

Monday, March 7, 2022

Numbers 21:4-9

John 3:14-16

Look up at the bronze snake

Hello, everyone. Good morning.

The Israelites were supposed to enter the Promised Land of Canaan about a year after the Exodus, but because of their unbelief and complaining to God, they could not enter Canaan and traveled in the wilderness for 40 years. During this journey in the wilderness, God was training Israel to be a holy people. Deuteronomy 8:2, 3 says, "Remember how the LORD your God led you all the way in the desert these forty years, to humble you and to test you in order to know what was in your heart, whether or not you would keep his commands. He humbled you, causing you to hunger and then feeding you with manna, which neither you nor that man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD." Today's content is about the final test for Israel to become a holy people after 40 years of journeying in the wilderness. God wants the people He has chosen to mature as His children.

Look at verses 4 and 5 of today's scripture. "They traveled from Mount Hor along the route to the Red Sea, to go around Edom. But the people grew impatient on the way; they spoke against God and against Moses, and said, "Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the desert? There is no bread! There is no water! And we detest this miserable food!" In fact, they had won a great victory in the war just before this (verses 1-3). Therefore, they should be overflowing with gratitude. Yet, the Israelites can't stand the wilderness journey and complain to Moses.

I'm sure you all remember this situation. The Israelites had been slaves in Egypt for over 400 years, but God set them free as free people. Immediately after receiving this blessing, they complained about the bitterness of traveling in the wilderness. At that time, God made the bitter water sweet by throwing a piece of wood (Exodus 15:25). That miracle is not the only one. As you all know, God has been guiding Israel safely for 40 years with a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night (Exodus 13:21). And yet, they are still complaining about it. What's more serious is that now, after 40 years, the children's generation is complaining after the parents' generation. This behavior of complaining to Moses means that they are showing their disbelief in God. The bad history from their parents' generation is being repeated to their children's generation.

They say, "I detest this miserable food!" They spoke out their anger. "This miserable food" refers to the manna (Ex. 16:31). Imagine this manna pouring down from the heavens in the year 2022. Even if global warming becomes serious and there is a shortage of food, there will be no problem with manna. Romans 1:21 says, "For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened." How about us? Are we forgetting to be thankful for the everyday things that we have?

Look at verse 6, "Then the Lord sent venomous snakes among them; they bit the people and many Israelites died." This is horrible. Countless "venomous snakes" came to the camp of Israel. A fiery snake is a poisonous snake. I had lived in Okinawa for 13 years. In Okinawa, there is a poisonous snake called "habu". One of my friends in Okinawa actually opened the front door on her way to work and found a habu coiled around her. It caused such a commotion that she called the police. Just one poisonous snake can be terrifying. It is said that if bitten, it will cause fever and pain so high that it will burn, and if not treated within three minutes, it will kill you. Today's fiery snakes are desert snakes, so they must be extremely poisonous. These fiery snakes bit the Israelites.

The Israelites plead with Moses: verse 7, "We sinned when we spoke against the Lord and against you. Please pray that the Lord will take the snakes away from us!" Here, I would like to consider together the existence of poisonous snakes for a while. In the Bible, from Genesis 3, Satan appears in the form of a snake to tempt human beings. Satan's purpose is to separate human beings from God's love and to destroy them forever. John 10:10, "The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy." Satan does not come in the form of a ghost dressed in white with long hair and blood dripping down its face. Satan's purpose is to make us doubt God, to make us lose faith in God, and to make us turn away from God. He steals the blessings we receive from God and makes us unable to be thankful. This temptation spreads to our souls like the poison of a viper and causes us to die. As our souls weaken, our physical and mental health deteriorate, and our relationships become strained. Therefore, we Christians should always build a strong relationship of trust with God.

Moses prayed intercession to God for his people. Verse 8 and 9 says, "The LORD said to Moses, 'Make a snake and put it up on a pole; anyone who is bitten can look at it and live. So Moses made a bronze snake and put it up on a pole. Then when anyone was

bitten by snake and looked at the bronze snake, he lived."

This "bronze snake" symbolizes Jesus Christ. Jesus said in [John 3:14~17](#), "Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the desert, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life. For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God's one and only Son." Just as the Israelites who were bitten by poisonous snakes in the time of Moses lived only by looking up at the bronze snake, so we will live only by believing in Jesus Christ. We can have eternal life. We don't have to do anything. Just look up to Jesus Christ and believe in Him, and we will be saved.

To "look up at" means to pay attention to Jesus Christ all the time without taking your eyes off Him. It is not enough to listen to the message at worship services, but also to read the Bible and praise Him even when we are alone, and to think deeply about Jesus Christ while praying. [Hebrews 3:1](#) says, "Therefore, holy brothers, who share in the heavenly calling, fix your thoughts on Jesus, the apostle and high priest whom we confess."

Do you think about Jesus Christ often? Jesus Christ died in our place to pay for our sins. He is still alive and invites us to meet him. When we ask to see him, He will see us. He even eats with us. A meal with Jesus does not have to be a silent meal (Mokushoku in Japanese). [Revelation 3:20](#) says, "Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with me." Jesus is knocking on our door right now. Gentle Jesus Christ is not forcing his way into your heart. He waits for you to open the door of your heart.

What were you thinking when you heard today's message? Are there any problems that we have inherited from generation to generation? One of my friends at work was Canadian, and she was very careful about drinking alcohol. I asked her, "I don't drink because I'm a Christian, but why do you?" She said like this, "To be honest, I like very much to drink too. But I know there are some alcoholics in my family and relatives. That's why I'm very careful for that." I have a similar problems like her because there have been several offenders and victims of domestic violence in my family. There's also a long history of problems that kept the Israelites from complaining to God for

generations.

