

Thought for the Day 15th July - John Reed

Read Revelation 12:7-12

Last week, police in Queensland spotted a man doing 123 km/h in his ute. When they pulled him over, he told them a story they found a little hard to believe.¹ Apparently, as he was doing 100 km/h down the road quite legally, a snake – he suspected a brown snake – had come through the floor around his gear stick, wrapped itself around his legs and started to strike out at him. He said he had fought the snake off with a seatbelt and a knife, and was worried that he had been bitten. As I said, the police officers were a little sceptical at first – until they found the cut and bleeding brown snake in the back of his ute! They called an ambulance, and it turned out the man had not been bitten, but was suffering from shock.

Snakes are scary things. Especially for us here in Australia where, by some reports, we have 21 of the 25 most venomous snakes in the world – a list that includes the Eastern Brown, the Western Brown, the Mainland Tiger Snake, the Inland Taipan, the Coastal Taipan, and the Mulga Snake.

So, we can relate very well to the imagery that the Bible uses of snakes. Almost universally, they are a symbol of evil and danger. It starts with the evil one in the form of a serpent in the Garden of Eden (Genesis 3), tempting Adam and Eve. It includes the plague of snakes that afflicted the wayward and disbelieving Israelites during the Exodus (Numbers 21; 1 Corinthians 10:9), and numerous warnings that Israel's sinfulness will result in terrible events metaphorically described as attacks of snakes (Psalm 58:4; Proverbs 23:32; Jeremiah 8:17; Isaiah 30:6). Jesus even depicts the Pharisees as a "brood of vipers" (Matthew 23:33).

Jesus also gives his followers the authority to handle and trample on snakes with no harm coming to them (Mark 16:8; Luke 10:19). Now, I personally think he meant this metaphorically, not literally. That is, this is not an invitation to play with any snakes you find in your garden (or your ute), but rather an assurance that God, in his grace, provides us a way to overcome and resist the work of the evil one.

We see a sample of this in the incident in the Exodus, when Moses set up the bronze serpent on a pole, and anyone who looked to it was saved and lived (Numbers 21:8-9). Jesus refers to this in John 3:14-15, as a foretaste of what will happen when he is "lifted up" on the cross, as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness – whoever believes in him will have eternal life. The final demonstration of this is here in Revelation where the great dragon, "that ancient serpent who is called the devil and Satan," is thrown down and defeated and the salvation and power and kingdom and authority of Christ has come.

So, whatever snakes are writhing their way around your life, look to the cross and find there the victory that Jesus offers you.

¹ <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2020-07-07/queensland-ute-driver-survives-snake-attack-at-100kph/12430514>