

**Comfort in a Scary Situation**  
**Sermon on Numbers 21:4-9**  
**Saint Mark's, Watertown, WI**  
**Pastor Karl Walther**  
**March 5, 2006**

**Introduction: Snakebite Is a Scary Situation**

As we just heard: *The Son of Man must be lifted up, that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life.* Amen.

Dearest brothers and sisters in Christ Jesus:

Do you ever imagine yourself in scary situations? You know, that's not hard to do, because life is full of scary situations.

But do you ever get worried about being in a really scary situation—an emergency situation? How about – let's say – getting bitten by a snake?

That's not so far-fetched! Forty-five thousand Americans each year get bitten by snakes. Seven or eight thousand of them are poisonous. A few are fatal. There are, in fact, poisonous snakes in every state except Maine, Alaska, and Hawaii. Wisconsin is missing from that list. Wisconsin does have some poisonous snakes.

So, suppose this coming summer you are out in the great Wisconsin outdoors. And you are bitten by a snake. What would you do?

**Theme: Comfort in a Scary Situation**

Well, that's the dilemma God's people Israel found themselves in, according to today's Word from God to us. Together with the Israelites, let us seek: COMFORT IN A SCARY SITUATION. And we're going to end up finding that this issue of snakebites hits closer to home for all of us, than we might first imagine....

**Exposition & Application: Israel's & Our Snakebite & Antidote**

In God's Word to us today, it's the year fourteen hundred six BC. The Israelites had spent the last forty years wandering in the wilderness, south of their Promised Land. It was because of their sins and their failure to trust in the Lord. By now, Miriam had died. Aaron had died. Moses would soon die.

It's at that point that we read – and this is God's Word to us today, printed on the first inside page of your service folder: *They, those six hundred thousand Israelite families—**They traveled from Mount Hor along the route to the Red Sea, to go around Edom.** Mount Hor was where Moses' brother Aaron had died. It was immediately south of the border of what would soon be Israelite territory. The route the Israelites were on would lead back to the Reed Sea and to Egypt, if taken to the west. But the Israelites were eastbound. So, this route would take them along the south edge of the Promised Land, underneath and alongside the Dead Sea, north of Edom, through Moab, and finally across the Jordan River from Jericho.*

Going on: ***But the people grew impatient on the way.** And we can understand that. These people had spent forty years, four decades, only slightly less than my entire lifetime, wandering in the wilderness! Specifically: **They spoke against God and against Moses** – since they were a team – **and said, "Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the desert?"** But they weren't really dying. **There is no bread!** But there was bread. **There is no water!** But God kept providing water—even miraculously. And—and here's really what they were getting at: **And we detest this miserable food!"**—*

literally, I kid you not: *our patience is at an end with this lite-lite bread* (!), this “diet bread”, this manna God rains down from heaven, six nights a week.

Now, isn't that all ever applicable to us?! Each of us is also on a life-long journey. Each of us grows sinfully impatient on the way. And we complain: “Lord, my life is not exciting enough—or alternately: it's too turbulent.” “Lord, I don't have enough stuff—or alternately: I'm overwhelmed.” “Lord, people don't respect me enough—or maybe: I've got too many eyes on me.” “Lord, why did you give me this lousy spouse and these rebellious children—or Lord, why didn't you give me any at all?” “And then, Lord, all I've got to look forward to is growing sick and dying.”

So, how does the Lord feel about all our complaints? Well, maybe we can get a clue from the way he treated the Israelites.... **Then the LORD sent venomous snakes among them; they bit the people and many Israelites** – hundreds, at least, with a panic that swept to tens of thousands – **many Israelites died.**

And in precisely the same way, you have gotten snakebitten, too—and so have I.

It goes back to that old snake in the Garden. He bit our first parents, Adam and Eve. He injected his poison into them. And it was just like a regular snakebite. That stings. Then it swells. That's because there is internal hemorrhaging going on. And it may take as many as three or four days. But left untreated, a person might die.

You and I have inherited the snakebite of Adam and Eve. Satan has injected his venom into us. We carry a rebellious attitude against God from the very beginning. That swells up into sin in our lives. Internally, we bleed. And then after seventy or eighty years or just a couple more, we die.

So, how do you treat a snakebite, like this?