I was thinking today about an issue that has saddened and troubled me for many years. The other day, I mentioned that I had a hatred with a member of my church, and I had a hard time forgiving him for six months. The reason why I was able to forgive him surprisingly quickly may be because the relationship was not that deep. However, if the problem comes from a family member or close relationship, it may take longer to forgive and heal.

I went through a very difficult time after my divorce. It was like pouring vinegar on a wound, even though the damage done by my abusive ex-husband was also very serious. That is, my sister and her husband did not help me. The heartbreak of being rejected by my only one sibling was very severe. When I think about it now, I may have been bitten by Satan at that time, and the poison spread all over my body and my soul. At that time, I was relying more on my sister and her husband than on God. Because I was relying on human beings, I was deeply hurt when they did not help me. Looking back, I should have returned to God sooner and restored my trust in Him sooner, but I suffered for 14 years over this matter. Before I knew it, I couldn't get rid of these feelings of resentment and hatred like some kind of addiction, even though I thought I should forgive my sister and brother in law. I suffered a lot of hatred that I could not solve by myself.

By the way, thankfully, I entered the JTJ Missionary Seminary four years ago and started studying the Bible. In the beginning, there was no immediate change in my heart, but gradually I changed. Every day, I set aside time to close my eyes and pray, thinking about God. I began to truly desire to see Jesus. This went on for about two years until one day. I had a wonderful realization when I read the words of Psalm 49:6-9, "those who trust in their wealth and boast of their great riches? No man can redeem the life of another or give to God a ransom for him – the ransom for a life is costly, no payment is ever enough – that he should live on forever and not see decay." I never imagined that the Bible would have the perfect words for when I was rejected by siblings. God must have been waiting to see when I would see this verse. I wept, thinking that if I had taken the Bible seriously, I wouldn't have had to suffer for 14 years. Then I discovered that there was a blessing behind the painful experiences that happened to me. When you read the Bible, you will find words like this that will help you solve your questions and sufferings.

Fifteen years ago, my children and I escaped the abusive ex-husband and took refuge in my sisters' home in Vancouver. I and my mom were living in my sister's house, paying rent, but she suddenly kicked us and my children out. My mother, who was a victim of domestic violence at the time, was also with us. Suddenly we were homeless. But thankfully enough, I was able to enter a shelter for victims of domestic violence in Canada on the very day I was kicked out. The caseworker was very troubled to find a shelter that could accommodate my 60 year old mother, myself, and my two sons, ages 3 and 1. - in downtown, White Rock, or Newton. When she finally called the shelter in Surrey, there was amazingly one large room available that could accommodate four people. We went to the shelter, and to our surprise, it was only a 10-minute drive from my sister's house. In addition, God put us in a shelter near my sister's house so that we could get help from her, and Kenta and Taishi were able to play well with my sister and her cousins.

In addition, I was able to stay at the shelter for six months because of visa extension issue, even though I was only allowed to stay at the shelter for one month. The Korean caseworker who witnessed this was really surprised. She, who was a serious Buddhist believer said, "I've been working as a caseworker for more than 10 years, and I've never seen four people like you living in a shelter for six months. It's amazing."

It was a miracle that God provided food, clothing, and shelter for me and my children every day for six months as I pondered His grace. My eldest son was abused by his own father, but at the shelter, there was a counselor specializing in children, and Kenta was able to receive play therapy several times a week, and by the time he returned to Japan, his wounds had healed considerably. I am grateful for that.

I can confess now that the wilderness life was a blessing. My sister and brother-in-law had small children at the time 10 and 9 years old, and they were a young couple with no money, so they could not have helped my mother and me who were victims of crime. In a way, God saved all four of us through the heartlessness of my sister and her husband. If you have ever been rejected by your siblings and relatives, don't worry about it. God will take care of you personally. When I interpreted a difficult situation from God's perspective, I became grateful.

Is there anyone in your life that you have been unable to forgive for many years? Isn't that hatred spreading through your body like a deadly poison, making your heart sick? Maybe you are deeply hurt by the betrayal of a friend you trusted for decades. You may be deeply hurt by the rejection of your husband, wife or parents who are supposed to love you. You may be so depressed that you are unable to work, take care of your

children, or do your schoolwork. While you admit that this is partly your own fault, you can't help but blame your family, cold friends, bosses, and colleagues.

But be careful, when you think it's those people's fault that our lives have become so unhappy. That is a symptom of the spread of Satan's deadly poison. If you have been thinking that way for a long time, you need to take an antidote. That antidote is Jesus Christ. Please look up to Jesus Christ as soon as possible. When we believe in Jesus, our painful life can be interpreted in a new way. Because we are loved by Jesus Christ. Jesus loves us so much that He would die in our place. Galatians 2:20 says, "I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me."

We can have a deep fellowship with Jesus Christ, and when we are in that world of grace, we are amazingly freed from all hatred and unforgiveness. This is because the love of Jesus surrounds us all. I am experiencing this miracle little by little these days. I hope you will experience this grace, too. The experience of meeting Jesus Christ cannot be compared to the level of therapy in psychology. Encountering Jesus Christ and experiencing eternal life is something that cannot be compared to the joys of this world. This eternal life of Jesus Christ will set you free from all suffering. John 8:32 says, "Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."

Let's pray together.

Heavenly Father, I thank you for Your Words today. I pray that by the grace of Jesus Christ's love, we will all be freed from the hatred and resentment that is so poisonous. I also ask that you would give us the heart to forgive those who have hurt us. I pray that through the work of the Holy Spirit, all the problems that have been flowing from generation to generation that torment us will also be removed, and our bodies, minds, and souls will be set free. We pray that we will receive the new life of Jesus Christ every day, and that we will be able to live happily. I pray in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.