

DCF:

Two dads were in the post-op waiting room, waiting for their wives to come out with their newborn children. As usually happens, they struck up a conversation on how their lives were going to change. The first new dad was glum. “You know what this means, don’t you?” he said. “No more nice vacations to Cabo. I’ll have to give up my Porsche and buy a minivan. My life is over.” The first dad didn’t believe that a child could add anything good to his life.

The second dad? He said “This is going to be great! I get to see my child grow up and take his first step. I can’t wait to watch him play baseball or teach him how to ride a bike. I wonder what life will be like with him?” The second dad had faith that children would be a great blessing to him and his wife. When it comes to our approach to life, faith makes all the difference.

How’s your life today? Are you happy with the way things are going? Do you have peace in your heart, knowing that everything’s going to work out just fine? Or are you worried, stressed and just down right depressed? Today our Lord shows us that “**FAITH MAKES ALL THE DIFFERENCE!**” in life. Come with me to the Scriptures today and see how this is so. Faith causes us to confess our sins, but more importantly, faith in Jesus brings forgiveness and so much more. So, let’s go to the Old Testament book of Numbers.

Part One: Faith causes us to confess

The children of Israel were finally learning what God had been trying to teach them for years. We meet up with them today as they are about to enter the land of Canaan. It’s been 40 years of wandering, 400 years since their ancestors had left. And now, they were about to come home by the grace and power of God. Just before today’s section of Scripture, they found out that they had to make a slight detour because the nation of Edom wouldn’t let them travel through their land.

Maybe it was out of frustration. Maybe it was a lack of trust in God. Whatever it was, they started to complain about Moses and about God. “***Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the desert? There is no bread! There is no water! And we detest this miserable food!***”

Really? The Lord had kept them safe from their enemies all these years. He had fed them with bread from heaven and quail. He made sure they had drinking water for themselves and their flocks. He kept their sandals and clothes from wearing out. He had traveled with them in a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night. He spoke to them through Moses and reminded them again and again that He was bringing them into the land He promised.

And yet, because the Lord wasn’t moving fast enough and they were tired of the food He provided, they complained. They dredged up the same old tired conspiracy theory that had been floating around for over 40 years. “***Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the desert?***” In response, the Lord sent venomous snakes to wake them up, to turn them to repentance. As my grandfather once said “Some people need a tap on the shoulder. Some need a 2 by 4 upside the head.”

Do you see yourself in the attitude of these Israelites? How often do we complain about what God has given to us, and what He hasn’t give to us? For the past year, what did you focus on in your life? We couldn’t go to concerts. We couldn’t go out to restaurants like we did in the past. Vacation plans were altered. Why, even Disneyland was closed for some time. Even here at Messiah we missed booyah Sunday and baptismal cakes. We missed hearing the kids at Christmas singing praises to the Lord. We missed family get togethers and informal nights out with friends. Did we complain, or did we trust our Lord to take care of us? Faith makes all the difference when adversity comes into our lives, doesn’t it?

It sure did with the Israelites in today’s lesson. They were finally learning what God had been trying to teach them for 40 years. Admit your sin and repent. Notice how quickly they turned from complaining to repentance. They didn’t argue with God about the snakes. They didn’t try and reason their way out of it. “***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.’***”

Faith causes us to confess when we have sinned. A faith in God, a belief in who He is, moves us to

see and believe in His will. Faith means agreeing with God when He tells us something is contrary to His will. Faith means confessing I'm wrong and God is right. Faith means we know who God is. Faith means knowing we are sinful. Faith means confessing our sins.

What sins does your faith move you to confess before the Lord? Perhaps it's the sin of greed, wanting more for yourself and less for the Lord's work. Perhaps it's the sin of envy, being upset that your neighbor has a nicer car or earns more than you. Or, maybe it's the sin of jealousy because your classmate is more popular than you. Or, maybe it's the sin of pride because you don't get your way all the time. If you have faith in God, you know that these things are sins and displease the Lord of heaven and earth. And your faith will move you to confess and repent of those sins, won't it?

Believers confess their sins to their Lord because they also know, they also have faith, that the Lord will forgive them of all sin.

Part Two: Faith brings forgiveness

That's the main message of our Scripture lesson today. Faith brings forgiveness. Faith saves. God uses an object lesson - a bronze snake - to focus us and the Israelites on this fact. As we take a look at this bronze snake, we'll see the parallels with Jesus. As the snake on a pole gave physical life to anyone who believed in God's words, Jesus on the cross gives eternal life to those who believe in God's gift of forgiveness.

Now, please make note of an important fact. There was nothing magical about that snake. It was just made of bronze. It didn't do anything. It was not the snake that saved, but belief in God's promise. It was faith, believing in God's promise that saved anyone bitten by the vipers. People wouldn't look at the snake if they didn't believe the message. They would die. But people who believed in God's words would, and they would be saved from physical death. Healing came not from the serpent but from faith in God's Word.

Do you see the parallel with Jesus? It is faith in Jesus that saves. Believing what He did. Believing that He paid for our sins on the cross. Believing that God credits His payment to our spiritual account. Believing that God will give us eternal life because of what Jesus did. That saves us from hell. That gives us the life in heaven we don't deserve. Faith makes all the difference. Not just in the life to come, but even right here and now.

Oh, we might be tempted to complain about the things we don't have, like those Israelites. But because we do have faith in Jesus, we know that everything we have is from our Lord. And that makes all the difference in our approach to life.

Why, just take a look at what the Lord has given to us! We have forgiveness. The Lord is always with us, talking to us through His Word. We have our life, our health and our friends. Sure, life hasn't been as nice as we want it to be this past year, but we still do have them. Thanks to God. Perhaps God has used this past year to reset our priorities. We've had more time to pray, more time to read His Word, more time to spend in Bible study. Faith brings forgiveness, and being forgiven means peace and the desire to serve our Lord with our lives.

Of course, forgiveness doesn't mean we avoid all the consequences of sin on earth. The Israelites who were bitten and died before Moses put the bronze snake up on a pole remained dead. And, even though we know all our sins are paid for, we still often suffer the consequences of our actions. Take for instance a man who gambled away his paycheck. He repented of wasting that money and God forgave that sin. But it didn't mean he got that paycheck back. Or a young lady who gossiped about her friend. Her friend found out and broke off that friendship. She repented of her gossip and God forgave that sin. But it didn't mean that the friendship was restored to what it was before. We know that we might have to pay the earthly price for our sins, but not the eternal price.

And that's the thing that makes all the difference in our lives. We know our Savior and what He has done. We're comforted, knowing that in heaven all the consequences of our sinful nature will be erased. We know we are at peace with God. We can smile, rejoice, praise and work for Him because we know that **"FAITH MAKES ALL THE DIFFERENCE!"**

AMEN