



THE PROCLAIMER

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LIFTING UP THE BRAZEN SERPENT

⁸And the LORD said to Moses, "Make a fiery serpent, and set it on a pole; and every one who is bitten, when he sees it, shall live."⁹So Moses made a bronze serpent, and set it on a pole; and if a serpent bit any man, he would look at the bronze serpent and live (Numbers 21:8-9).

¹³No one has ascended into heaven but he who descended from heaven, the Son of man.

¹⁴And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of man be lifted up, ¹⁵that whoever believes in him may have eternal life (John 3:13-15).



Moses and the brazen serpent on a pole

You might think it a strange thing that I should write about snakes and such right in the midst of the Thanksgiving and upcoming Christmas season. But, I can never cease being amazed and exceedingly thankful for the mysterious ways that God has chosen to make known His revelation for the salvation of man. Truly, the message of the "serpent lifted up" is a reason to give thanks and without a doubt it is a gift so appropriate for the season.

First we must remember why the fiery serpents had bitten the people and inflicted their deadly venom. The people had called this judgment upon themselves by refusing to walk in the ways which God had directed them and because they despised the "bread of life" he had given to sustain them during their wanderings in the wilderness.

Rather than appreciate the "bread" given according to the wondrous wisdom of God, they quarreled, murmured, and complained. It is still within the fallen nature of humankind to prefer the fleshly meat of carnal reason, to fellowship with God. The "old man" desires to handle the fiery serpents of pride and lust and sin.

As we enter the Christmas season this year, how many people will chase after the spirit of this world and give little or no heed to the Spirit of God-- His way, His teaching, His gift? How many will follow after the ever tempting serpent and the empty promises with which he lures his prey, only to be bitten in the end with the sting of death?

The age old teaching of the scripture reveals again and again that the "wages of sin is death". The deadly venom of the serpent begins its destructive process immediately and if no healing



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remedy is found it continues its work in endless misery. The Scripture describes the ongoing horror as “being cast into outer darkness, “where the worm dies not, and the fire is never quenched”. Jesus himself speaks of the condemned going away into everlasting punishment, where there shall be weeping, and wailing, and gnashing of teeth.

I read a story about a man who was the keeper of reptiles in a Zoological Garden many years ago. One night after a time of revelry and a considerable amount of drink he decided to exhibit to his friends his supposed prowess with the snakes. He reached into a cage and took out a venomous snake and began to whirl it about his head. The snake did not bite. Encouraged by his success he said “Now the cobra”! He grabbed the deadly serpent and began to take the same action. The cobra suddenly struck out like a flash of lightning striking the man between the eyes. As blood began to stream down his face he cried for help. He was rushed to a hospital but by the time he arrived his speech was gone and his throat was constricting. His vision failed, then his hearing, his pulse sank and in one hour he was a corpse with a little mark on the bridge of his nose.

We might wonder, “What if the man bitten by the venomous serpent had been told that all he need do was look upon a piece of brass and he would be saved”. That’s exactly the provision God made in the days of Moses. No matter how close one was to death, obedience to the provision God had made, strange as it may have seemed, was the remedy which would save a life.

And so it is, God’s Word in the Old Testament scriptures paints for us a vivid picture which prefigures the ultimate New Testament truth. The Son of God, Jesus himself, would be hung on a pole. He who knew no sin would become sin and men would be invited to look upon the very thing that had caused their deadly dilemma. How utterly beyond the realm of human reason, that our

savior would allow himself to be so humiliated that he would actually be symbolized by a serpent. As it is written, Jesus would actually become the curse of sin which is passed on to all who engage in sin. But for those who will look upon Him, believe upon Him, deliverance is granted. Our enemies-- sin, death and the curse are themselves put to death.

¹⁴And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of man be lifted up, ¹⁵that whoever believes in him may have eternal life.”^o

¹⁶For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.

¹⁷For God sent the Son into the world, not to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through him. ¹⁸He who believes in him is not condemned; he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God (John 3:14-18)

Yes, strange indeed are the ways of God, especially if considered according to secular logic. But think of the effectiveness of so great a remedy. Those who have played with the deadliest of serpents, those who have been bitten and filled with fiery poison, those who have sunk into the blackest areas of human life, are always invited to come and gaze upon the crucified messiah. There in an instant, like a flash of lightning, pardon can be received, healing can be attained.

So, do we have reason to give thanks, a motive to rejoice? And if so, what should we who believe be about in this special season. Should we not be imitators of Moses? As Moses lifted up the saving serpent upon a pole, it is our privilege and call to lift up the gospel of Our Lord Jesus Christ. May the Spirit of the living God lead us gently on as we reach out to a world with so many needs.

SLOVAKIA/CZECH REPUBLIC OUTREACH OCT., 2003

Thanks again to all who were in prayer for our October outreach to Eastern Europe. Once again, coordinating efforts with Renewal Ministries, Tom was able to lead a team of seventeen for a very intense two weeks of evangelism and outreach.

Left: Fr. Benedict Groeschel shares his wisdom with the many who attended the discipleship school in Presov, Slovakia.



Right: Nearly 8000 people, many of them young people, gather for a Catholic rally in a sports arena in Slovakia.



Above: Tom and team members Msgr. Gregory Smith and Joan Triglia meet with His Eminence Miloslav Cardinal Vlk (2nd. From left). Real progress is being made as we seek to evangelize the very secular society in the Czech Republic. The Cardinal was very welcoming of our ministry there.