

Surely this Man is the Son of God (Numbers 21:4-9 and Mark 15:21-47)

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Numbers 21:4-9

The Bronze Snake

⁴They travelled from Mount Hor along the route to the Red Sea, to go around Edom. But the people grew impatient on the way; ⁵they spoke against God and against Moses, and said, “Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? There is no bread! There is no water! And we detest this miserable food!”

⁶Then the Lord sent venomous snakes among them; they bit the people and many Israelites died. ⁷The 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.

⁸The Lord said to Moses, “Make a snake and put it up on a pole; anyone who is bitten can look at it and live.” ⁹So 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, they lived.

Mark 15:21-47

The Crucifixion of Jesus

²¹A certain man from Cyrene, Simon, the father of Alexander and Rufus, was passing by on his way in from the country, and they forced him to carry the cross. ²²They brought Jesus to the place called Golgotha (which means “the place of the skull”). ²³Then they offered him wine mixed with myrrh, but he did not take it. ²⁴And they crucified him. Dividing up his clothes, they cast lots to see what each would get.

²⁵It was nine in the morning when they crucified him. ²⁶The written notice of the charge against him read: the king of the jews.

²⁷They crucified two rebels with him, one on his right and one on his left. ^[28] ²⁹Those who passed by hurled insults at him, shaking their heads and saying, “So! You who are going to destroy the temple and build it in three days, ³⁰come down from the cross and save yourself!” ³¹In the same way the chief priests and the teachers of the law mocked him among themselves. “He saved others,” they said, “but he can’t save himself!” ³²Let this Messiah, this king

of Israel, come down now from the cross, that we may see and believe.” Those crucified with him also heaped insults on him.

The Death of Jesus

³³ At noon, darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon. ³⁴ And at three in the afternoon Jesus cried out in a loud voice, “*Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani?*” (which means “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”).

³⁵ When some of those standing near heard this, they said, “Listen, he’s calling Elijah.”

³⁶ Someone ran, filled a sponge with wine vinegar, put it on a staff, and offered it to Jesus to drink. “Now leave him alone. Let’s see if Elijah comes to take him down,” he said.

³⁷ With a loud cry, Jesus breathed his last.

³⁸ The curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom. ³⁹ And when the centurion, who stood there in front of Jesus, saw how he died, he said, “Surely this man was the Son of God!”

⁴⁰ Some women were watching from a distance. Among them were Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James the younger and of Joseph, and Salome. ⁴¹ In Galilee these women had followed him and cared for his needs. Many other women who had come up with him to Jerusalem were also there.

The Burial of Jesus

⁴² It was Preparation Day (that is, the day before the Sabbath). So as evening approached, ⁴³ Joseph of Arimathea, a prominent member of the Council, who was himself waiting for the kingdom of God, went boldly to Pilate and asked for Jesus’ body. ⁴⁴ Pilate was surprised to hear that he was already dead.

Summoning the centurion, he asked him if Jesus had already died. ⁴⁵ When he learned from the centurion that it was so, he gave the body to Joseph. ⁴⁶ So Joseph bought some linen cloth, took down the body, wrapped it in the linen, and placed it in a tomb cut out of rock. Then he rolled a stone against the entrance of the tomb. ⁴⁷ Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of Joseph saw where he was laid.

There are **Bibles** in front of you

And a sermon **outline**

Please have your **Bibles opened** up firstly at **Numbers 21** starting at verse 4.

Let me pray first...

Intro – Why Good Friday?

Why **Good Friday**?

[Slide-Why?]

Because of a very small three-letter word beginning with **S**.

SIN.

Sin is when we disobey God — when we live our way instead of God's way, when we break God's rules for living.

But why is sin such a big problem?

Because the Bible tells us that **God is perfectly holy**.

[Slide-Habakkuk 1:13]

In Habakkuk 1:13 we read that *God's eyes are too pure to look at evil; He cannot tolerate wrongdoing.*

That means sin is not a small thing to God.

Sin separates us from God, because God is holy and pure.

Sin came into the world right at the beginning of the Bible in the Garden of Eden, when Adam and Eve were tempted by Satan, who came disguised as a serpent/snake. Adam and Eve disobeyed God - ate the fruit from the tree of the

knowledge of good and evil – they lost their innocence - and their relationship with God was broken.

And ever since then, sin has been the big problem of the world!

What we also need to understand is:

God must judge sin. Sin must be judged!

