**NUMBERS 21 - ‘THE KINGS ROAD AND THE LOOK THAT’S SAVES’**

The America's Cup is back in action on our doorstep, despite what you think about the government’s financial contribution, all defend our hold on sports oldest trophy. What I learned from the last challenge was that it too is all about the numbers!  Do you remember when we lost the cup when we were about seven races up and only had to win the last one?  Or when we had cyclists on bicycles to speed up the hydraulics when turning corners? And now it's all about the numbers of knots above the waterline on skids. So, we are again going to learn about *velocity made good,*the comparative speed against distance to the next mark, it’s all about numbers.

I think God likes numbers too! So much so that He named a book of the Bible just that.  Jesus told stories about numbers. The 99 sheep safely in the sheep pen and the one that went missing. The fish that were caught after a fruitless night’s work were counted,153 of them.  The people on the mountainside who got miraculously fed by a small boy’s lunch, 5 loaves and 2 fish, and then they counted 12 basketfuls left over. But, the number which is most important in this book is the number two. The two men who believed in God and that occupying this new land was possible. The rest took exit ramps, even their leader Moses did too. He was eliminated by his anger at the rebellious and complaining people, and instead of speaking to the rock as he was instructed he struck it with his staff.

Before I look at today’s story in chapter 21, I want to go back to a verse in chapter 20:17 *“We will stay on the Kings (main) road and never leave it until we have passed through your territory”.* This morning I think this is a word for some of you – it’s a declaration that I want to make for my life this morning and I suspect for many of you. I have spent time speaking about the seven off- ramps to this road. But what does *staying on the road to life look like?*

1. I want to travel through – to my destination, not turn off.
2. I want to live well and generously - without taking what is not mine.
3. I want to Walk in obedience, repentance and forgiveness - how I live.
4. I want to understand the waypoints of my story

I want to talk for a few minutes about your journey, the story of your life. The *themes* of your story, the unique journey you have trod. What you have *learned about yourself* on the way? How you have *discerned* the way of God in your life. What have you *understood about the way God guides* you?

The Kings Road is not an easy Road. Here are some of the things that happen on this road.

* You might *face enemies and people who oppose* you; world, flesh, and Devil. Even some who you think are with you might turn against you.
* You might find yourself *in the company of people you differ* from but who are going in the same direction, diversity of the kingdom. I think we have much to learn about this topic. Unity is not uniformity!
* You might discover that *your personal comfort and satisfaction are not as high on God's agenda for you* as you being shaped and formed into his image. That God will allow you to go through valleys and threatening territory, to shape you deep beneath the surface of your life.
* You certainly will discover that the *inside of you is not as saved or converted as you think*. Every one of us still longs for a quick way through opposition and discomfort to the destination. We also pray; Lord have you forgotten about me? Have you bought me into this wilderness to die out here? Did our leaders make the right choices?

But can you say with me verse 17; Lord I will stay on the Kings Road!

Because another king walked this road too. The king’s road goes through some pretty rough territory. Are you sure you want to take it? Just for a moment I want to take you on a road trip through some of the places that Jesus walked.

1. **Through Samaria** – places we *might not like to go through* and/or stop by because of our prejudice or social standing. Samaria was a place where no self-respecting Jew would visit because of the stigma associated with those people. But there are times when God asks us to travel to the Samaria’s of this world, because there are thirsty people waiting to hear the message of life.
2. **Through Galilee** – *crowds* demand your energy, and we feel we lack the capacity to love more or help more or keep going. Jesus kept among the crowds of people. The mount of Transfiguration is believed to be close to Galilee – this was where Peter suggested they build a shelter but Jesus replied - "I must go down!" On another occasion in John 9, he said – “I must do the works of him who sent me while it is the day, for the night comes when no man can work”!
3. **Through Gethsemane** - where everyone flees and *leaves you alone. Lord, we will never leave you! But they fled for their lives, stood at a distance, and denied Him when a slave girl identified them as being one of the Jesus people.* Some years ago I spent a week of my sabbatical in Jerusalem and I walked the Via Dolorosa. There are many stops on the way but the one I found most moving was the church of suffering beside the old garden of Gethsemane.  I think there I saw something of a God who suffers too with his creation. Who does not sit in heaven commanding the world – but who knows our pains of loss, injustice, abandonment, disappointment. There on those hard wooden seats beside Gethsemane’s old knotty olives trees, I understood something. God can walk with me through everything I face, He has been there.
4. **Through Calvary**– *where you die* to your life and your preferences and surrender everything to the Father. Not my will but Yours, Father. And it’s a prayer we pray until the last day we breathe here on this earth. You know I just love older people who have been on the King's road for many years.

