

In the Name of the Father, and of the ✠ Son, and of the Holy Ghost.

The serpents' venom did its deadly work. In the wilderness, God graciously provided for the people. He gave them manna to eat. But man is fickle. The people became discouraged, discouraged of soul. Blinded by their flesh, the people cursed the very blessings that the Lord had given them. And in doing so, they cursed the one God placed among them to bring them His Word and gifts.

So the Lord sent fiery serpents among the people, and they bit the people; and many of the people of Israel died. Imagine their terror. They were helpless. Fatal venom coursed through their veins, and there was no cure. There are few fates darker than to curse the one sent by God, to curse the gifts of God, and then to die.

The desperation of their time in the wilderness, the discouragement they felt over their situation and condition, had led them to tire of the miraculous food God gave them. They forgot the miracle. They forgot His promises. Their belly was their god. They cursed the gifts of the True God.

And then, confronted with death, they realized their sin. So the people, the ones the Lord allowed to live, were in horror. They came to Moses and said "We have sinned, for we have spoken against the Lord and against you..." Imagine their heart-felt sorrow for their doubt, for their transgression, for their impetuosity, for their distractibility, for their lack of longsuffering, for their lack of faith. Death was rightly theirs.

Perhaps you have known that sorrow, that terror, that horror. Perhaps the Holy Law of God has shown you your transgressions. Perhaps personal suffering, jealousy, covetousness, lust, anger or being forced to remain in isolation in your house has led you to follow your fallen flesh rather than the Commandments of God. Perhaps you are haunted by your sins, and by the thoughts of those you have hurt.

Do as Israel did. Repent. Kneel before God and confess your sins. Confess that you have spoken against God, that you have done the very things He forbids, that you have thought fallen, sinful thoughts that break all of His Commandments. Confess with Israel in the desert, seeing the due penalty for sin before you: death.

Confessing their sinfulness, Israel did not die. Repenting, God removed the fatal serpents from their midst. But God did not tell Moses to wave his hand and the serpents and their poison would be gone. God works through concrete, tangible, visible elements to bring salvation and life to His people. At God's command, Moses made a fiery serpent, the very image of the source of the deadly venom, and set it on a pole. And it was that everyone who was bitten, when they looked at it, they lived.

It wasn't only in looking at the serpent on the pole that Israel was saved. It was looking at the serpent on the pole according to God's command. It was in looking at the serpent on the pole and believing the promise, the Word of God, which said "...it shall be that everyone who is bitten,

when he looks at it, he shall live.” Israel had the command of God, God’s promise, and a visible element. Looking, believing, they were spared. They lived.

You too have been bitten by a serpent. You have been bitten by the serpent who deceived your first father. That venom courses through you because you have inherited Adam’s flesh. And that inherited sinfulness is multiplied by the sins that you have daily committed. You find yourself standing alongside of Israel in the wilderness, already poisoned by sin, knowing that death comes.

That you be saved, that you be spared, that you be healed, that you live, God raised up an Image on a pole for you. As those bitten by serpents beheld an image of a serpent on a pole, so do you look upon the image of the sin that is killing you raised up on a pole. You look at One covered in your sins. You look at the greatest sinner of all time raised up on a pole. As Israel was cured in the desert, therein lies your cure too – to look upon the Image, the Image of God, God the Son that bears your sin, raised up on a pole.

The sin is not His. He was born miraculously, without sin. He is Divine. He is God, the Second Person of the Holy Trinity. He is the very Image of the invisible God, God Incarnate. He came to His own, but His own received Him not. Consider the blasphemy of the Jews. They called Him a Samaritan, the worshipper of a false God. They called Him demon possessed. They called Him a liar and a fake. And in the depth of His State of Humiliation, He endured their blasphemy.

He spoke only the Truth. He answered “I do not have a demon...” Still they wanted to kill Him. They picked up stones against Him. But stoning was too merciful a death for Him. All the things they accused Him of – idolatry, lying, falsehood, sin – all these the Holy and Sinless Son of God became, taking on your sins, taking on the sins of the world. And their cries of “Crucify!” were answered as the very image of sin, Christ covered with the sins of the world, was hung on a pole, and displayed for all to see.

In Him, in the Crucified One, there is hope for you. In Him there is forgiveness for you. In Him there is healing and life for you. For as the Apostle writes “Christ came as High Priest of the good things to come, with the greater and more perfect tabernacle not made with hands, that is, not of this creation. Not with the blood of goats and calves, but with His own Blood He entered the Most Holy Place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption.”

God has provided for you, dear Christian, you who endure the wilderness of this fallen world and its difficulties and dangers. Christ was raised up on the cross that whoever believes in Him has eternal life. It is there for you – God’s command, God’s promise, and God made Visible, God Incarnate, God who was seen and heard and handled and touched. Looking to Christ on the cross, believing that He died for you, you are healed. In Him all your sins are forgiven. He gave His life that your life be spared. He bore your sin so that all that remains for you is holiness.

“For this reason He is the Mediator of the New Testament, by means of death, for the redemption of the transgressions under the First Testament, that those who are called may receive the promise of the eternal inheritance.” That is God’s Word. That is God’s Promise. That is God’s

Promise to you. Believing, you receive the benefits of His cross and empty tomb. Believing, it is you who receive the eternal inheritance He promises – eternal life with God in heaven.

So you who rejoice to see His day will see it. You will see the risen and ascended Christ return in glory. But for a time, the paraments are violet. For a time, His glory is veiled. So now, in this time, in this wilderness, He gives you saving Gifts. He gives you bread better than the manna, He gives you the Bread of Life. He gives you Himself.

He gives you faith, faith that looks to Christ. And He gives you the Blood He shed that you believe and drink, and be healed. He gives you the Body crucified, the Body risen, the Body ascended, the Body of Christ, to be your miraculous Food in this wilderness.

And so it is, that if anyone has sinned, when you look to Christ crucified, you live.

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