Which brings us to our Old Testament reading from Numbers 21:4-9

[Slide-Sin must be Judged]

Sin Must Be Judged (Numbers 21:4–9)

The **context** is – it’s roughly 1400 BC

God’s people - the Israelites – having been rescued by God from slavery in Egypt - are in the wilderness on their way to the Promised Land

Not only has God rescued them but He has been providing them with bread from Heaven called **manna** and **quail meat**.

But look at v5 – *they spoke against God!*

They grizzled “*Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? There’s no bread! There’s no water! And we detest this miserable food!*”

That’s gratitude for you!

(pause)

So God sent venomous snakes to bite the people and many died! (v6) This was **God’s judgement** on the Israelites sin and rebellion against Him!

And the people woke up to themselves and confessed to Moses – v7 – “*we sinned when we spoke against the Lord and against you. Pray the Lord will take the snakes away!*” And Moses prayed!

Mercifully, God answered Moses’ prayer and told Moses to make a bronze snake and put it on a pole – and anyone who looked at the bronze snake on the pole would live!

It might seem strange to put a snake on a pole – why not a lamb or a bird – they were animals normally used in sacrifices for sin.

But God wanted the thing that was killing them because of their sin - to be lifted up before them! They needed to see God’s judgment on their sin was the snakes!

Why **bronze**? Bronze in the **OT was a symbol of God’s judgment** – a **bronze altar** and **bronze basin** were used for sin sacrifices!

So the bronze snake represents – sin that has been judged by God!

Application

But we’re not like the Israelites – are we?

We have food, a home, family, friends

We live in a relatively safe country

We have freedom to read our Bibles

Yet we complain about God

God has answered our prayers and helped us many times before?

But like the Israelites we forget what God has done for us!

We might not speak against God but we often think things like

“Why has God allowed this?”

“God’s not fair” or “God doesn’t care!” or “God is not doing what I want!”

Just like the Israelites took for granted the manna and quail that kept them alive – we start to take for granted what God has blessed us with – daily food and shelter – our family – our church family – His Word – His Son!

The Israelites wanted Moses to pray to take the snakes away. We can be the same – we want God to remove the consequences of our bad choices – or we want God to remove our problems without properly spending time with Him!

In short – we are just like the Israelites – and that’s why we need Good Friday – we need to look up to **SOMEONE** on a Cross - rather than look up to a bronze snake on a pole.

Jesus – talks about this in **John 3:14-15** and He refers to Moses’ bronze snake – Jesus says

¹⁴ Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the wilderness, so the Son of Man [that’s Jesus Himself] must be lifted up, ¹⁵ that everyone who believes may have eternal life in him.”

And that brings us to our NT passage from Mark 15...[\[Please turn there now\]](#)

1st then the **Jesus Lifted Up** – verses 21-32

[Slide-lifted up]

Jesus Lifted Up (Mark 15:21-32)

We pick up the story in v21 – where Jesus is being taken to be crucified. Simon of Cyrene (North Africa) - visiting Jerusalem for the Passover festival has no choice but to carry Jesus' cross. It was Roman practice to force someone else to carry the cross if the condemned was too weak, or injured or too slow.

One would have expected Jesus' disciple Simon Peter to be there to carry the cross for Jesus – but no - it was another Simon instead!

Simon was the father of Alexander and Rufus. Rufus is mentioned by the Apostle Paul in Romans 16:13 as a faithful Christian. One can only imagine the impact that Simon carrying Jesus' cross had on Simon's family's faith!

Luke's Gospel tells us Simon carried the cross and followed behind Jesus.

This should remind us that Jesus taught that to be His disciple we had to **deny ourselves, take up our cross and follow Him** (Matthew 16:24)

Following Jesus involves **real sacrifice** – suffering, rejection, loss and humiliation!

It also reminds us as Christians **to carry one another's burdens!**

V23 – As Jesus was lifted up on the cross – He was offered wine mixed with myrrh – which was a pain killer – but Jesus did not take it – He insisted on suffering completely – because He came to bear all our suffering and to take all our punishment completely – and not to have it eased in any way (Isaiah 53:4-6)

V24 – When He was crucified – the soldiers divided up His clothes and cast lots for them – this fulfilled Psalm 22:18 which says “*They divide my clothes among them and cast lots for my garment*”. Taking Jesus’ clothes, stripped Jesus of His dignity and was a sign of the soldiers’ dominance over Jesus!

