

Lifted Up

Introduction: Today one of the most profound and beautifully powerful portraits of Calvary, and Christ's atoning work on our behalf.

Wilderness Narrative

- 38 years of wandering was over (1 year at Sinai, 38 in the wilderness)
- From Kadesh to Plains of Moab they traveled (here Moses would recount the Decalogue, bless the people, and give his farewell discourse)
- The complaining had not stopped even after all this time—against God and Moses (no food/water) “our soul loathes this worthless breed.” (true today)
- The Lord sent fiery serpents to bite them, many died.
- Came to Moses (note they confessed) “we have sinned!”—against you and God.
- Asked for intercession (he had done this often and they knew it was effective).
- Moses prayed—God directed

Then the Lord said to Moses, "Make a fiery serpent, and set it on a pole; and it shall be that everyone who is bitten, when he looks at it, shall live." Numbers 21:8 NKJV

- Moses obeyed—the people healed

So Moses made a bronze serpent, and put it on a pole; and so it was, if a serpent had bitten anyone, when he looked at the bronze serpent, he lived. Numbers 21:9 NKJV

Specific Observations

1. Man's need is always the occasion for the display of God's grace and mercy.

NOTE: Once Israel could say “we have sinned” God could act!

C.H. McIntosh—“When Israel murmured, the serpent's bite was the answer' when Israel confessed, God's grace was the answer.”

IMPORTANT: The very image of that which had done the harm was set up to be the channel through which divine grace could flow in rich abundance to the poor, wounded sinners.

2. Faith was/is the instrument whereby the sinner found healing for their sinful souls! “Look and live!”

- a. Had to look, not at himself, not his wounds, not at others, but directly and exclusively at God's remedy.
- b. If one refused—there was nothing but death for them.

Great Application

Rehearsing excuses, looking to others, churches, denominations—no help in any of these. Must look to Jesus to live!

- If an Israelite doubted or wondered or thought it too ridiculous to look at serpent—death would occur. Same thing for us.
- Each had to look for himself—not another and no one could look for them!

NO ONE IS SAVED BY PROXY!

FAITH

- Looking at the brazen serpent with assurance
- Looking at the cross with confidence

Faith is "the gaze of the soul upon a saving God." (A.W. Tozzer)

Now to the New Testament text

- Jesus to Nicodemus—ruler of the Jews
- Came to Jesus at night—respected Him as a teacher from God
- But not enough

Jesus answered and said to him, "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." John 3:3 NKJV

- Inquiring of Nicodemus

Nicodemus said to Him, "How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born?" 5 Jesus answered, "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. 6 That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. 7 Do not marvel that I said to you, 'You must be born again.' 8 The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear the sound of it, but cannot tell where it comes from and where it goes. So is everyone who is born of the Spirit." John 3:4-8 NKJV

- Still confused

Nicodemus answered and said to Him, "How can these things be?" John 3:9 NKJV

— Further answer

Jesus answered and said to him, "Are you the teacher of Israel, and do not know these things? 11 Most assuredly, I say to you, We speak what We know and testify what We have seen, and you do not receive Our witness. 12 If I have told you earthly things and you do not believe, how will you believe if I tell you heavenly things? 13 No one has ascended to heaven but He who came down from heaven, that is, the Son of Man who is in heaven. John 3:10-13 NKJV

— Key text (Something Nicodemus would recognize)

And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up, 15 that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life. John 3:14-15 NKJV

TRUTH—Have to gaze upon Him by faith. He must be lifted up—faith in Him alone.

(ILL) Serpent in midst of the camp in wilderness lifted up—healing—SO JESUS LIFTED UP!

What must we do?

Three Lessons—When we look to the cross...

I. We must see our SIN for all its horrific ugliness.

A. Why was Jesus pictured as a serpent?

1. That was Satan in garden.
2. How could looking at that bring salvation?

B. On the cross—HE BECAME SIN

God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God. 2 Corinthians 5:21 NIV

(Lie, gossip, adultery, bitterness, criticism, anger, porno, hate, cheating, deceit, covet)

HE BECAME THAT!

(The Father had to turn away)

II. We must see HIS SHAME for all its awful reality.

A. Pre-incarnate reality

For to which of the angels did He ever say: "You are My Son, Today I have begotten You"? And again: "I will be to Him a Father, And He shall be to Me a Son"? 6 But when He again brings the firstborn into the world, He says: "Let all the angels of God worship Him." 7 And of the angels He says: "Who makes His angels spirits And His ministers a flame of fire." 8 But to the Son He says: "Your throne, O God, is forever and ever; A scepter of righteousness is the scepter of Your kingdom. 9 You have loved righteousness and hated lawlessness; Therefore God, Your God, has anointed You With the oil of gladness more than Your companions." 10 And: "You, Lord, in the beginning laid the foundation of the earth, And the heavens are the work of Your hands. 11 They will perish, but You remain; And they will all grow old like a garment; 12 Like a cloak You will fold them up, And they will be changed. But You are the same, And Your years will not fail." 13 But to which of the angels has He ever said: "Sit at My right hand, Till I make Your enemies Your footstool"? Hebrews 1:5-13 NKJV

He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. 16 For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created through Him and for Him. 17 And He is before all things, and in Him all things consist. 18 And He is the head of the body, the church, who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in all things He may have the preeminence. 19 For it pleased the Father that in Him all the fullness should dwell. Colossians 1:15-19 NKJV

B. He became flesh

1. Stable
2. Flight to Egypt
3. No place to lay His head
4. Arrests, spitting, beating, stripping, plucking His beard

C. All—so we could look to HIM and live!

III. We must see HIS SACRIFICE as exclusive and unique.

A. No other place to look

Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved." Acts 4:12 NKJV

B. No other means to save

Knowing that you were not redeemed with corruptible things, like silver or gold, from your aimless conduct received by tradition from your fathers, 19 but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot. 1 Peter 1:18-19 NKJV

C. No other hope exists

For if we sin willfully after we have received the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins. Hebrews 10:26 NKJV

Conclusion: But in the center of the camp—(the Church) stand the cross!

LOOK AND LIVE!