

Numbers 21:4-9

“So Moses prayed for the people.” We begin with this verse of our text because this verse is usually ignored. It’s not dramatic enough. The fiery serpents, now they’re dramatic. So is the bronze serpent up on a pole. But Moses praying for the people? That’s nice, but it’s definitely not an attention grabber; it’s not headline news.

Yet take this part out of our narrative and we’re left with nothing but a tragedy: death without life, despair without hope. Moses praying for the people is that which ties our narrative together. The serpents come, the people are dying, they confess their sin, so Moses prays to the Lord on their behalf, and the Lord tells Moses what to do to save His people, he does it and the people are delivered.

But we like drama. It sells newspaper stories and movies, and it keeps people awake in the pew. But drama is a result of sin. The Garden of Eden was without drama until sin entered the picture. Had man not fallen into sin, this world would be a place of joy, peace, bliss, and no drama whatsoever.

Our narrative begins with drama and it ends with drama. But it ends with God’s dramatic action to deliver His people. If you have no drama in your life, you may not relate to this narrative. But I think you do, or at least you will, because where sinners go, drama follows.

Our narrative begins with the people complaining. They’re impatient, and that’s sinful. But worse than that, they turn away from the good gifts of God. They speak against His deliverance. *“Why have you brought us up out of Egypt!”* That great dramatic action of God to deliver them through the Red Sea - the people are saying, *“We wish that had never taken place! We would rather be living in bondage under Pharaoh in Egypt!”* And they speak against God’s providing for them in the wilderness. He had been feeding them the gift of manna - bread from heaven. *“We hate this gift!”* they complain, *“We loathe it! It’s worthless, and we wish we were never given it in the first place!”* Now that’s drama.

Comparing this to our day, it would be like a Christian saying, *“I wish I had never been baptized! I would prefer to live in Satan’s kingdom than to be in God’s kingdom! And I detest hearing the Word of God! I loathe the Sacrament on the altar. This gift is worthless. I don’t even want it in my life!”* This, in essence, is what God’s people are saying in the narrative before us. How could they say such a thing?

But hang on. We may not say such a thing with our mouth, but our actions may tell a different story. A child of God may never complain, as the Israelites did, *“Why did God have to deliver me in my baptism!”* but he may despise his baptism, even without realizing it, by walking away from it headlong into sin, or by never remembering it, and thus thinking it to be nothing to him. A Christian may never actually say, as the Israelites did, *“I loathe this bread from heaven! This Sacrament of the Lord’s body and blood is worthless!”* But he may say such words by his actions. He despises it and deems it worthless by refusing to hear God’s Word with his ears, and by refusing to receive the bread from heaven with his mouth.

I know that I like to separate myself from those rebellious Israelites by thinking that I would never act as they did. Yet their sin lives in my heart and in yours. And at times it shows itself by how we live. Thank God that He is merciful...to His people then and to us today.

Back then we see Him sending snakes among His people - out of mercy actually. Because even though they despise their baptism in the Red Sea, God still claims them, just as He claims you. He still calls them His own. Now the absolute worst thing God could do here at this point in the narrative is to do nothing. Had He done nothing, this would show that He did not love them. For they could not be brought back to Him unless drama came to them. A pot of water will not boil unless the heat is turned on. His people would not repent unless God attacked their stubborn unbelief. And so the snakes come and many of them die. And the people boil over in repentance because the heat is turned on. "*We have sinned!*" they cry to Moses, "*against God and you.*"

Friends, this cry must be in your life and mine continually. But we're as stubborn as the Israelites. And so God must send drama into our life as well. Unless He sends fiery serpents in various ways, we would not repent. And it is a sad thing that when God sends such snakes, that even then at times His people refuse to change their sinful ways. If there is drama in your life, be it an illness or a dread disease; be it the consequences of bad choices, this drama is sent by God, or used by Him. He attacks our stubborn pride. He wants all to repent and turn from their sinful ways.

Now friends, do you see why Moses praying for the people is so vital? For them, and for us, we need prayer so badly. Moses prays, and God's deliverance comes. The people sin, the serpents come, the people repent, God delivers them. And at the heart of it all Moses prays for the people. Intercessory prayer is the heartbeat of the narrative before us.

I'm no Moses, but your pastor does pray for each one of you by name regularly. And I need you to pray for me. Without your prayers, my work among you would be without joy. We can all be Moses for each other. And God hears our prayers for each other. He heard Moses' prayer and He delivered His people by the bronze serpent on a pole. He hears our prayers and acts in deliverance for us.

When we pray we enter into a "drama-free zone." The drama in our life turns us to prayer. But in praying, we join ourselves, through baptism, to the figure hanging on a pole; not a bronze snake, but Jesus. He is praying for us from the cross; praying for our deliverance and forgiveness. Jesus goes to the cross to take all the drama in your life into Himself. His was the most dramatic life ever lived, for evil was constantly against Him. And His was the most dramatic death ever died, for by His death He brought an end to all the punishment that our sinful drama deserves. He let all the fiery serpents bite Him. He drained the poison from their fangs. So when God sends these snakes into your life, they hurt, but they cannot kill and destroy you. You have a living Savior who sustains you by His life.

Whatever drama you are going through, or will go through, this narrative is of great comfort and hope for you. God meets your drama with His dramatic acts of deliverance. His deliverance for you answers all the drama in your life. Look away from yourself to the figure on the cross. He is there for you, friend. That is where your drama ends. That is where your Lord cries, "*It is finished!*" You, dear sinner, are forgiven. You, dear child of God, have an eternity awaiting you in Christ without drama, but only with joy, peace, and bliss. Amen.