But to start and stay on the king’s road you need to understand the meaning of Numbers 21. The snake on the pole is still used today in medicine. The World Health Organisation uses it in their logo, as does the New Zealand Medical Council. Greek mythology calls this the rod of Asclepius, the god of healing. Two theories of the origins of this are that it comes from an ancient Egyptian practice for treating parasitic worms. A papyrus from 1500 BC tells us that doctors would make a cut in the skin just above where the worm was traveling, as the worm made its way it would be wound around a stick until it had climbed out. Doctors who offered this service would put a sign outside their houses of a worm on a stick. The second origin comes from Numbers 21, this story we read today, where Moses puts a bronze snake on a pole, and those who looked would be healed from the venom of the snake bite. But it’s a certain type of look, not just a glance, it’s a look of:

**Admission** (*faith* *and trust) – of the heart, not the head.*

Just as Jesus was lifted up on a cross to die, your look of faith asserts - yes Jesus you did that for me. I don’t fully understand it but I believe that somehow you did this for me, and my heart says thank you. I Look to you for what I need – forgiveness for my sin and past, and healing to come in the core of my being. It’s a look not of the head, but of the heart.

**Acknowledgment** (Insight) *into your condition of needing healing.*

Everyone who had been infected with the venom needed healing.  In our hearts, we know this. We know we are broken inside, we know that inside each of us lurks thirst and desires that are deadly. And we need help. It’s simply a look of acknowledgment, that I need help and you cannot fix yourself.

**Abandonment** *to any other remedy*

Moses put up this bronze snake on a pole and that was it, there was no other remedy offered. If you didn’t like it – you turned away and died. And friends here is the story Jesus told Nicodemus and today comes to us. You must be born again of the Spirit and this is the only answer. Not more knowledge, not more effort, not more research. It’s a spiritual rebirth that comes from the faith in Jesus and his offer to you. That's why when God speaks and draws you to himself – you better respond. Because you cannot come to God *unless he draws you* by His Spirit.

The **pronouncement** of your condition is terminal, the diagnosis is serious. God’s **prescription** is Jesus – and what he did for you. The **prognosis** is guaranteed – there is hope for your condition. But you need to ‘Look’ – and make your own what God offers. God has done everything he can for you, but now it is your choice, to see it and claim it. But this look is not just the start of the journey it is also the way to stay on the pathway. Many, many times I have had to keep finding the on-ramp back onto the pathway to life. And I have had to do the 3 A's, many times.

**ADMIT** – left the path and need to return

**ACKNOWLEDGE** – that the search I have been on has not bought life

**ABANDON** – Any other strategy and turn again towards God in repentance

**There are two key New Testament verses that link to this story:**

*“Just as Moses lifted up the bronze snake in the wilderness – so Jesus (Son of Man) must be lifted up, so that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life”.*   **John 3:14-15** *“If I be lifted up I will draw all men to myself that where I am they may be also”.* **John 12:32**

The language used here is a metaphor:

Firstly, being **lifted up on the cross to die.** The bodies nailed to wood and then lifted up and dropped into a hole in the ground.

Then he was **lifted up to new life**. On Easter Sunday by the Father when the powers of hell could not keep him down, he was bodily resurrected from that tomb where he had lain and just the grave clothes remained! And for fifty days he walked and talked with his disciples about the kingdom and explained to them the true purpose of his death and resurrection and mission. And he was **lifted up before their eyes**. Doctor Luke tells us that they went to Bethany for what we call the ascension,where Jesus left them and was ‘lifted’ up into heaven, taken from them and they returned to Jerusalem filled with great joy! You know what this means? There is an advocate for us in heaven this morning.

I want to lead you in a prayer this morning as we close this message:

*Lord Jesus, I acknowledge my need of you. I need you to repair and restore me into the person who you designed me to be. I have sinned and my broken life needs healing. I ask that you forgive me, and begin and continue the process of rebuilding my life. I believe you are the Son of God and I look to you and ask that you bring your healing into my life. Today, may I experience a spiritual rebirth that brings me into your kingdom.*

*Lord Jesus, I’ve left the pathway to life a number of times. I see it now as I have taken off ramps because of fear, compromise or disappointment. Today I’m coming back to you to ask you to forgive and restore me and help me set my course again towards the destination that is you. Give me strength and wisdom to make daily choices in my life that will reflect this, in Jesus Name. Amen.*