

# Week 2

## Embracing a New Kind of King

### Drawing Near through Jesus' Sacrifice

#### John 3:14-21

3.21.24

Palm Sunday

#### **John 3:1–21** (CSB)

There was a man from the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews. <sup>2</sup>This man came to him at night and said, "Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God, for no one could perform these signs you do unless God were with him."

<sup>3</sup>Jesus replied, "Truly I tell you, unless someone is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God."

<sup>4</sup>"How can anyone be born when he is old?" Nicodemus asked him. "Can he enter his mother's womb a second time and be born?"

<sup>5</sup>Jesus answered, "Truly I tell you, unless someone is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. <sup>6</sup>Whatever is born of the flesh is flesh, and whatever is born of the Spirit is spirit. <sup>7</sup>Do not be amazed that I told you that you must be born again. <sup>8</sup>The wind blows where it pleases, and you hear its sound, but you don't know where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit."

<sup>9</sup>"How can these things be?" asked Nicodemus.

<sup>10</sup>"Are you a teacher of Israel and don't know these things?" Jesus replied. <sup>11</sup>"Truly I tell you, we speak what we know and we testify to what we have seen, but you do not accept our testimony. <sup>12</sup> If I have told you about earthly things and you don't believe, how will you believe if I tell you about heavenly things? <sup>13</sup>No one has ascended into heaven except the one who descended from heaven—the Son of Man."

<sup>14</sup>"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 may have eternal

life. <sup>16</sup>For God loved the world in this way: He gave his one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will 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. <sup>18</sup>Anyone who believes in him is not condemned, but anyone who does not believe is already condemned, because he has not believed in the name of the one and only Son of God. <sup>19</sup>This is the judgment: The light has come into the world, and people loved darkness rather than the light because their deeds were evil. <sup>20</sup>For everyone who does evil hates the light and avoids it, so that his deeds may not be exposed. <sup>21</sup>But anyone who lives by the truth comes to the light, so that his works may be shown to be accomplished by God.”

## 1. Jesus uses Nicodemus to introduce this powerful truth!

### A. We all know John 3:16,

1. But it was Nicodemus’ crisis of belief that led to this announcement.
2. It was Nicodemus’ struggle that initiated this amazing passage.
3. Isn’t it just like Jesus to use our crisis to demonstrate His great grace?
  - a. With Jesus, pain is never wasted.
  - b. With Jesus, doubt can lead to revelation.
  - c. With Jesus, struggles lead to transformations.
  - d. The Apostle Paul said that Jesus is glorified in our weakness for in our weakness, He is strong.
4. If you can:
  - a. lift it, you won’t ask for God’s strength.
  - b. figure it out, you won’t seek His wisdom.
  - c. birth it, you will try to give life instead of receiving the life of the Spirit.

B. Jesus tells Nicodemus you must be born again.

1. And he didn't have a framework to understand this.
2. All of his knowledge and study, his lifetime devotion to the tenants of Judaism did not prepare him for this revelation.
3. How can I be born-again?
4. What does this mean?

## 2. Moses and snakes on the plain.

A. Jesus introduces a radical truth with a familiar (to Nicodemus) passage.

1. Remember, Nicodemus is an expert teacher.
2. He has Numbers 21 memorized.
3. Jesus knows this by saying, "Just as..."
4. The word "as" introduces a comparison called a simile.

### **Numbers 21:4–9 (CSB)**

<sup>4</sup>Then they set out from Mount Hor by way of the Red Sea to bypass the land of Edom, but the people became impatient because of the journey. <sup>5</sup>The people spoke against God and Moses: "Why have you led us up from Egypt to die in the wilderness? There is no bread or water, and we detest this wretched food!" <sup>6</sup>Then the LORD sent poisonous snakes among the people, and they bit them so that many Israelites died.

<sup>7</sup>The people then came to Moses and said, "We have sinned by speaking against the LORD and against you. Intercede with the LORD so that he will take the snakes away from us." And Moses interceded for the people.

<sup>8</sup>Then the LORD said to Moses, "Make a snake image and mount it on a pole. When anyone who is bitten looks at it, he will recover." <sup>9</sup>So Moses made a bronze snake and mounted it on a pole. Whenever someone was bitten, and he looked at the bronze snake, he recovered.

