Is the One We See Is this statement true for you? This is what you say to a person who has not chosen to follow Jesus to be born again, anew. Why? They are dead and blind. Because God ordains to open the eyes of the blind when they have something to see — namely a compelling picture of Jesus crucified for sinners. And what should you do – believe in Him. What does that mean? It means look to Him. The grace of the new birth is our seeing Christ lifted up. It has taken the greater death of Jesus Christ to overcome the death of sin. We all will continue to struggle with sin, but the power of the cross of Jesus is far greater than the power of sin itself.

Conclusion:

Moses was just one man but he was available to God and God used him. One person can make a difference; one person's prayers, one person's involvement and witness can make such a tremendous difference in bringing the lost to Christ.

As a church we must not get bogged down in programs, debates, conflicts while there are so many in our community who are desperately in need of Jesus.

We must lift Christ up now. He is the water of life that the thirsty souls of this earth need. The problem is no longer far away – it is right here at our doorstep.

Let us all make a new personal and church commitment to take the gospel to our community and to the world. Let's lift Him up.