

## Jesus and the Bronze Serpent (4<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Lent, Year B)

### 2 Chronicles 36:14-16, 19-23: The Destruction and Rebuilding of Jerusalem

1. The Temple Defiled: the people “polluted” the “house of the Lord” (36:14)
2. The Prophets Rejected: they mocked the “messengers” of God (36:16)
3. Destruction of Jerusalem Temple: the Babylonians “burned the house of God” (36:19)
4. Babylonian Exile: people of Jerusalem taken into exile (587 B.C.)
5. Return from Exile: King Cyrus of Persia’s decree to rebuild Jerusalem (536 B.C.).
6. “Let Him Go Up”: last words of the Jewish Bible; “let him go up to the Temple!”

### Psalm 137—Let My Tongue Be Silenced, If I Forget You, Jerusalem

1. Song of the Jewish Exiles: “By the waters of Babylon, we sat down and wept...” (v. 1)
2. Never Forget: “If I forget you Jerusalem, let my right hand wither!” (v. 5)
3. Jerusalem: “I set Jerusalem... above my highest joy!” (v. 6)

### Ephesians 2:4-10—By Grace You Have Been Saved

1. “By grace (Greek *charis*) you have been saved through faith (Greek *pistis*)” (v. 8)
2. “Not because of works (Greek *ergōn*), lest any man should boast” (v. 9)

### John 3:14-21—Jesus and the Bronze Serpent

1. Typology of the Bronze Serpent (see Numbers 21:1-9)

#### The Bronze Serpent

1. Bronze Serpent “lifted up”
2. Whoever looks upon the Serpent  
→ is saved from death  
(cf. Numbers 21:9)

#### The Crucifixion

1. Son of Man is “lifted up”
2. Whoever “believes” in Jesus  
→ has “eternal life”  
(John 3:14-15)

2. John 3:16: “For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son...”
3. Salvation: God sent the Son not to “condemn” the world but to “save” it
4. Light vs. Darkness: people loved “darkness”—b/c their deeds were “evil”

### The Living Tradition

St. Thomas Aquinas: St. Augustine says (*De Trin.* xiii.): *There was no other more suitable way of healing our misery than by the Passion of Christ...* In the first place, *man knows thereby how much God loves him, and is thereby stirred to love Him in return*, and herein lies the perfection of human salvation; hence the Apostle says (Rom. 5:8): *God commendeth His charity towards us; for when as yet we were sinners ... Christ died for us...* Fourthly, because man is all the more bound to refrain from sin, when he bears in mind that he has been redeemed by Christ’s blood, according to 1 Cor. 6:20: *You are*

*bought with a great price: glorify and bear God in your body...* It was accordingly more fitting that we should be delivered by Christ's Passion than simply by God's good-will. (Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* 3.46.4).

## Questions for Discussion and Reflection (4<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Lent, Year B)

1. What do you think of the analogy Jesus draws between the Bronze Serpent of Numbers 21 and his own Crucifixion? Why does Jesus pick such a strange Old Testament passage to prefigure his own death and resurrection?

---

---

---

2. Read Psalm 137 and try to imagine yourself as one of the Judean exiles. How would you have felt when you saw the city of God and the Temple of the Lord destroyed by the Babylonians? What would you have thought about God's promises to be with his people forever?

---

---

---

3 John 3:16 may be the most famous verse in the Bible. But what does the verse mean in context? According to St. Thomas Aquinas, why does God choose to save the world through the crucifixion rather than some other means?

---

---

---

### For Further Study

1. Joel C. Elowsky, *John* (2 vols.; Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture, New Testament IVa-b; Downers Grove: IVP, 2006), 120-130.