



Lifted Up

The First Week of Lent

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.

Numbers 21:8-9 (NIV)

God does some pretty weird things. Even a quick perusal of the Bible will turn up some peculiar behaviors, and this passage in Numbers is a prime example. Venomous snakes are biting people. So God tells Moses to make a snake and put it on a pole for the people to look at. Huh? Now if God had told Moses to have people turn their eyes to something that clearly represented Him (like the Tabernacle or the Ark of the Covenant or the pillar of smoke or fire), that would have made sense. But a snake on a pole?

Perhaps God puts the incomprehensible before us as a reminder that He is far beyond our understanding. When He says, “For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways,” (Isaiah 55:8) we can say, “Amen to that!” when we think of the bronze snake.



And there's the thing. God often doesn't do what's understandable or expected. Instead, He does something we can't even begin to comprehend. From before the beginning of time, God had a plan that, of all things, involved Him saving us from ourselves through His own death. Then He sprinkled clues throughout history not just in the form of prophecies, but in metaphors and allusions. Allusions like a snake on a pole being lifted up to save people from the consequences of their rebellion, pointing to hundreds of years later, when the Son of God was lifted up on a cross to save people from the consequences of their rebellion. (John 3:14)

God's incomprehensible plans and acts serve to keep us focused on Him. Will He be faithful? Yes. Will He be predictable? Not even close. We can't assume that He will do things the same way today as He did yesterday. We can't assume that we've sussed out how His faithfulness will play out. We can only keep our spiritual eyes and ears open for today's cue, for this minute's direction. And we can be sure that direction will always point us toward Him.



What has God done in your life this week that you don't understand?

How might God's incomprehensible action be pointing you toward Him?

Exercise:

1. Lift this exercise up to the Lord, asking Him to highlight what He wants you to notice.
2. Read the Bible passage to the right and try to picture yourself in the situation. Notice how you react to what's happening around you. Do you join in with the people's complaints, or do you resist? How do you react to God's response of sending snakes? When Moses sets up the pole, do you look at the bronze snake, or do you look away?
3. Now sit quietly for a bit and allow God to speak to you. Are there "snakes" in your life now? What might God be saying through them?
4. Finally, spend a few minutes thanking God for how He works in your life and asking Him if there are other ways He wants you to experience Him.

Numbers 21:4-9

⁴They traveled 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 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.