

Counting On God For Salvation

Message 04 of the series, "Numbers: Counting on God"

I. The people of Israel spent forty years wandering in the wilderness because they refused to enter the Promised Land. They didn't trust God. Instead, they grumbled and complained.

"Because you complained against me, every one of you who is twenty years old or older and was included in the registration will die. You will not enter and occupy the land I swore to give you... You said your children would be carried off as plunder. Well, I will bring them safely into the land, and they will enjoy what you have despised... Because your men explored the land for forty days, you must wander in the wilderness for forty years—a year for each day, suffering the consequences of your sins." Numbers 14:29-34 (NLT)

II. Near the end of their wanderings the next generation started grumbling and complaining again and God punished them.

"Then the people of Israel set out from Mount Hor, taking the road to the Red Sea to go around the land of Edom. But the people grew impatient with the long journey, and they began to speak against God and Moses. 'Why have you brought us out of Egypt to die here in the wilderness?' they complained. 'There is nothing to eat here and nothing to drink. And we hate this horrible manna!' So the LORD sent poisonous snakes among the people, and many were bitten and died." Numbers 21:4-6 (NLT)

Note: When they faced delays and difficulties they forgot that God was protecting them and providing for them.

"Do not forget that (the LORD) led you through the great and terrifying wilderness with its poisonous snakes and scorpions, where it was so hot and dry. He gave you water from the rock! He fed you with manna in the wilderness, a food unknown to your ancestors. He did this to humble you and test you for your own good. He did all this so you would never say to yourself, 'I have achieved this wealth with my own strength and energy.' Remember the LORD your God. He is the one who gives you power to be successful, in order to fulfill the covenant he confirmed to your ancestors with an oath." Deuteronomy 8:15-18 (NLT)

Note: It's easy to fall into the sins of grumbling and complaining and forget all that God has done for us.

"I don't want you to forget, dear brothers and sisters, about our ancestors in the wilderness long ago... God was not pleased with most of them, and their bodies were scattered in the wilderness. These things happened as a warning to us, so that we would not crave evil things as they did... Nor should we put Christ to the test, as some of them did and then died from snakebites. And don't grumble as some of them did, and then were destroyed by the angel of death. These things happened to them as examples for us. They were written down to warn us who live at the end of the age. If you think you are standing strong, be careful not to fall." 1 Corinthians 10:1-12 (NLT)

Life Application: Grumbling and complaining reveal ingratitude and unbelief. These are serious sins.

"Today when you hear his voice, don't harden your hearts as Israel did when they rebelled.' And who was it who rebelled against God, even though they heard his voice? Wasn't it the people Moses led out of Egypt? And who made God angry for forty years? Wasn't it the people who sinned, whose corpses lay in the wilderness? And to whom was God speaking when he took an oath that they would never enter his rest? Wasn't it the people who disobeyed him? So we see that because of their unbelief they were not able to enter his rest." Hebrews 3:15-19 (NLT)

III. The people confessed their sins and asked Moses to pray for them.

"Then the people came to Moses and cried out, 'We have sinned by speaking against the LORD and against you. Pray that the LORD will take away the snakes.' So Moses prayed for the people." Numbers 21:7 (NLT)

Life Application: "...if we confess our sins to him, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all wickedness." 1 John 1:8-9 (NLT)

Life Application: God loves it when we pray for people who have mistreated us.

"You have heard the law that says, 'Love your neighbor' and hate your enemy. But I say, love your enemies! Pray for those who persecute you! In that way, you will be acting as true children of your Father in heaven."
Matthew 5:43-45 (NLT)

IV. God provided a solution: a bronze serpent on a pole.

“Then the LORD told him, ‘Make a replica of a poisonous snake and attach it to a pole. All who are bitten will live if they simply look at it!’ So Moses made a snake out of bronze and attached it to a pole. Then anyone who was bitten by a snake could look at the bronze snake and be healed!” Numbers 21:8-9 (NLT)

Note: Jesus said this Old Testament story was a picture of what he came to accomplish on the cross.