B. In Numbers 21, Israel is close to the Promised Land.

1. Much of the older generation has passed away, and the younger generation is beginning to take over.

2. But the younger ones have been influenced by their parents, and they, too, learned how to murmur and complain from mom and dad, grandma and grandpa.

a. If your kids are bad to gossip, murmur, or complain, you might want to check the mirror.

b. These sorts of sins are learned behaviors that are learned by observation and modeling.

3. All is not bad with the younger generation.

a. As **Numbers 21** shows, the younger generations are better at fighting and obeying than their parents.

b. As long as they have a job to do they are on point, but they have no patience for the journey.

c. If I can give a word to the younger generation here today:

1. I see an intensity, loyalty, and a passion that distinguishes you from your parents.

2. But don't reject the journey.

3. Embrace the process for the process is where God does His lasting work.

4. **Numbers 21:4** says they became impatient because of the journey and spoke against God and Moses.

C. God always punishes the sort of mumbling and complaining within His people.

1. This time, the punishment is unique but fitting to the sin.

2. Notice the complaint:

a. Israel said, You led us from Egypt to die; there is no bread or water, and we hate eating manna.

b. Can you imagine that you are pushing 40, and since you were weaned, the only thing you have eaten has been manna?

3. Furthermore, many within this group did not remember Egypt.

a. Some were born in Egypt but had no memory of slavery.

b. Yet, they picked up their parent's sin and murmured and complained against the Lord.

c. And almost 40 years later, what was the generational memory of Egypt?

d. The Generational memory was the food and the security.

1. They did not remember to tell about the beatings or the back-breaking labor of making bricks.

2. They didn't talk about the men who died building monuments for Pharaohs who claimed to be gods.

3. They only remembered that, at least in Egypt, they had food and water to drink.

e. Sin causes us to forget the depth of the pit God has saved us from.

f. Sin causes us to forget how dark the darkness of our old way of life was.

4. If God's people want to crave the blessings of Egypt, then they will receive the curses of Egypt.

5. If the Israelites prefer to live in Egypt, they will die like Egyptians.<sup>1</sup>

### 3. Snakes: An Egyptian way to die.

A. Snakes are a significant image of Egyptian culture.

1. The Lord told Moses to confront Pharaoh and Pharaoh's witchcraft with his staff that became a snake and when confronted the snake ate the other snakes.

2. "These serpents were a potent representation of the power of Egypt, to which they were apparently so eager to return. Snakes were well-known symbols of power and sovereignty in ancient Egypt, as the familiar image of a cobra on Pharaoh's crown reminds us. Having once been freed from Pharaoh, did they really want to be subject to the power of the serpent all over again?"<sup>2</sup>

3. Many centuries after Moses and only 60 years before Jesus started his ministry, Cleopatra committed suicide by the bite of a snake<sup>3</sup>.

B. Because of their rebellion and blasphemy,<sup>4</sup> the Lord sent poisonous snakes among the people, and the bite was painful and ultimately fatal.

1. To die by snake bite was a very Egyptian way to die.

2. The Lord is not being creative in His punishment; He is being truthful.

a. For the wages of sin is death...

b. Wages are fitting to the task.

---

<sup>1</sup> Roy Gane, *Leviticus, Numbers*, The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2004), 679.

<sup>2</sup> Iain M. Duguid and R. Kent Hughes, *Numbers: God's Presence in the Wilderness*, Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2006), 262.

<sup>3</sup> Cleopatra died in August of 30 B.C.

<sup>4</sup> It is blasphemy because they called the miraculous provision worthless and contemptible.

C. As people are dying and being overrun with snakes, they cry out to Moses to intercede.

<sup>7</sup>The people then came to Moses and said, "We have sinned by speaking against the LORD and against you. Intercede with the LORD so that he will take the snakes away from us." And Moses interceded for the people.

1. They begged Moses to speak to God on their behalf so that this plague might be stopped.

2. And Moses, the ever-faithful intermediary, goes before the Lord.

3. How long does this take?

a. We don't know.

b. And while Moses is crying out to God, people are being bit, suffering and dying.

c. Then the Lord speaks.

