

Trust Christ and Live!

- † Impatient sin (vv.4-5)
- † Humble confession (vv.6-7)
- † Miraculous life (vv.8-9)

In the Name of Jesus, God's sign on a pole, dear fellow penitents:

How was your week? Did anyone have to pull up stakes and move your tent and all your belongings a few miles down the road? All the kids are saying, "No, Pastor, we live in houses and our moms and dads drive cars." Yes, my dear friends. Maybe you "pulled out" of the driveway this morning, but even without checking the parking lot, I'm sure no one came in a wagon pulled by horses. Your cars have heaters and padded seats, maybe even leather if you like. Rain or shine, you'll stay dry and cool, or warm and cozy once the engine warms up. But no matter what you drive, someone else has a nicer car. One man parked his new Mercedes at the airport; someone plowed into the side. New car...now old car.

More important than cars is your health. If we were at med school studying diseases, this one is the worst, the most deadly epidemic to strike the human race. The symptoms include complaining, but the disease underneath is much, much worse. We're surrounded by snake oil salesmen each with his own cure. But we will need the Great Physician to cure this. Do you **Trust** His skill? Do you want to **Live**?

† Impatient sin (vv.4-5)

Thursday was "one of those days." Morning pastors' meeting, too tired to study. Six hours of prep. crammed into two. Coming to church with drivers texting or too busy to drive. Praying all the way, but you know what really got me? I picked up this bulletin and read the sermon theme with this first part: **Impatient sin**. I'm hearing Sandra Bullock, FBI agent *Miss Congeniality*: "Pasto, having a bad day?"

You don't have to live in a desert, trudging behind the dust of a few million Israelites for forty years to fall into **Impatient sin**. We don't need two freight trains a mile long to deliver enough food or another with tanker cars 1800 miles long just to supply water for us and our animals. We can plan our days – not wait every morning to see if the LORD's glory cloud lifts above the tabernacle or not. No one knew whether they were coming or going until the LORD signaled with that cloud. Forty years earlier they nearly lost the Promised Land. For forty years all those rebellious men have left their bones buried in the desert. Now the Israelites are back at Kadesh on the southern boundary, but things aren't going so well. Moses' sister Miriam died. Moses and Aaron struck the rock in anger to get water, costing them the Promised Land. They won't get to enter after four decades of service. Then Aaron dies – and this is still the chapter just before our text. Worst of all for the people, the nation called Edom, descended from Jacob's brother Esau, has secured their border. "Go around!" is the message of Edom's hostile army.

So you've been walking all your life, not driving in a car. You've been eating nothing but manna off the desert floor, not enjoying fine restaurants or fast food. Your meat has been nothing but quail. And, yes, it tastes like chicken. Now your relatives just informed you that due to their stubbornness, you must add hundreds of miles and more months to your journey over rocks and sand. Are we having fun yet? Can you understand why the people *spoke against God and against Moses*? "**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!**" Literally, the Hebrew original says, "...into God and into Moses...." It cut to the heart for the LORD and His faithful prophet. God had been so patient. Moses so faithful. Now this.

† Humble confession (vv.6-7)

Does this sound a little harsh? *“Then the LORD sent venomous [fiery] snakes among them; they bit the people and many Israelites died.”* Can’t you just hear the Bible critics complaining about that? “Let me get this straight. God’s chosen nation of Israel complained, so God sent venomous snakes to kill them for it? Are we all going to die just for complaining about burgers and fries?”

Here’s where we need the Great Physician to teach us something about soul care. Literally, it said, *“The soul of the people became discouraged / impatient....”* What we see as just a little complaining was like a cancerous mole. Melanoma, the most serious cancer, had spread throughout their vital organs and metastasized in their hearts and souls. Underneath all that complaining was a the deadly sin of discontent. The Holy Spirit’s finding is true 100% of the time: *“The soul who sins will die.”* (Ezekiel 18:4 NASB) In order to save our souls, God has to surgically remove our sin.

The Master Surgeon was successful. *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.” So Moses prayed for the people.*

Can you see what to do with those cancerous moles of complaining whenever they appear? Bring them to God quicker than you would run to your favorite doctor. This is the God who created you and always wants the best for you. You and I will never understand all His ways, any more than we can understand the education and skill of a surgeon. But our Master Surgeon can operate where no x-ray or MRI can even see. Our Master Surgeon has a cure that heals 100% of the time. God gives...

† Miraculous life (vv.8-9)

It’s not the way I would do it; God’s way always works. After their surgery, He listened to Moses’ prayer for the people, then offered His prescription to save their bodies and souls. God had Moses hang a sign on a pole. Made from bronze, it looked like the snakes that were biting the people. And here’s His dosage instructions: *“Anyone who is bitten can look at [the bronze snake] and live.”*

Have you been aware of the poisonous venom of sin in your life? Is your soul discouraged to the point that discontent seethes down deep in your soul? Are you struggling just to get by? Then travel by the Spirit from the desert to Jerusalem on a quiet night 1500 years later. One confused soul doctor named Nicodemus asked the Master Surgeon Himself how anyone can really live. Here’s what He said, *“Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the wilderness, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, ¹⁵so that everyone who believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. ¹⁶For God so loved the world that he gave his only-begotten Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish, but have eternal life. ¹⁷For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.”* (W.P.)

Fiery serpents are nothing compared to the sudden, eternal fires of Judgment Day. They will come like a raging prairie fire, driven by the winds of the Lord’s pent up anger. But God’s weather report in the Bible has us ready. He has made a backfire around our hearts. Like a rancher who does a controlled burn around his buildings and barns, we are safe in this island of grace and forgiveness in Jesus.

God doesn’t just want to stop our complaining. He wants more than an end to our discontent. He wants to make our hearts holy content, deeply satisfied in Jesus our Savior. Next time you kids are riding with your parents on the freeway, look at a flatbed semi as you pass. If the trailer is empty, it bows upward. That way a load will level it out. Likewise, God lifts us up with gratitude and thanks for all His loving kindness and tender mercy. And when life’s load gets heavy on your trailer, it levels out and you ride strong. A grateful heart goes a long way with Jesus at the wheel. From the desert to the sky, **Trust Christ and Live!** Amen.