“... as Moses lifted up the bronze snake on a pole in the wilderness, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, so that everyone who believes in him will have eternal life. For God loved the world so much that he gave his one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life.”

John 3:14-16 (NLT)

BRONZE SERPENT

Their bodies were poisoned with venom.

God’s solution was a snake on a pole.

They were saved by faith when they they looked at the serpent.

They were utterly dependent on God to save them.

JESUS

Our souls are poisoned with sin.

God’s solution was His Son on the cross.

We are saved by faith when we look to Jesus.

We are utterly dependent on God to save us.

“God saved you by his grace when you believed. And you can’t take credit for this; it is a gift from God. Salvation is not a reward for the good things we have done, so none of us can boast about it.”

Ephesians 2:8-9 (NLT)

“Christ has rescued us from the curse pronounced by the law. When he was hung on the cross, he took upon himself the curse for our wrongdoing. For it is written in the Scriptures, ‘Cursed is everyone who is hung on a tree.’ Galatians 3:13 (NLT)

“Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.” Hebrews 12:2 (NIV)

Note: The bronze serpent wasn’t magic. (Hezekiah) did what was pleasing in the LORD’s sight, just as his ancestor David had done. He removed the pagan shrines, smashed the sacred pillars, and cut down the Asherah poles. He broke up the bronze serpent that Moses had made, because the people of Israel had been offering sacrifices to it. The bronze serpent was called Nehushtan. Hezekiah trusted in the LORD, the God of Israel...” 2 Kings 18:3-5 (NLT) “Nehushtan” means “piece of brass”. It had no power.

Life Application: The whole world needs Jesus.

“For God was in Christ, reconciling the world to himself, no longer counting people’s sins against them. And he gave us this wonderful message of reconciliation. So we are Christ’s ambassadors; God is making his appeal through us. We speak for Christ when we plead, ‘Come back to God!’” 2 Corinthians 5:19-20 (NLT)

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Connect Group Discussion Questions:

1. Name something you complained about this week that is actually a blessing in your life, but caused frustration because it did not go along with your wishes.
2. Would you say that the children of Israel in Numbers responded differently to God than we do today, or were their responses/actions similar? Why do you think that?
3. Read Luke 6:27-36. How are we, as followers of Christ, supposed to respond to our enemies? What is your track record in this?
4. Read Ephesians 4:17-32. What is something you do in your daily life that needs to change to be more like God? In verse 23, how can you let the Spirit renew your thoughts and attitude?
5. What are some other stories from the Old Testament that look toward Jesus providing salvation by dying on the cross? (John 3:14-16)
6. Read Titus 2:11-15. When you tell others about salvation, what do you tell them about your faith in Jesus?
7. Why was it important for the people to look at the bronze snake in Numbers 21:8-9? Was that need any greater than the need to share the Gospel with others today? What can you do about that?

Quotations to Consider:

Turn your eyes upon Jesus, look full in His wonderful face, and the things of earth will grow strangely dim, in the light of His glory and grace.- Chorus from Turn Your Eyes Upon Jesus by Helen H. Lemmel

"(The preacher said) 'Young man look to Jesus Christ. Look! Look! Look! You have nothing to do but look and live!' I saw at once the way of salvation. I know not what else he said—I did not take much notice of it—I was so possessed with that one thought . . . I had been waiting to do fifty things, but when I heard that word, "Look!" what a charming word it seemed to me. Oh! I looked until I could almost have looked my eyes away."
- C.H. Spurgeon regarding his own salvation.

Few things accelerate the peace process as much as humbly admitting our own wrongdoing and asking forgiveness."
- Lee Strobel

"Today, some Christians are content to merely exist until they die. They don't want to risk anything, to believe God, to grow or mature. They refuse to believe his Word, and have become hardened in their unbelief. Now they're living just to die." - David Wilkerson