Well, maybe you've seen the old movies of the old west where they quickly sucked the blood out of the wound and spit it on the ground. Experts nowadays agree: That's liable to do more harm than good; it could infect the victim, and it could poison a new victim. Do you apply something to the wound? No, that doesn't do any good. Do you wait to see if the snake was venomous? No, that might delay treatment too long. Do you worry about killing the snake and bringing it in? No, it is also really too late for such action.

Most experts now agree that the best way to treat a snakebite is immediately to own up to the fact that you've got a problem on your hands and head to the hospital. And that's what the Israelites had sense enough to do....

**The 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."** Now, that's a really good start on a solution to the problem, isn't it? *We sinned*, they said, which is a really nice confession of the real problem. *We spoke against the Lord and against you*, they said, which is a nice complete admission of guilt. *Pray to the Lord*, they said, which tells us the Israelites knew where to go for help.

In the same way, in the snakebite of our sin, we can't expect that we're going to be able to do anything to help the situation. We ourselves can't suction the sin out of our lives, nor can we do so for anyone else. Nothing we have will take the wound away. And pretending that we aren't bitten, or pretending that it's not a serious thing, won't do us any good either. We'll end up dead!

So, we need to head to the hospital, to the heavenly hospital, to our Lord. And what do hospitals do for snakebites? Well, they administer an antidote, and antivenom. An antivenom is a rare sort of a substance, derived from antibodies of animals. In fact, there are only one or two of those substances licensed for use in the United States.

The Israelites, also, had an antidote for their snakebite. We read: **Moses prayed for the people.** And: **The LORD said to Moses, "Make a snake and put it up on a pole**—really, basically, a *flag pole*—because the Hebrew word here refers to a rallying

point for the people, like what our flag is for us. And the Lord says to Moses: anyone who is bitten can look at this “snake on a stick” and live.”

So 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, he lived. It must have almost seemed too simple. You wonder if some of the people couldn’t believe it was that easy. But of course, either they’d get desperate enough to look and to live, or they’d pay with their own lives for their doubt.

Now, how about you? That old snake has bitten you, too. His venom is coursing through your veins. It won’t do to ignore it. You can’t treat the wound yourself. You need a doctor to deliver the antidote....

So, brothers, sisters, lift up your eyes! Do you see it on the horizon? It’s a rallying point. God, the good doctor, has placed it there to call every snakebite victim to himself. Hurry! Hurry! Even have somebody carry you, if you must.

Now, you’re getting closer.... Do you see him? Do you see whom God has lifted up for you and for all to behold? There he is: on the cross, raised for every eye to see. He is the perfect antidote to the snakebite of sin. In fact, if you will, he is a complete blood transfusion for the venom that lies within you. Trade to him your poisoned blood; he’s harboring it already. The venom of your sin is killing him, rather than you, taking his life, rather than yours. And he has traded to you his fresh blood, his pure blood, his lifegiving blood—which passes from his brow, his hands, his side, his feet, to you.

You have looked to him – no matter how sick with sin you were – and you are healed. Life is yours.

### **Conclusion: Christ Is the Antidote to Life’s Scary Situations**

So, now what?

Will you head back out to the wilderness, to the spot where you were, and hope to get bitten again? Never!!! Avoid that old snake, Satan. If it was down near the dry valley of alcohol and drugs that he bit you, avoid that valley! If it was over in the rocks and caves of sexually suggestive material that he bit you, avoid that! If it was along the path of a complaining spirit that he bit you, get away from there!

Now what?

Will you wander far from his hospital, taking the chance that: if you’re ever bitten again, you might not be able to get back there in time? Never!!! Stay in sight of God’s Word. Don’t be saying, “I heard that last week; I don’t need it this week.” That’s Satan’s lie! Don’t be saying, “I read that when I was young; I still remember it well enough now, I guess.” That’s Satan’s lie! Don’t let him deceive you! Don’t wander away!

And now what?

Well, do you know any other snakebite victims? Oh, certainly!!! Coax them to the hospital! Carry them to the hospital! Carry the cross to them! Tell them, “You can’t ignore that snakebite of sin. It’s not going to go away. In fact, it’s going to kill you! But I’ve got some antivenom for that. His name is Jesus Christ. Let’s get you a blood transfusion—his pure blood for our sick blood forever!”

You see: *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. Amen.*

It’s true: *God did not send his Son in to the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. Amen.*