

**Grace and peace to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.**

<sup>4</sup>They set out from Mount Hor along the road to the Red Sea to go around the land of Edom, but the people became very impatient along the way. <sup>5</sup>The people spoke against God and against Moses, “Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? Look, there is no food! There is no water! And we are disgusted by this worthless food!”

<sup>6</sup>The LORD sent venomous snakes among the people, and the snakes bit the people. As a result many people from Israel died. <sup>7</sup>The people went to Moses and said, “We have sinned, because we have spoken against the LORD and against you. Pray to the LORD to take the snakes away from us.” So Moses prayed on behalf of the people.

<sup>8</sup>The LORD said to Moses, “Make a venomous snake and put it on a pole. If anyone who is bitten looks at it, he will live.” <sup>9</sup>Moses made a bronze snake and put it on the pole. If a snake had bitten anyone, if that person looked at the bronze snake, he lived. **This is God’s Word.**

**Dear Friends,**

If you watch television, I’m sure you have seen some advertisements for different kinds of medications. First they tell you how great this drug is in solving whatever problem or disease it was developed for – many times they make it sound like a wonder drug and they encourage you to talk to your doctor about prescribing it for you. If you listen to these commercials, somewhere in the commercial they have to give you a disclosure of the side effects and that can be amusing or frightening depending on how you look at it. The side effects of the drug can be worse than the disease. One drug, I can’t remember which one, even had the warning that in some cases it can cause death. Makes you wonder what kind of relief they were going for.

As we consider the portion of scripture before us we realize that we are afflicted with a disease – the deadly disease of sin. Fortunately, **“God has a remedy for sin – Faith in Christ.”** But in order for the remedy to work we need to, **“Recognize the problem,”** and then to, **“Trust in the cure.”**

**I.** Have you ever been on a trip and run into a detour? You hope it doesn’t take you too far out of the way but as you follow the signs sometimes it can add quite a few miles and a few extra hours. Detours can be frustrating. You might say that is what the Children of Israel ran into as they were headed for the Promised Land. They needed to cross the land of Edom to reach their destination but the king of Edom would not let them pass. They pleaded but he would not relent and so they had to detour and go around Edom which would add weeks to their journey.

Naturally the people were not happy – they were so close and now this extra time and distance. The people were frustrated and mad and you might say that their faith was fading They were looking for someone to blame for their troubles. The easy targets to blame were God and God’s servant Moses. They said, **“Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? Look, there is no food! There is no water! And we are disgusted by this worthless food!”**

It's so easy to find fault when we're not happy with something. Even though God had provided manna and quail and water for 40 years they complained. Even though they had wandered in the desert for 40 years and their clothes never wore out they complained. Yes, a generation had died but it was because of unbelief and not because the people left Egypt. How quickly they forgot the blessings of God and their complaints showed their lack of trust and lack of faith.

The Lord responded to their complaint but it wasn't what we might expect. **“The LORD sent venomous snakes among the people, and the snakes bit the people. As a result many people from Israel died.”** Their sin had jumped out and bit them. To me, this picture of poisonous snakes everywhere is a terrifying picture and yet it shows us how bad sin can affect our lives if we don't have God as part of our lives. Sometimes we forget just how deadly our sins really are.

At times we are like the Children of Israel – forgetting about God's grace and complaining on how life isn't going the way we want it to go. It is easy for us to get mad at God because he didn't answer a prayer the way we wanted him to or because we are having trouble in our relationships or because we are alone or depressed or whatever the issue might be.

Sometimes we get upset with what God's Word says because it goes against what our politically correct society wants to promote. It would be so much easier if we could pick and choose the parts of God's Word to follow. It is easy to be a Christian pessimist but do those two words even belong together?

As Christians we want to be optimists – focused on God's grace and blessings that come to us each day. Why? Paul in our 1<sup>st</sup> lesson reminds us, **“But God, because he is rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in trespasses. It is by grace you have been saved!”** (Ephesians 2:4-5) God is good and gracious. He has given us life – spiritual life and he provides for our needs both physically and spiritually. So when things aren't going well or challenges pop up, step back and ask, is God trying to get my attention? Where is my focus and what does my attitude look like today? Am I listening to God or to my sinful nature? Many times these challenges are there to pull us closer to God and they come as a reminder to pay attention to what God is saying to us. Remember he has the ultimate cure to bring us healing and relief.

**II. The Children of Israel messed up but it didn't take them long to realize their mistake. “The people went to Moses and said, “We have sinned, because we have spoken against the LORD and against you. Pray to the LORD to take the snakes away from us.”** Moses loved the people and interceded for them as he had done so many times in the past and God answered Moses quickly. **“The LORD said to Moses, “Make a venomous snake and put it on a pole. If anyone who is bitten looks at it, he will live.”**

God doesn't make it hard. Believe and trust in the promise of God to bring healing when they looked to the bronze snake hanging on the cross. The snake itself didn't have power but the power lay in the promise of God. Those who believed were saved and those who thought it was too simple or too foolish died. There was no in between.

God has provided us with the cure for our sins as well. Our Gospel lesson points this out, **“Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the wilderness, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, <sup>15</sup>so that everyone who believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.”** (John 3:14-15) It’s ironic that the cure looks curiously like the disease itself. In the desert, the people had to look at this bronze snake on a cross to be healed from the deadly snake bites they had received. We look to Christ, hanging on a cross and suffering greatly to cure us from the great suffering we deserve for our own sins. And yet Jesus reminds us, **“For God so loved the world that he gave his only-begotten Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish, but have eternal life. <sup>17</sup>For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.”** (John 3:16-17).

That is what our faith in Jesus is all about – it brings us forgiveness for every deadly sin we commit, spiritual life and the sure hope of heaven.

It’s so easy to dwell on the negative and blame everyone else – even God – for our troubles and to be miserable but God’s will for our lives is just the opposite. But God wants us to be happy and he wants us to be spiritually healthy so he has given us the antidote for our sins in the cross.

I wish I would never sin and I try hard not to as I know you do also but when I sin and when you sin may we always look to the cross for forgiveness. May we always look to the cross as a reminder of God’s great love for us and may we always rejoice in God’s grace and mercy that he brings us each and every day. Amen.