

Thursday, May 11, 2017, at 8:00 a.m., Ron and Grace headed back home from their morning run. Grace stopped off at a neighbor's yard and relieved herself in a liriopie patch. Ron put a dog waste bag in his left hand and carefully walked into the liriopie -- trying not to injure the plants.

As he reached down, suddenly he felt a sting like a fire ant or a wasp. He saw small bit of black residue in the area of the sting and quickly brushed it off. A trickle of blood flowed from two pinholes on the side of his left hand roughly a half inch apart. Swelling started immediately. Grace could tell that something was wrong. Ron never saw what bit him. He wiped off the blood on the dew-drenched grass, ran home, made quick provisions for Grace's day, and then rushed off to the emergency room.

By 8:30, at the hospital front desk, Ron's swelling already severely impaired his ability to sign his name. He was given antivenom, but after receiving one vial, he descended into an allergic reaction. He cried, "Tingling in hands and feet," and a moment later, "I'm blacking out!" The nurse rushed to the room and found his blood pressure and heart rate were critically low. They stopped the antivenom. He recovered immediately. They moved him to the ICU and resumed the antivenom with prednisone to counteract the reaction. Twenty-four hours later, he was fine.

Ron later described the experience this way. "I was on my way out. But it doesn't really matter. As the Apostle Paul said, 'To live is Christ, and to die is gain.'" If you know the Lord, if He's your Savior, there's no sting in death, and there's no fear in dying.

Speaking of snakes, this has certainly been a *venomous* year. We've witnessed a plethora of them slithering from the slime in politics, entertainment, and the news media. The Bible says, "the poison of asps is under their lips." That's the tragic condition of fallen man. Satan came to Eve as a serpent and infected the human race with the deadly poison of s-s-sin. Even the religious leaders Jesus' time followed and taught "doctrines of devils." John the Baptist and Jesus each called these hypocrites "a generation of vipers."

If you think about it, snakes play a key role in the Bible. The serpent made its first appearance in Genesis 3:1. Next, it appeared before Pharaoh and then in the wilderness as a judgment against the grumbling Israelites. Moses was told to make a replica of the venomous serpent and put it on a pole. Whoever was bitten and looked at that image, would live. The AMA still uses this symbol today.

Solomon likened alcohol to a poisonous snake. It stings to taste, dulls the senses, and ultimately leads to destruction. The serpent appears again in Revelation chapter 12 where he's unmasked as the Devil and Satan -- the deceiver. Just as this serpent first appeared three chapters into the Bible, he made his final appearance three chapters from the end. Without him and the corruption he began, peace and tranquility of the new creation ultimately return to engulf eternity future.

But, you say, what do snakes have to do with Christmas? In John 3:14, Jesus tells Nicodemus the meaning of that strange image Moses made. He says it's a symbol of the Son of God dying to pay the penalty for sin for those who look to Him in faith. He became s-s-sin for us on that pole lifted up that we might have life. So it is a joyous thought after all! Despite being surrounded by vipers, we can say with the Apostle Paul, "Thanks be to God for His unspeakable Gift."

Merry Christmas!
Ron and Betsy