V27 – **Innocent Jesus** was crucified next to two rebels, one on His left and one on His right. Luke tells us that one of the rebels mocked Jesus and the other believed in Jesus and Jesus promised him, he would join Jesus in Paradise! (Luke 23:39-43). There is a neat link to the story of Joseph in OT here. Where **Innocent Jospheh** – in Genesis 40 - is in prison next to two prisoners – **Pharaoh’s cupbearer** – whose dream Joseph interprets and who is later restored to his position. And **Pharaoh’s chief baker** – whose dream Joseph interprets and who is executed.

Isn’t it awesome how **the OT is a constant sign-post to Jesus!**

Whilst Jesus was lifted up on the cross

Vv29-32 – People passing by **hurled insults at Jesus**, mocking His earlier words about *rebuilding the temple in three days* and daring Him to **come down from the cross and save Himself**. Ironically the temple Jesus was talking about was the temple of His body!

The **chief priests and teachers of the law** also joined in, saying, “*He saved others, but He cannot save Himself! Let the Messiah, the King of Israel, come down now from the cross, that we may see and believe.*”

Of course, Jesus **could have come down and saved Himself – at any point** - but that was **not God's plan**. He was lifted up to **bear the sin of the world**. If He had saved Himself, we would **still be in our sins**, we would not be **forgiven**, and we would be **separated from God** forever – and end up in Hell!

Thank you Jesus for being lifted up for us!

Application

What can we learn from **Jesus being lifted up?**

- 1st - Just as the Israelites had to **look to the bronze serpent to be saved**, **we must look to Jesus' sacrifice on the cross to be saved. Salvation is received by looking to Jesus in faith, not by our own works or efforts.**
- 2nd - The Israelites were punished for **complaining and rebelling against God**; we must recognize that **sin has real consequences**
- 3rd - The Israelites were in immediate danger from the snakes. We too are in spiritual danger - the snake represents Satan who prowls around looking for someone to devour. **We need to be alert to Satan's schemes and keep ourselves close to Jesus – He is the only way to live eternally!**

2nd then **Jesus is Judged for Sin – verses 33-41**

[Slide-Judged]

Jesus is Judged for Sin (Mark 15:33–41)

Continuing from v33

The whole land was completely dark from noon to 3pm.

And v34 – Jesus cries out from the Cross – words from Psalm 22:1 – “*Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani?*” (which means “*My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?*”)

This is a terribly dark moment – and it’s like creation itself is grieving the death of God’s Son!

At that moment:

- Jesus bears the sin of the world – we can only imagine what that felt like for Him
- **Jesus experiences God’s wrath and judgment on sin**
- Jesus experiences for the first time – separation from God the Father – The Father has turned His back on His Son!
- And Jesus takes our punishment for our sin!

The Apostle Paul puts it this way in **2 Corinthians 5:21**

God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

There was another supernatural event at this moment too. In verse 38, the curtain of the temple — the curtain that separated the Holy of Holies, where God’s presence was, from the rest of the temple — was torn in two from top to bottom.

This curtain was a barrier like a “no entry” sign and showed that sinful people could not come into God’s presence. Only the High Priest could enter this Holy of Holies, once a year, with a sacrifice for sin. But when Jesus died, the curtain was torn from top to bottom — meaning God had torn it. Now - through Jesus’

death, the barrier between God and sinners was removed once and for all. No more sacrifices for sin were necessary – Jesus’ death on the cross was a once and for all sacrifice for sin! This meant the way into God’s presence was now open to us through Jesus.

Then in v39 – we have the remarkable testimony of a **Roman centurion**.

The centurion had likely seen many crucifixions, but he had never seen anyone die like Jesus. He saw how Jesus died — with dignity, with a loud cry, and not in despair but in control — and he saw the darkness for 3 hours and he realized Jesus was no ordinary man. **Even this hardened Roman soldier could see that Jesus was truly the Son of God.**

And then we have the **remarkable witness of the women** watching from a distance in vv40-41. They hadn’t run away like the men! These women were devoted to Jesus – they loved Him and had followed Him faithfully and cared for His needs. Jesus had shown how to love women properly – and not to treat women as second class citizens like the culture in Israel did at the time! The women’s presence also shows that the story of Jesus’ death was not invented later, because in that culture women were not considered reliable witnesses. If someone were making up the story, they would not choose women as the main witnesses. But the Gospel writers record it because that is what actually happened.

