

## A Hungry Snake

Scripture: Exodus 7:1 – 13

Live Streaming Service for 1/16/22

In the children section of a book store you will find dozens of books with titles like - fuzzy bunnies, fluffy bears, hungry caterpillars, naughty puppies, happy duckies, runaway kitties, talking trains, transforming trucks, walking cars, and smiling airplanes. But there is a noticeable lack of cute, charming, and sentimental books about snakes!

Look around at your stuffed animals that most toddlers have, you will find bears, bunnies, and many animals; but you will find few snakes!

There is a reason for this, snakes are icky! Now there is a term that I need to define. 'Icky' is a technical term meaning unbelievably cold, slimy, scaly, and slithery with spooky eyes and lethal looking fangs.

It has been well documented by behavioral psychologists that the vast majority of people on the planet have an innate aversion to snakes and any snakelike animals. This is not hard to believe, let us take a poll within this church - how many of you have an innate aversion to snakes and any snakelike animals? (Pause)

It is more than a little difficult to develop warm feelings for a creature that can hide almost anywhere. It is more than a little difficult to develop warm feelings for a creature that climb almost anything. It is more than a little difficult to develop warm feelings for a creature that wait indefinitely for you to come past.

Then when you come past, the snake can bite you with poison or the snake can squeeze you to death! Certainly not all snakes can do this, but we fear snakes!

Given this deep and widespread aversion to snakes, it is truly remarkable that human beings also have an irresistible fascination with snakes. From a movie 'Snakes on the Plane' to the creation story in Genesis, we are in thrall by snakes. There is no simple explanation for this. Fear and fascination often go hand in hand, but perhaps more than snakes themselves, the human preoccupation with snakes has more to do with their symbolism.

In the most ancient of civilizations the snake was a representation of fertility and life. The shedding of the snake's skin was viewed as a sign of rebirth, transformation, and resurrection from death to new life.

In the ancient Far East, the snake was associated with guardianship and protection. Snakes are fierce and effective fighters. There is little evidence of fear within that culture.

Snake venom which is a powerful poison can be transformed into many modern medicines. Snake venom is often viewed as divine judgement, a powerful chemical, and a mysterious life force.

And because snakes so closely resemble roots and tree limbs, many believed snakes to be plants that came to life. And their powerful venom was extracted by healers just as one would collect roots and saps.

In ancient times snakes were looked at differently than today!

The attitudes relating snakes to deceitfulness, deception, and craftiness is a modern idea. The snake in ancient times was a source of wisdom. The hypnotic gaze of pythons and cobras lent to this belief. The hooded eyes of many types of snakes help this belief also. In almost every ancient culture of the ancient world, there is evidence of cultic and religious veneration of snakes and serpents.

Ancient cultures loved snakes!

In our scripture reading today from Exodus 7:1 – 13, there is evidence of a strong ambivalence toward snakes and serpents. Throughout our shared Hebrew and Christian history, snakes have been both heroes and villains in some of our most beloved stories.

In the Garden of Eden, snakes are look upon as a villainous serpent. The snake in the Garden of Eden is Satan himself! But today we look at Moses and Aaron as they invoked God's power to turn a staff into a snake.

The confrontation between Moses and Pharaoh are truly epic battles of wills. Moses, the representative of God, and his friend Aaron face off against the most powerful man on earth, Pharaoh. The beauty of these stories is that they are so completely scripted by God. God tells Moses what to do but he also tells Moses what the result will be ahead of time. Moses enters the contest, the battle of wills, knowing Pharaoh will have his heart hardened and refuse to let the Hebrew people go. This is a classic style of story-telling. This is story telling - my God can beat up your God. This is very popular in the Hebrew Bible.

Moses requests the release of the Hebrew slaves, and Pharaoh says - 'Prove to me why I should!' or Pharaoh says - 'Perform a wonder to let them go!' Aaron tosses his staff on the ground and it turns into a snake. Cocky old Pharaoh summons his sorcerers and magicians and they toss down three of their rods which turn into snakes. Probably Pharaoh was thinking - 'whatever you can do, my guys can do better!' Pharaoh is ready to call the contest a draw but then Aaron's staff/snake consumes the other three staff/snakes. This is game, set, & match. But Pharaoh's heart stays hardened.

On the surface this is such a satisfying story. It is much like David & Goliath. The underdog prevails in a spectacular fashion. But on a deeper level this story symbolizes the ongoing relationship of God and God's people to the world.

The Hebrew people spent most of their history in slavery to a more powerful nation. Politically, economically, and militarily; the nation of Israel was the underdog. For every weapon they could raise, there was someone else who could raise three. For every mighty act they could perform, there was someone whose heart remained hardened towards them. For every cry of justice or freedom the chosen people could raise, there was an oppressor nation just waiting to deny them. The people of Israel were the one snake.

It is easy to miss the meaning of the simple passage for the miraculous event it describes. It is easy to miss the meaning when we get lost in the magic. Far beyond the ability to do magic tricks rests a much greater power. It is the power that comes from deep trust and assurance that God is in control. This assurance allows even the most timid and unsure to stand before the most powerful people on earth with courage and confidence. This power reminds us that no matter what we might see with our eyes, the wisdom of God's heart will prevail.

The snake in our passage is a hungry snake that symbolizes God's strength and promise. For those in the time of Moses, the promise endures. That is the promise that true faith swallows up fear and trust in God is the greatest power of all.

It is easy for us to miss the meaning of a miraculous event. It is easy to miss the meaning when we get lost in this world. We need to recognize the power that comes from a deep trust and the assurance that God is in control. This assurance allows even the most timid and unsure of us to stand with courage and confidence. This assurance reminds us that no matter what we might see with our eyes, the wisdom of God's heart will prevail.

For us, the promise endures. That is the promise that true faith swallows up fear and trust in God is the greatest power of all.

Let us have a true faith in God that will swallow up any of our fears. Let us trust in God because he is the greatest power of all.