

Grace mercy and peace to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Well, we sprung ahead late night. But that is not the spring we look ahead to. We are eager for spring and warmth. But what about winter. We complain quite a bit about it. It was too cold. It was too long. Soon enough we will be complaining, "It's too hot. Summer is just too short." We people are never pleased. We complain, or find something to complain about.

Our Old Testament reading this morning strikes us as odd for a few reasons. First of all, it seems very severe for God to punish His wandering children so greatly for their complaint in the desert. But is God justified?

Here is an example. A father takes his children out for ice cream and a movie on a Saturday afternoon. Mother takes advantage of the quiet household to get some things done she was not able to get to during the week, what with all of the family activities going on. She finishes laundry and puts the kids clothes and linens away, but also tidies up their rooms. She also picks up in the living room, and even manages to get dinner on the table before her loved ones return home. She is so glad to see them back.

The husband comes in the door with the kids. He says "honey, I hope you don't mind but I ran into Hank and Miranda. They said they need a babysitter Monday, and since you weren't doing anything anyway, I said that you could watch their kids. Oh, what stinks?" The children shed coats and shoes in the doorway before the door is closed behind them, run to their rooms and start yanking toys off shelves, before being beckoned to come to the table for dinner. At which point the oldest says, "Ick, I can't stand this food." How does mom feel? Why? What would you say? Why did the mother even

bother after all of this? She did not expect any sort of rewards or praise. All of her hard work was out of her love for her family. How is she repaid? I do not plan on answering these questions, I just wanted to give you all something to think about.

Our Old Testament reading strikes us as odd for another reason. God deals severely with his rebellious children. They complain and God sends poisonous snakes into their midst to bite them. They repent to Moses and ask for a remedy. God tells Moses to make a bronze serpent, affix it to a pole and lift it up. The Israelites are told to just look at it. Just look at the snake? They aren't told a way to rid themselves of these vile menaces. Nor do they get antivenom to treat the bites. They deal with the bites of these snakes and are told to just look at a snake on a pole. That does strike us as odd. Why?

Really? Just looking? Beholding? How can just looking at something rescue a person from death? You'd think of a remedy for the poison, or maybe antivenom. But looking?

We grapple with the easy answer of just looking at the serpent. With just looking, just having faith in Jesus. But it is not the act of just looking at an object that saves. Holding onto the promise of God, saves the person. God says so, and so it must be. God tells us to do it, despite our logic, we are to do it. We cannot understand that Jesus paid the price for our countless sins, but God says He did, and so we believe He did. Pretty simple. But still our sinful pride says, "No I got to do something. I cannot just have forgiveness, just have eternal salvation for not doing something."

We have lifted ourselves up in our sinful pride. The Israelites lifted themselves up in their own eyes, and sinned against the Lord and against Moses. Fiery serpents bit them. He cast down the Israelites with the serpents' bites. God's Law beats

us down in the very same way, for we too are full of sinful pride. Sin and tribulation have brought us down to our knees, that we would repent of our sins, for without repentance and faith we are, as Paul says in our Epistle, “dead in trespasses” (Eph. 2:5a), and, as Christ says in our text, “He who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the Name of the only begotten Son of God. And this is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world, and men loved the darkness rather than the light, because their deeds were evil. For everyone practicing evil hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed” (vv. 18b-21).

When Christ, the beloved Light of the world, comes again on the Last Day, we will be raised. And not just raised back to life with all of the world, but we will be raised to everlasting life. We will rise to heavenly bliss.

“Then the LORD said to Moses, ‘Make a fiery serpent, and set it on a pole; and it shall be to everyone who is bitten, when he looks at it, shall live’” (Num. 21:8). The Israelites who were bitten and looked up to the serpent on the pole were saved. The Israelites confessed their sins and placed their trust in the word the Lord gave Moses, the word to erect the serpent on the pole. They were brought down, and the Lord lifted them up in His gracious love. “And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life” (vv. 14-15), our Lord says in our text.

Christ would be lifted up. He was nailed onto the Cross and lifted up. But that is not the end. He was raised up on the third day and exalted with His ascension. Jesus was lifted up so that we would look to Him in faithful trust. “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not

perish but have everlasting life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved” (vv. 16-17).

Jesus Christ came down from heaven to be born of the Blessed Virgin Mary, in order that He would be lifted up on the cross to die for the forgiveness of our sins. His dead, lifeless body was taken down from the cross to be laid in the tomb, in order that He would take it back up again by rising from the dead. The Lord, once lifted on the glorious tree, as He has promised, has drawn us now to Him. Christ our Good Shepherd has laid down His life for us His sheep to take it up again. God so loves us, that He sent His crown jewel to die in our place so that we would be with our beloved Father.

God delivers because He is the God of grace. We are not lost, deliverance was God’s plan. Not being lost because of sin and our sin was not God’s plan. It is God’s plan to rescue us from damnation. And He wants to rescue. He wants to save. He wants to save the lost and condemned. He wants you and your lost friends and lost neighbors. He calls them and you to behold Jesus and live. It matters not whether you have turned from grace your whole life, it matters not if you have scorned God and His children your whole life, it matters not if you have sinned so grossly, turn to the Lord, repent and believe, believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will live. All who look and believe in His death for sin and His resurrection, all who believe in Jesus will be saved. And it is in His name, Amen.