These women were not famous, powerful, or important in the world's eyes — but they **followed Jesus, served Him, and stayed with Him to the end**. They are examples of quiet, faithful discipleship.

Application

What can we learn from **Jesus being judged for sin**?

- 1st – the cross teaches us the seriousness of sin
 - Sin separates us from God
 - Sin must be judged and punished with death
 - Only perfect Jesus can make the perfect sacrifice for sin
- 2nd – the cross teaches us how much Jesus loves us
 - He was abandoned by the Father so we could be accepted by God
 - He was judged so we could be forgiven
 - He was shut out of God's presence – so we could be brought in
- 3rd – faithful discipleship looks like the women who were at the cross

Thank you Jesus for **being judged for our sin!**

3rd then **Jesus Truly Died** – verses 42-47

[Slide-Died]

Jesus Truly Died (Mark 15:42–47)

It is very important that Jesus truly died. Because if Jesus didn't really die, then His resurrection wasn't real — and the whole of Christianity falls to the ground. We need Jesus to have truly died and rose again to defeat death so that we can have the promise of eternal life.

Over the years there have been many theories trying to dismiss Jesus' death and resurrection — things like Jesus only fainted and didn't really die, or the women went to the wrong tomb, or Jesus somehow escaped before dying. But these verses make it very clear that Jesus really died.

In verse 43, **Joseph of Arimathea**, a member of the Jewish Council, took a great risk by going to **Pontius Pilate** and asking for Jesus' body for burial. This was a bold move, because Joseph could have faced trouble from the rest of the Jewish Council or suspicion from the Roman authorities for being associated with Jesus. In verse 44, even Pilate checks that Jesus is definitely dead before handing over the body, and the centurion confirms that Jesus had died.

Then in verse 46, Jesus' body is wrapped and placed in a tomb, and in verse 47 the women see exactly where He is buried. This is important because they know the location of the tomb and will return after the Sabbath to anoint Jesus' body. There is no possibility that they simply went to the wrong tomb.

Mark is making it absolutely clear: Jesus truly died, He was truly buried, and therefore His resurrection is real.

Application

What can we learn from **Jesus having truly died**?

- 1st – **Our faith is not based on myths or fables but on true historical events**
- 2nd – Jesus was not just an amazing teacher and miracle worker – **He actually came to this Earth to die!** Jesus' burial reminds us that Jesus' mission was the Cross to die for the sin of the world

- 3rd - In the hours of crisis it is often the Peters who have sworn loyalty to Jesus with big gestures and fullness of self-confidence, that disappoint, and **it is the secret and quiet followers of our Lord Jesus (like Joseph and the women) that do not hesitate to serve Him in love — no matter the cost.**

Thank you Jesus **for dying for us!**

Our Reflection

To finish up then...

On this Good Friday – 2000 years after the first Good Friday...

It's worth us reflecting on how Jesus' crucifixion affects us personally!

Jesus' death is not just a true historical event – **it has to be PERSONAL.**

I've thought about this a lot this week – and this is how it affects me – and I pray it can affect you in similar ways!

[Slide-Reflection]

• ***1st – Jesus – I am sorry that my sin was put on You and You suffered because of me!***

• ***2nd – Jesus – I am ever so grateful that You died for my sins to be forgiven – and made it possible for me to go to Heaven one day!***

• ***3rd – Jesus – I am humbled that You have given me a second chance!***

• ***4th – Jesus – I have immense love for You!***

- *5th – Jesus – I desire to follow You and I have such a strong desire with the help of the Holy Spirit to tell others what You have done for me – so that more people follow You – so God the Father gets all the glory!*

Our Response

We also need a **response** this morning!

[Slide- Response]

And we can get our **response** from **three characters** in our Bible passage this morning:

- 1st – like **Simon of Cyrene** – carry our cross and follow Jesus faithfully
- 2nd – like the **Centurion** – believe Jesus truly is the Son of God and confess who He is to everyone!
- 3rd – like **Joseph of Arimathea** – publicly stand with Jesus and publicly stand up for Jesus!

In summary – our response is – **Follow Jesus, Believe in Jesus and Stand up for Jesus!**

Let's pray...

Heavenly Father, thank you for the great love shown to us in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ. Thank you that through His suffering and death the way to you has been opened. Help us to trust Jesus more deeply, to live gratefully under His kingship, and to follow Him with courage and faith. In Jesus' name, Amen