D. Go fashion and make a bronze snake and put it on a pole...

1. How long does it take to make a snake out of bronze?

2. There were no premade bronze snakes with them.

a. To make a snake of bronze was a PROCESS.

b. The people who hated God's process and plan, who murmured about the journey, now waited while Moses made intercession and then fashioned the snake on a pole.

3. But the process was worth it as all who looked upon it were healed.

E. Not only was the snake significant, but so was the pole.

1. Listen to how this scholar put it:

2. Nor was the standard on which the serpent was to be transfixed merely a convenient means of lifting the serpent up

where everyone could see it. In Egypt, such a pole or standard was a recognized symbol of the deity's power. Here it served to demonstrate that the Lord's power was present in the midst of the camp, granting life to those whose sins had condemned them to death through the serpent's bite. The transfixed serpent on the standard thus demonstrated in visual terms the defeat of Israel's mortal enemies, Egypt and Satan, overcome by the power of the Lord<sup>5</sup>

#### 4. Jesus is better than the snake.

A. Jesus now compares what He is getting ready to do to what happened in the days of Moses.

1. Nicodemus understood Moses.
2. Moses was his life's work.
3. And now Jesus points Nicodemus to something far greater than a snake, more powerful than a wooden pole, and a greater cure than a physical snake bite.

B. God did not use the flesh of a crucified snake to redeem humanity, but the flesh of the Incarnate Son of God: Fully human and fully divine.

1. To understand John 3:16, Nicodemus had to understand Numbers 21.
2. Moses gave a snake upon a pole so that all who looked upon it would be healed.
3. But GOD gave His son upon a cross so that everyone who believes (looks upon with faith) will not perish but have eternal life.

---

<sup>5</sup> Iain M. Duguid and R. Kent Hughes, *Numbers: God's Presence in the Wilderness, Preaching the Word* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2006), 263.



4. For people to be healed from the snake bite, they had to believe the Word of God and the power of God by looking upon the pole and believing.

C. Through Jesus, salvation comes when people look to the crucified and risen Savior and believe upon Him.

1. For it was precisely on the cross that Jesus won his victory over the ancient serpent, Satan himself, fulfilling the original gospel promise of God: "I will put enmity between you [the serpent] and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel" (Genesis 3:15).<sup>6</sup>

2. The original snake bite took place in the Garden of Eden.

3. The symbol of power for the believer is an empty cross and an empty tomb.

D. Jesus told Nicodemus that just as Moses lifted up a bronze snake, God would lift up Jesus.

1. In Numbers 21, God sent snakes as judgment.

2. In John, God sent His only begotten Son.

3. And ALL who look upon him will be saved and given eternal life.

Apply: To the Modern Day Nicodemus.

A. Max Lucado said, "To see sin without grace is despair. To see grace without sin is arrogance. To see them in tandem is conversion."<sup>7</sup>

1. Knowing Numbers 21 wouldn't save Nicodemus.

2. Meeting Jesus at night wouldn't give Nicodemus eternal life.

---

<sup>6</sup> Iain M. Duguid and R. Kent Hughes, *Numbers: God's Presence in the Wilderness*, Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2006), 264.

<sup>7</sup> Roy Gane, *Leviticus, Numbers*, The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2004), 681.

3. Nicodemus needed to believe that Jesus was who He claimed to be and was doing what He said He was going to do.

B. For the Modern-day Nicodemus' around us, hear this:

1. "The simple equation endures: the cure for snakes is a snake; the cure for human life is one man's life; the cure for death is death. Nothing less will do."<sup>8</sup>

2. Knowledge and work are not enough.

3. It requires belief and confession in Jesus.

C. There comes a personal decision: Do you want the bread from heaven or the poison of the snake?

1. Israel rejected both the journey and the provision.

2. Later in John, Jesus declares that He was the Bread of Life, the true Manna, and the True Drink that Israel partook of.

3. And for us today:

4. Do you want life, or do you choose death?

5. We have all been bitten by the snake of sin, but will we accept the antidote that is Jesus?

E. My question for all of us is:

1. What kind of King takes upon himself the curse for the people?

2. What kind of God gives His only Son?

3. What kind of man rejects such a great gift?

Prayer

---

<sup>8</sup> Ibid, 682.