

SERMON FOR MARCH 14, 2021

TEXT: NUMBERS 21: 4-9

THEME: THE FOOLISHNESS OF GOD

From Mount Hor they set out by the way to the Red Sea, to go around the land of Edom. And the people became impatient on the way. **5** And the people spoke against God and against Moses, "Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? For there is no food and no water, and we loathe this worthless food." **6** Then the Lord sent fiery serpents among the people, and they bit the people, so that many people of Israel died. **7** And the people 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. **8** And the Lord said to Moses, "Make a fiery serpent and set it on a pole, and everyone who is bitten, when he sees it, shall live." **9** So Moses made a bronze serpent and set it on a pole. And if a serpent bit anyone, he would look at the bronze serpent and live.

In the name of Jesus:

We are a people that seeks answers, we want remedies, especially for the things that ail us. Walk into any drug store, supermarket, or convenience store and you will find aisles of medications. There are over the counter medications, homeopathic medicines, and vitamins, not to mention the plethora of medications that the doctor might prescribe for us in the pharmacy. There is even a store in town that specializes in medicines called The Medicine Shop. We will go to great lengths to find a remedy to what ails us.

Not too long ago, though, people relied on home remedies. Perhaps you have your own home remedy, one that was passed down to you by your parents or your grandparents. Home remedies that people rely on and testify to their ability to make one well. It is difficult to trace the science behind any home remedy, but you will use it because it is practical, inexpensive, but most importantly, you trust that it will work. It doesn't matter if the home remedy seems foolish, you will rely on it solely because you know it works.

Imagine, though, for a moment that there is a remedy for what really ails us, a remedy for our sins, and a remedy for death. Something that you can apply that will remove your sins and give you the certainty that you can live forever. Who wouldn't want to sign up for that?

There is such a remedy. But it is simply folly and plain foolishness to many. God offers such a remedy, we see it in both our Old and New Testament lessons for today. In fact, the Old Testament gives us a picture, an example of what God offers to all in His Son Jesus Christ. It is foolishness to many, but the Bible says it is THE FOOLISHNESS OF GOD.

In our Old Testament lesson, Moses describes a time when the people of God, in the wilderness, bitterly complained before God. They were miserable. This, in spite of the facts, that God had released them from captivity in Egypt, this, in spite of the fact that God provided for their needs by giving them food

and water, this, in spite of the fact that God was with them, God's people were not satisfied and bitterly complained to God about their situation. They were not thankful to the Lord for what He had done for them and for what He continued to provide for them while they were in the wilderness.

We see in our text that: **5** And the people spoke against God and against Moses, "Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? For there is no food and no water, and we loathe this worthless food." **6** Then the Lord sent fiery serpents among the people, and they bit the people, so that many people of Israel died."

The people got the message. They cried out 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." The Lord gave to Moses a remedy, and then told him: "Make a fiery serpent and set it on a pole, and everyone who is bitten, when he sees it, shall live."

And that is what Moses did. He made a bronze serpent and set it on a pole. And if a serpent bit anyone, that person would look at the bronze serpent and live. Pretty easy and straightforward don't you think? All one has to do is look to the serpent and live. If you did that, you were healed. But if you were full of pride, arrogant, and thought, "I am not going to believe in this

foolishness,” well, then, you wouldn’t receive the benefits. You would not receive the healing that you sought.

In the Gospel lesson for today, Jesus is speaking to Nicodemus. They are talking about how to live forever. This topic of eternal life is something that not only Nicodemus was interested in, it is something that many ask how they can live forever. Jesus gives the answer, to all who are willing to listen to Him. In John 3, Jesus explains to Nicodemus and to all who will listen: “And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, **15** that whoever believes in him may have eternal life. **16** “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. **17** For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. **18** Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God.”

This is the reason Jesus said that it was necessary for Him to be born, to go to Jerusalem to be betrayed and handed over to the authorities, to suffer, and to be crucified on the cross. Every human being has been bitten by the poison of sin, it affects all of us and we can’t escape it. There is no over the counter medication, no prescription, no homeopathic medicine, no vitamin,

and no home remedy that will take care of the sin that ails us and give to sinners the healing that we all need. So just as God told Moses to put a serpent up on a pole, and told the people to look at the serpent to be healed and live, so too now God says that in love for the world He sent His only begotten Son into the world to be crucified on Calvary's cross, so that all who believe in Jesus will receive the full and complete pardon and forgiveness of their sins and will gain eternal life. For Jesus came down from heaven not to be worshipped and adored, but to give His life as a payment for sin and a ransom for many.

That's silly, is the response of many today. Those who rely on their wisdom and the wisdom of the world say that this is plain foolishness. How can a man's death by crucifixion over 2000 years ago mean anything to anyone today? And so they will rely on their own home remedies, their own good works, their own righteousness, their own ability to deal with sin and they will seek to find ways to live forever. They will offer advice saying that Jesus' death is not enough, and so in order to live forever you need to do something, you need to be more sincere, you need to have a religious experience, you need to become more emotional in your faith.

But Jesus dismisses this type of thinking as real foolishness. Salvation doesn't work that way. For all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God,

there is no one righteous, no not one. The wages of sin IS death. But God's free gift to sinners is eternal life in Christ. For you have been saved by grace through faith in Jesus.

As Christians who happen to also be sinners, we are tempted to think that God might be favorably disposed toward us because of our thoughts, words, and actions. We might foolishly think that will get a break in life from suffering because we believe in Jesus. We might foolishly say: "God will be good to me because I went to church today," or "I give my offerings to the church, so God owes me one." God owes us nothing. He loves the sinner by sheer grace and mercy, without any merit or worthiness in any of us. Our Heavenly Father points us to the cross of His Son and says: "Look to the cross and live." Jesus invites us to follow Him daily, reminding His followers that whoever wishes to follow Him must daily deny oneself, take up the cross, and follow Him. Today God calls us to confess our foolishness in self reliance and self righteousness. Confess your sin, for Jesus is faithful and just and He forgives you all of your sin and cleanses you from all unrighteousness. So look to the cross of Christ, for there you have forgiveness of sins and eternal life. **"18** For (while) the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God." For the foolishness of God is

wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men. For our faith rests not the wisdom of men but in the power of God.”

To whom be all glory and honor, in Jesus’ name. Amen